

■ Gil Baullion puts a coat of paint on the new health clinic at the Macdonough School Friday in Middletown. The clinic, which is expected to open soon, will offer students checkups, immunizations, counseling and other services.

New clinic at Middletown school considered a welcome addition

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MIDDLETOWN — The steady thwap, thwap, thwap of a hammer punctuated Pamela Muraca's words last week as she tried to talk on the telephone at Macdonough School.

A section of drywall in the school office needed painting. A thin metal beam had to be covered.

But Muraca, Macdonough's principal, uttered not a single complaint. The disruption was practically welcome.

When it ended, the North End school would have the beginnings of its own health clinic.

"I'm psyched to really have it open," she said.

Nestled to the side of the school's front office, the clinic's two snug rooms are expected to offer a universe of

services to students this spring, from checkups to immunizations to counseling to family outreach.

"The clinic will be able to address any health issue — medical or mental — for children," Muraca said.

The clinic will soon be a reality, thanks to an \$80,000 grant from the state and several months of planning by city and school officials, local physicians and other professionals, and staff from Middlesex Hospital.

"It's been a really positive planning process," said Dona Hoff, supervisor of Middlesex Hospital's family advocacy program and the primary author of the grant proposal. "I feel like it's the end of the semester and I have five finals on the same day."

Indeed, in recent months an

advisory committee and its various subcommittees have worked on issues ranging from designing the clinic's layout to developing lists of procedures to follow in various medical situations. The procedures alone are expected to total more than 100 pages.

Hoff, who is also the clinic's manager, is scheduled to submit necessary documents to the state Department of Health Services for licensing April 1. The clinic will be able to open as soon as a licensing inspector visits the clinic and gives approval.

Community Health Center, also in the city's North End, is scheduled to provide medical services for the clinic. A nurse practitioner will staff the clinic up to 20 hours a week. The

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clinic's physicians also will be available for emergency support.

A key advantage of having the clinic based in a school will be the chance to ensure that every child or family is connected with a primary care provider — be it a private physician or someone at the center — to visit or consult with about medical issues, said Margaret Flinter, the center's vice president.

Middlesex Hospital has hired a full-time outreach worker who will meet with families to tell them about the clinic and serve as a general liaison between school and home.

A full-time social worker is also scheduled to be hired. Interviews have been conducted and deliberations are underway, Hoff said.

Flinter hailed the broad-based approach of covering both physical and emotional health.

"The problems that children face are rarely purely medical," Flinter said.

Indeed, Muraca has said many families whose children go to Macdonough have limited access to transportation or private health providers. In 1991-92, nearly 60 percent of its students came from families whose financial situations qualified them for free or reduced price lunches.

This fall, Muraca said, 10 of about 60 kindergartners had to be excluded the first day of school because they were not fully immunized.

"This way it won't take any time" to get pupils shots, Muraca said.

The existing state grant will keep the clinic open only through this school year. Hoff said she plans to apply for another grant to help fund the clinic during the 1993-94 school year, and is optimistic about continued funding.

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