

Health Care Goes to School

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kbrannon@tulane.edu

If students at Walter L. Cohen High School get a fever or sprain an ankle, they won't have to travel much farther than down the hall to see a doctor or nurse practitioner. On May 12, the Tulane University School of Medicine pediatrics department and the Louisiana Recovery School District opened the Walter L. Cohen School-Based Health Center to provide high-quality medical and behavioral health services to high school students without regard to their ability to pay.



Dr. Sue Abdalian, right, checks out student Keaton Anthony Williams at the Walter L. Cohen School-Based Health Center. Abdalian is medical director for the clinic, and Williams participates in Cohen's Academy of Health Sciences. (Photo by Sally Asher)

The center, located within the school at 3520 Dryades St. in uptown New Orleans, has four clinic exam rooms, a mental health counseling area, laboratory and an administrative office.

It offers annual physical exams, sports physicals, immunization shots, hearing and

vision screening, nutrition counseling and health education as well as general primary care services for treating minor illnesses and injuries. The clinic also offers behavioral health services, including individual, group and family counseling.

"School-based health centers offer the school community access to preventive healthcare service," says [Dr. Sue Ellen Abdalian](#), medical director for the center.

"Most often, adolescents do not receive routine preventive health care even when it is available to them in other settings. This clinic can provide a medical home for students in a safe, approachable environment so they won't have to miss school, and their parents will not have to miss work for every needed healthcare visit."

Paul Vallas, Recovery School District superintendent, says the clinic will provide a crucial service to Cohen's students by helping to identify and address health issues or problems that might interfere with the learning process.

"The help our students need will be readily available where they need it, and I have no doubt that it will help address previously unmet medical needs and help our students stay in school. I applaud Tulane University for increasing access to health care for our students and thank all those who have worked to make this clinic a reality," Vallas says.

The center, which will be open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, will treat patients with or without health insurance. Summer hours will coincide with summer school. The clinic's staff will include a doctor, nurse practitioner, medical office assistant, social worker and nurse.

Although the [Tulane School of Medicine](#) has helped open and has a presence in many other school-based health centers, the Cohen Health Center is the first Tulane-sponsored, school-based health center.

The center is funded through the Louisiana Public Health Institute's Primary Care Access and Stabilization Grant program. The Louisiana Public Health Institute, through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson and W. K. Kellogg foundations, also supplied the center's electronic medical records system. School Health Connection, a regional collaborative group formed to support school-based health centers in the New Orleans area, provided additional support for student and community health advocacy.

Cohen High School has a health careers focus. Teachers at Cohen's Academy of Health Sciences plan to use the health center as an educational resource and role model for students hoping to pursue careers in health care. Students enrolled in the academy program prepare for future careers in health care by graduating with certification and endorsements in pre-medical training, nursing, sports medicine, nutrition or first responder/emergency medical services.