

School-based health centers praised

PRICE HILL - Nurse practitioner Dilruba Rahman sees about 20 kids on a busy day in the Oyler School-Based Health Center.

Among her tasks: she gives immunizations, treats colds and coughs, and manages care for students with asthma.

While it's just routine care, the impact on these students is huge.

The addition of a School-Based Health Center at this high-poverty school five years ago has been the biggest contributing factor to the school's academic turnaround, said Principal Craig Hockenberry. It's often the only access to health care these students have. Having a clinic physically located in their school keeps them healthy, focused and in school.

"Health and wellness have a direct impact on how kids do academically," he said. "If we don't address those issues, we'll continue to have problems in our city's core."

Hockenberry teamed up Wednesday with officials from the Cincinnati Health Department, Growing Well Cincinnati, and the Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati for a news conference to laud the benefits of School-Based Health Centers. There are

10 centers in the Cincinnati Public School district, 20 in Ohio and 1,900 statewide.

The goal of the event, they said, was to educate the public about the importance of these clinics.

The city is considering cuts to its health department and the school nurse program.

In less than a month, voters will decide on a proposal to repeal parts of the Affordable Care Act, President Barack Obama's health care legislation passed by Congress last year.

The law supplied \$93 million to School-Based Health Centers this summer - at least \$1.3 million of which went to local clinics, said Kate Keller, senior program manager at the Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati. The law is scheduled to provide a total of \$200 million through 2013 to support expansions of School-Based Health Centers.

Wednesday's event was sponsored by

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Know Your Care, a national group that supplies information about the Affordable Care Act.

The health department has been saying for months that reducing school nurse service would hurt academics and health care for kids. The speakers stopped short of taking a position on Issue 3 - the Affordable Care Act issue.

"The broader message is as we decide about health care in this country, School-Based Health Centers make sense," said Marilyn Crumpton, director of the School and Adolescent Health Program for the Cincinnati Health Department.

Oyler school serves nearly 700 students in grades Pre-K-12. Since the clinic opened, the school has risen two categories on the Ohio Report Card - from Academic Emergency to Continuous Improvement. Its Performance Index Score - another measure of academic achievement - rose from 63 to 85. It met 10 academic indicators last year compared to none five years ago.

That's because kids get quick, accurate diagnoses and treatment that helps them stay in school, Hockenberry said.

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