

**EDUCATION**

# Nonprofit, Ferndale schools join to find kids health-care coverage

**3,000 estimated to lack insurance**

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Healthy kids are better learners. The message is simple - but getting there isn't always easy.

To help, Ferndale schools are partnering with the Whatcom Alliance for Healthcare Access, a local nonprofit, to make sure all students have health insurance. An estimated 3,000 children in the county are uninsured, said Wendy Carr, access coordinator for the alliance.

Through this school outreach project, the alliance can better connect with uninsured families and introduce them to health-care options.

"We understand schools aren't social service agencies," Carr said. "But if a kid is constantly missing school because they don't have access to antibiotics ... it impacts their learning."

Schools identify uninsured kids when students enroll in the district, update their contact information and sign up for sports, as well as when parents request free and reduced lunch assistance and attend teacher conferences.

By connecting with all students, Carr hopes to reach families who may not ask for help or who may assume their income is too high.

A family of four making \$4,000 a month can still qualify for support, Carr said. It's about "reaching those families that are really carving out a substantial amount of their budget every month" for health care.

Carr receives the names of uninsured kids and contacts parents to help walk them through health-care options - a free consultation.

The referrals are free as well. Ferndale does not pay the alliance for its services.

#### HELP WITH HEALTH CARE

**What:** The Whatcom Alliance for Healthcare Access is a nonprofit coalition that includes the St. Luke's Foundation, St. Joseph Hospital and the Whatcom County Health Department.

**Purpose:** The organization is dedicated to ensuring health-care access for all community members.

**Information:** call 715-6531 or visit [www.whatcomalliance.org](http://www.whatcomalliance.org)

Access coordinators have the expertise and time the schools may not have to help parents get health insurance, find a doctor, enroll in Medicaid or access a variety of health-care resources.

The schools "aren't providing the service, but doing an excellent job facilitating the service," Carr said.

Ferndale schools began piloting the partnership in January, and the alliance has already met with 90 families from three schools.

Diane Beaman, Ferndale's director of classified personnel and an alliance board member, plans to meet with other school districts to share Ferndale's experience and encourage them to sign up.

"When a child does not come to school ready to learn and it may be because of illness ... it is our responsibility to assist in making that child successful," Beaman said. "This is a way our district can assist that child."

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April 19, 2006