$1.1 million loan to go to school district for student health center

By Amy Sylvestri

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The City Council unanimously approved a $1.1 million loan to the San Leandro School District to start a student health clinic near the high school campus.

The school district wants to buy the former Girls Inc. building and turn it into a clinic that would offer medical, dental, and social services to students, according to Superintendent Cindy Cathey.

“This is a very good investment in our students,” Cathey told the council.

The money from the city would be used to purchase the building, but the services would be sustained mostly through insurance reimbursement and the staff would come from the Alameda County Medical Center, Cathey said.

The school district is also getting $500,000 from a past school bond and $500,000 from a federal grant and could apply for more grants in the future.

Cathey said that many other school districts have clinics and that absentee rates are proven to go down when a district has a clinic.

City Manager Chris Zapata recommended that the council approve the loan, saying that working with the school district and improving the quality of life in San Leandro are among the city's main goals.

Zapata added that it will be financially beneficial to the city as well because the school district will pay the money back at a higher interest rate than it is earning in the city's bank account for

its reserve fund.

The funds currently earn less than 1 percent interest and the school district would pay from 1.5 percent to 5 percent over the 15-year life of the loan.

Councilman Michael Gregory questioned the need for the clinic when students can use traditional services like their family doctor.

Cathey replied that “complicated life circumstances” sometimes mean that students don’t have proper access to medical care.

Cathey said issues like obesity, asthma, depression, and even toothaches can keep kids from coming to school and the health center could be a focal point in their care – they can be seen by a medical professional there and referred elsewhere if necessary.

School board member Jason Toro spoke up and said he strongly supports the health center,

saying that it will “close the gap in access to health care.”

This is extremely important,” said Toro. “It will be a safe space for students.”