

Here's today's online Advocate article on SBHC:  
<http://www.2theadvocate.com/columnists/insidereport/19811849.html>. Looking it up, it is found at [www.2theadvocate.com](http://www.2theadvocate.com) under "News" then "Columnists" with the title of "Inside Report for June 12, 2008."

## INSIDE REPORT

### Inside Report for June 12, 2008

#### School-based health care to expand

- By **CHARLES LUSSIER**
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#### Comments (1)

Supporters of school-based health care are planning a major expansion in East Baton Rouge Parish.

During the next four years, they aim to increase the number of school-based health centers from nine to 17, placing new ones in strategic locations. The nonprofit group Health Care Centers in Schools is pressing the school system to fund \$2.5 million for construction; the group then would raise as much as \$4 million more in start-up costs from private donations.

Once in operation, the centers are expected to pay for themselves through private insurance and Medicaid.

Health centers would offer a full-time nurse or nurse practitioner, a full-time social worker for mental health counseling and a weekly visit by a physician.

Today, 75 Baton Rouge public schools lack a full-time nurse. The expansion would pay for either a center or a full-time nurse at every school with more than 500 students.

Executive Director Sue Catchings said the expansion, once complete, would mean nearby access to medical care for all 46,000 children in the school system.

"Once we're committed, we'll have a network of school-based health centers all around Baton Rouge that will be open all year round," Catchings told the parish School Board at a May 27 special meeting.

The need is not small.

About 80 percent of the children in the school system live in poverty, and many of them have undiagnosed health problems.

This past year, school nurses had at least 3,200 children fail vision screenings.

A private group called The Eyes Have It!, based in New Orleans, gave these children eye exams and purchased glasses for 73 percent of them. Some had serious vision problems. Eighteen appear to suffer from glaucoma, a perplexing diagnosis.

Catchings said glaucoma normally afflicts the elderly, almost never children.

Hypotheses of why these children have the eye disease range from lead-based paint to the steroids in asthma inhalers.

“We just don’t know,” Catchings said.

While most Baton Rouge children have some kind of insurance these days, most lack easy access to medical care, Catchings said.

Most doctors and medical facilities in town are south of Florida Boulevard, many families lack transportation and doctor’s offices are closed after hours and on weekends, she said.

Dr. Stewart Gordon, chief of pediatrics at Earl K. Long Medical Center, offered the School Board another reason, “Only 25 percent of primary-care physicians (in Baton Rouge) accept Medicaid in its current form,” Gordon said.

“They take pieces, not the whole.”

The plan is to phase in the new centers, building no more than two a year.

Although the school system has yet to sign on to the expansion, the idea has many supporters.

Westdale Middle School Principal Sherry Brock said she wishes all schools had a school-based health center as she does at Westdale.

At a previous school, Brock told the School Board, a child died because that school had to wait too long for medical help to arrive from elsewhere.

After she became principal at Westdale Middle, another student had an asthma attack, but a school-based nurse responded almost immediately, preventing a similar tragedy.

“It’s really a difference, in this case, of life and death,” Brock said.

*Charles Lussier covers education in East Baton Rouge Parish for The Advocate.*

**Here’s the link to the article: <http://www.2theadvocate.com/columnists/>**

**The only comment shown is from:**

**Haymaker**

Thursday, Jun 12, 2008

12:10 PM

“Hey, just what we need to do. Take an already failing school system and making them pay to add health care to their responsibilities. They are failing with respect our children's academic health so, now we want to let them attend to our children's mental and physical health too!”

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