



Health centers at schools a 'safety net' for students

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By **Tarryl Jackson | Jackson Citizen Patriot**

Local children and teens who don't have the time or resources to regularly see a doctor have a new place to get the care they need.

Last week, the Center for Family Health opened the Jackson High Health Center, expanding its reach to those who otherwise may not have access to routine medical care.

This is the center's third school-based facility, with two others operating at Northeast Elementary School and the Middle School at Parkside for the past six years.

"It was a way for us to reach children who were not receiving health care," said Molly Kaser, executive director of the Center for Family Health. "They were coming to urgent care when there was a problem, but that was it."

The 2,000-square-foot health center in the high school is open to all youths in Jackson County ages 10 to 21, and is expected to serve 500 to 600 patients in the first year.

Ebonek Dentmond, a junior at Jackson High School, said she liked the convenience of the new health center.

"I think it's a good place," said Dentmond, 17. "It helps young kids and it keeps them safe."

The new center houses four patient exam rooms, a primary care provider and a behavioral health therapist.

"They feel safe and share a lot of issues and problems with us," Kaser said. "If you put the care where the kids are, they will use it."

Both the health centers at Northeast and Parkside saw a total of about 4,700 patients last year.

All three centers provide a range of health services, including preventative care, immunizations, physicals, sick visits,



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Physician's assistant Amanda Topper, right, looks around the corner at medical assistant Mandy Smith to ask a question as they do computer work at the Jackson High Health Center.

counseling and crisis intervention.

These school-based centers are primarily in low-income or medically underserved areas and help children manage chronic diseases, reduce the spread of sickness, and provide health education to all students, said Michele Strasz, executive director of the School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan.

"School-based centers are the safety net for providing primary care to children in a school setting," she said.

A research team from Michigan State University recently conducted the Michigan Evaluation of School-based Health, a study that focuses on the impact of these health centers on children's health and behavior.

According to the study, the use of these centers were associated with health benefits for the entire student body, including less physical and emotional discomfort, higher self-esteem, greater satisfaction with health, more physical activity and eating more healthy foods.

Jackson Public Schools Superintendent Dan Evans said the new center at the high school will make health services even more accessible to youths.

"I look at Jackson High School as kind of being the center of the county," Evans said.

"The other centers don't have a fitness center attached to them, which I think is going to be a plus for the students and indicate that we really want individualized exercise for all kids."

— Staff writer Bob Wheaton contributed to this report.

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