

PEOPLE

Care for all kids



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PATRICK DENNIS/The Advocate

Jennifer Kullman, a registered nurse stationed at Twin Oaks Elementary School, interacts with Kamron Harris, 10, in Kullman's office at the school.

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Deborah Facey, a seventh-grade math teacher at Westdale Middle School, learned firsthand how valuable school-based health clinics are when her 11-year-old son needed services.

Even though Facey had health insurance, she had trouble finding appropriate care, she said.

"We were in a jam," she said.

Luckily, her son was able to receive services through the school clinic, and Facey didn't have to leave work for doctor's appointments, she said.

Within East Baton Rouge Parish, there are 11 school-based health centers managed by the nonprofit Health Centers in Schools through a contract with the school system.

The organization also operates the school nurse program.

Health Centers in Schools provides free school-based health care for more than 45,000 children in parish public schools and the EBR Recovery School District schools, according to the organization's annual report.

With a parent's consent, the organization helps all children, regardless of income, get the preventive and emergency health care they need to be able to stay in school and learn, the report said.

The agency recently completed its third-annual flu vaccination program in the parish, vaccinating nearly 8,000 students.

It also was a partner in the Give Kids a Smile program, which provided a free trip to the dentist last month for about 600 first- and second-graders in the parish.

Health Centers in Schools began in 1987 with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Below is a list of health center locations and the year they opened:

- Istrouma High School (1987)
- Westdale Middle School (1987)
- Glen Oaks Middle School (1993)
- Prescott Middle School (1993)
- Glen Oaks High School (1997)
- Northeast Elementary School (1997)
- Northeast High School (1997)
- Capitol High School (2001)
- Scotlandville Elementary School (2006)
- Broadmoor High School (2009)
- Glasgow Middle School (2009)

Laura Jones, a nurse practitioner who rotates days at three schools including Westdale Middle, said she sees between 15 and 20 students a day. Common issues include headaches, sore throats and minor injuries that require bandages or ice.

"They're not out of class as long, which is good," Jones said of providing treatment at the school clinic.

Social worker Sheryl Miller, who also works at Westdale, said she is able to immediately begin offering services to a child in crisis — rather than a child waiting weeks or months to be seen by a private therapist.

Miller said she sees between seven and 10 students a day at the school clinic. Many have attention deficit disorder or are dealing with family disruptions like an incarcerated parent or parents going through a divorce. Many struggle with depression and anxiety, she said.

"Looking at a lot of the transitions in their lives, you can see why they're depressed," she said.

Integrated care among the clinic's staff is a big focus, Miller said.

"We refer back to each other a lot," Miller said.

The clinic's entire staff meets once a week to discuss every instance of suspected child abuse, thoughts of suicide, high-risk sexual behavior or chronic medical problem, she said.

"It's checks and balances," Miller said.

Anyone who comes in with an academic problem is automatically referred for a vision and hearing screening, she added.

Parents are involved in care when they can be, she said.

Miller said she works on behavior modification with children struggling with anger management or academic problems. Parents are involved in any reward system implemented or with any recommended parenting changes.

Miller said she also conducts workshops for parents on what is considered normal growth and development.

Some schools without school-based clinics have a nurse on site full time, while other schools have rotating nurses who travel to several schools, said Charlotte Odom, Health Centers in Schools spokeswoman.

Registered nurse Jennifer Kullman is the sole person with medical training on the Twin Oaks Elementary School campus, a school with more than 600 students, she said.

Her office is located down a busy school hallway, and she has a steady stream of knocks on her door from students with headaches, minor scrapes and bruises, and sometimes such emergencies as broken bones.

She also oversees the medical care of a classroom of students with severe and profound disabilities.

"That's my main purpose here — to keep the kids in class and to keep the parents at work," Kullman said.

Kullman has worked at the school four years. Twin Oaks is a full-time nursing site due to the large special needs population. “Flu season — they are in and out. I could see 40 kids in a day on top of my daily kids,” Kullman said. “It just depends on the day.”

Teachers have asked her to give presentations on nutrition, hand washing and changes during puberty.

She often makes referrals to doctors, dentists and optometrists and can help find a medical professional who accepts Medicaid patients.

Kullman said she sees herself as providing a “safe haven” to the children, who may have problems at home that are affecting their schoolwork.

“Sometimes I’m the resident psychologist,” she said.

“I give them somebody they can trust,” she added. “Sometimes they just need somebody who is constant. If they’re hurting, they know where to find me.”

There are nine stationary school nurses within the parish and 40 rotating nurses, Odom said.

Sue Catchings, Health Centers in Schools chief executive officer, said her organization has flipped health care’s standard model.

Instead of the child going to the doctor, Health Centers in Schools brings the medical professional to the child, she said.

Catchings said one of the areas she is most passionate about is providing vision screenings and glasses to children who need them.

“They can’t pass the test because they can’t see,” Catchings said. “People don’t understand the connection.”

With parental permission, an optometrist who comes to the school can give a child a dilated eye exam. About 75 percent of students referred after failing a vision screening end up needing glasses, Catchings said.

The eye doctors have found a large population of students with amblyopia or lazy eye, Catchings said.

If left untreated, the condition could leave the child unable to see out of the affected eye, she said.

Approximately 15 students have also been diagnosed with glaucoma, which is not typically a pediatric disease, she said.

“I want the public to understand there is a connection between education and health,” Catchings said.

Catchings said her organization has had a lot of collaborators — including nursing schools, technical colleges and universities, whose students supplement clinic staff while allowing the students to get the necessary on-the-job training.

“It’s evolved into working relationships that are very good for the whole community,” Catchings said.

Catchings said her organization — with a \$5 million budget — experienced a 6.5 percent cut from the Louisiana Office of Public Health in the middle of the 2010 fiscal year. Services at two clinic sites — Capitol High and Glen Oaks Middle — were reduced to part time.

The agency’s largest funding source is the school system, with the state funds, Medicaid reimbursement and private donations, foundations and grants making up the rest, Odom said.

Facey said she is thankful not only for the help her son has received, but for the medical services available to all students at the school.

“With the population of kids we teach, many of them do not have health insurance,” she said.

“It takes a lot of the load off of us. Teachers don’t feel helpless,” she added. “We know we have a great resource right here.”

For more information on Health Centers in Schools, visit the organization’s website at <http://www.healthcentersinschools.org>.