

## The Columbus Dispatch

# Health care part of Columbus schools' services Mobile medical, vision, dental units aid nurses

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**BY JENNIFER SMITH RICHARDS**

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Playground scrapes and upset stomachs are still part of the job.

But for health workers in the Columbus schools, there's so much more: Nurses referred students more than 40,000 times last school year for medical, hearing, vision, dental or mental-health care. Some students were referred more than once or for multiple reasons.

Nurses had conferences or counseled students on personal hygiene more than 5,700 times; medical care nearly 20,000 times; and nutrition more than 5,400 times. They conducted 1,700 psychological evaluations and caught 1,400 cases of lice. Students were behind on shots - or, as is often the case with immigrant students, had never had any - 11,400 times.

"It's a large district, and we're trying to reduce barriers to learning," said Nancy Rini, a nurse who oversees health and wellness services for the district. "Their days are very full."

The district has fewer than 50,000 students. Seventy-six percent receive free- or reduced-price lunches, an indicator of poverty.

Rini said nurses deal with many health issues but keep up and meet students' needs through two mobile medical units run by local hospitals, a dental van from Ohio State University and a vision van that visits once a year.

Columbus is Ohio's largest school district and has 118 schools. It has about 100 school nurses.

There is also one nurse practitioner - a nurse who has advanced training and can prescribe medicine - who works in two schools that have large nursing offices. Ohio Avenue and Lincoln Park elementaries, which were rebuilt as part of the district's sweeping construction project, have larger nursing spaces that, if the district later decides, could be used as school-based health clinics.

At least one large nurse's office will be placed in each quadrant of the district by the end of the construction project, Rini said.

The Ohio State mobile dental unit, which has three dentists' chairs, travels from school to school and

provides care ranging from basic cleanings to tooth extractions. It's staffed mostly by senior dental students, who over the past two school years conducted 23,000 dental procedures for students from 77 elementary schools.

Even with that many X-rays, fluoride treatments and cavity procedures, the schools need more, said Canise Bean, who oversees Ohio State's mobile unit and is community-outreach director for the dentistry school.

"I think we could have two more mobile dental coaches, and we still could not address the needs," Bean said.

Often, she said, dental students realize that "these are kids that have had no dental care."

Rini said she's satisfied that the mobile units serving Columbus students are adequate, and she said she's grateful for the partnerships.

In 2005, Columbus and OhioHealth partnered to operate a school-based clinic in the then-new Linden Elementary building, but when funding ended, so did the clinic. A nurse practitioner uses the space to do healthy-weight checks.

If Columbus decides to offer school-based health clinics, it won't be on the scale of Cincinnati's.

Cincinnati has eight school-based clinics run by outside groups, including the city's health department and local medical centers. A ninth is scheduled to open this fall. All are open to the community and are funded through the partners, not the district.

Cincinnati has about 34,000 students and 57 schools. The city pays for 40 public-health nurses to work in the schools. However, city budget cuts threaten to end that arrangement next school year, which means the district would have to come up with funds for nurses.

Columbus decided against school-based health clinics early in its construction project, which began nine years ago.

"How people are solving the problem varies from city to city, state to state," said Marilyn Crumpton, a pediatrician who is medical director for school and adolescent health at the Cincinnati Health Department. "But the more services that we can deliver in the setting of the school, the more we can see improvements in academics because kids are not out of school."

That includes mobile units, she said. "If that dental van pulls up at a school and delivers those services, the child is out of the classroom for an hour. If the parent picks the child up and takes them to the dentist, they're gone half a day."

Cincinnati, like Columbus, offers some mobile care. At one high-poverty school, a mobile dental van parks for an entire semester to care for "every tooth" in the building, said Darlene Kamine, executive director of the Community Learning Center Institute.

[jsmithrichards@dispatch.com](mailto:jsmithrichards@dispatch.com)

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