

School health centers paying off for students

Children found to be more active, eating better, happier

Kathleen Lavey • klavey@lsj.com • September 10, 2010

When a student at Lansing's Otto Middle School feels sick, help is just a short walk away in the school's on-site **health** center.

The center, staffed by a nurse practitioner and two nurses, offers health assessments to all 600 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders at Otto and also offers primary care services for many of their families.

The goal: healthier kids.

The result: School-based clinics such as Otto's and others like it around the state work, according to a new study conducted by Michigan State University researchers.

Students who use on-site health centers in their schools are happier about their health, more physically **active** and eat better than students who don't use such centers, said Miles McNall, associate director of the Community Evaluation and Research Collaborative at MSU.

"There is clear evidence of health benefits for using a school-based health center," McNall said. "The other aspect to think about is, this is a very important **safety** net for children who might not otherwise have access to primary care services."

The Otto Clinic is one of 68 state-funded health centers operating around Michigan and one of two clinics run by the Ingham County Health Department that focus on kids and teens. The other, Willow Plaza Services, offers health care in a non-school setting for people ages 11 to 21.

The Otto health center also offers primary care services to families of Otto students and others in the community.

"One of the most unique things about school-based health centers is that care extends to the family,"

said Marcus Cheatham, deputy health officer for Ingham County. "The kids grow and they learn and the whole family gets involved."

Keeping the \$300,000-a-year program at Otto up and running has called for some **innovative** financial partnerships.

In 2001, the Otto program, then run by the state Department of Community Health, wound up on a list of budget cuts along with other school-based health centers elsewhere in the state.

"Parents rallied and said, 'This is a really important community **resource** in our schools,'" said Debbie Brinson, deputy health officer for the Ingham County Health Department and interim director of the School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan.

The result: A flurry of efforts to find alternative **resources**.

Today, the state of Michigan funnels about \$175,000 a year into the program, about 70 percent of which is federal matching funds. The rest comes from Ingham County, the Lansing School District and fees for services the clinic offers, reimbursed by Medicaid or **insurance companies**.

As legislators continue to look at next year's budget, about \$1.3 million in funding for school-based health centers is targeted for cuts, Brinson said.

"I'd hope that we could get the money restored so

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that we don't lose centers next year, and that we position ourselves so that when the economy becomes strong, which it will, we can expand," Brinson said.



Working with kids: Family nurse practitioner Denise Coats talks with Otto Middle School student Robert May, 12, about managing his diabetes after he came into the Otto Community Health Center. (Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)

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Michigan's rank among other states in availability of school-based health care

\$300,000

Approximate annual cost to operate the Otto Community Health Center



Helping: Lab technician and clinical assistant Pam Love fixes an Otto Middle School student's broken glasses Thursday at the Otto Community Health Center inside the school.

By the numbers

100,000

Michigan children served by school-based health centers

4

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