

New center at New Britain High serves health needs of students

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In many educational facilities, students are required to have a physical examination and up-to-date immunizations prior to entering high school and again by the 11th grade.

Yet, what happens to those students who do not have or cannot afford health insurance to continue to maintain yearly health examinations?

Often, they are not allowed to return to school until health requirements are met. Many times the result is several days that a student is out of school, until a family or state agency intervenes. New Britain High School has become the first school in the city to provide its students with free health services through its new School-Based Health Center, licensed and funded by the Connecticut Department of Public Health, with additional funding by the Consolidated School District of New Britain to total a \$127,000 grant.

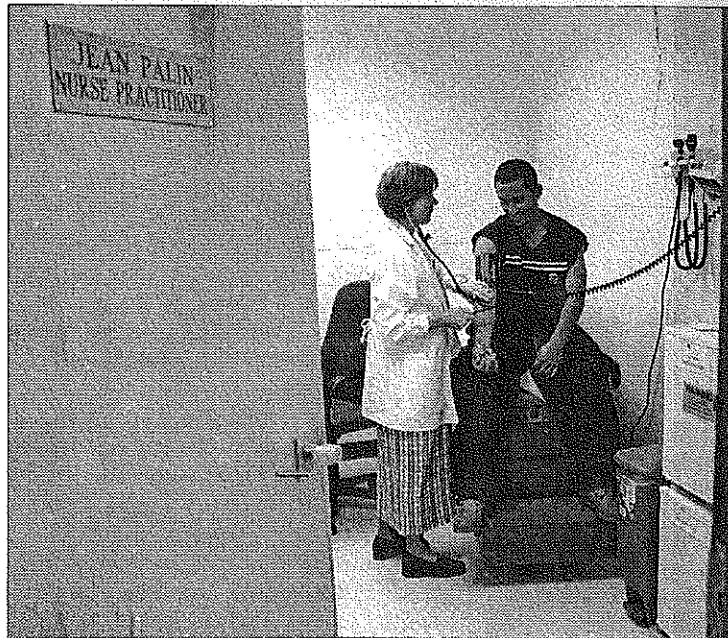
"I had poison ivy and nothing was helping to get rid of it," said 17-year-old junior Jovani Rodriguez. "They helped me out with a prescription and I got Husky (an insurance plan). Then I got my physical here and the next day I had all my shots up to date."

Like many students at the high school who are taking advantage of the opportunity, Rodriguez said the health center is an asset to students' education and wellbeing because it's convenient and accessible.

"The Health Center has been open since April 30 of this year and students are already stopping by and registering," said Roseann Wright, director of the center.

"The convenience of having a health center located within a school works well for a student's lifestyle. Students can get their examinations done without missing a day of school."

Rodriguez confirms the fear he had when he had to go to the health center to inform Wright that he did not have the required physical examination or immunizations done.



HERALD PHOTO - BRYAN CURTIS

Jean Palin, a nurse practitioner, tests the blood pressure of Jovan Rodriguez, an 11th-grader at New Britain High School, in the new School Based Health Center.

"I was scared because I thought they were going to send me home," he said.

"Sometimes kids miss a month from school."

The service does not replace school nurses or private health providers, and ensures no duplication of care. According to Wright, all medical information is sent to all students who have a private provider.

The staff, Janet Manthey, medical assistant; Jean Palin, nurse practitioner; and Wright, along with the high school nurses, work collaboratively to provide primary and episodic health care.

"So far we have had a good response from students," said Wright. "We have a little under 200 students who have applied. So it's been very busy."

The center's mission is to work in partnership with parents, with respect to age, cultural values, and the family situation of every student to ensure that students maintain good health.

"The center will provide our high-school students with necessary medical, diagnostic, treatment and referral services previously unavailable to our students," said Dr. James Rhinesmith, superintendent of schools.

"We believe that the services provided at the center will enhance the district's ability to provide more comprehensive health services to those students that require such support."

The center is able to provide students with treatment of illness and injuries such as colds, ear infections, skin problems and sore throats, in addition to routine check-ups, physical examinations, immunizations, prescription and dispensing medication, laboratory testing, nutrition counseling and weight management, crisis intervention, individual, family and group counseling, and referral for dental care and follow-ups for specialty care.

"There are several (school-based health centers) throughout the state of Connecticut," said Wright. "Usually 80 percent of the (school) population of an established health center is benefited by the services."

The health center is operated by the Community Health Center of New Britain, Inc., located on Washington Street. "I think this program is good and needed," said Rodriguez.

"It's helping a lot of kids already. I told one of my friends who already signed up. (Students) probably don't think it's important, but it is."