

Spotlight on the Safety Net

*A Community Collaboration
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John H. Lucas, Sr. Wellness Center

The John H. Lucas, Sr. Wellness Center is a comprehensive medical home for middle and high school students located inside Hillside High School in Durham, North Carolina. It opened in December 1995, after the high school moved to its present location. In the previous Hillside location, students were able to visit Lincoln Community Health Center (LCHC) for their medical needs. During the planning for the new high school site, the administration asked the LCHC providers to help design a clinic there. When the Wellness Center became a reality, it was named for an outstanding former Hillside principal.

After more than 10 years of service, the John H. Lucas, Sr. Wellness Center provides an invaluable resource to the children and young adults in the community who may not have had regular access to medical care. Any middle or high school student can be seen at the Center any day of the week through a scheduled or walk-in appointment. As a satellite office of Lincoln Community Health Center, the Wellness Center follows the same guidelines for access to services. They offer a sliding fee scale for students without health insurance. More than 50% of the school's students have family incomes that qualify for free or reduced lunch programs and are more likely to be uninsured. The Center offers comprehensive primary care, immunizations, school and sports physicals, and a mental health social worker is available once a week. The staff includes a clinic manager who is a family nurse practitioner, a licensed practical nurse, and a receptionist.

As a member of the North Carolina School Community Health Alliance, the John H. Lucas, Sr. Wellness Center is committed to working with partner organizations in the community. At Hillside, the staff helps form a system of care in collaboration with the school nurse, guidance counselors, and a Child and Family Support Team made up of a social worker and nurse. In the past, a nutritionist from the Durham County Health Department has also been available to counsel students on healthy eating and exercise in order to prevent obesity. The intervention program was funded through a grant from the School Health Program of the Children and Youth Branch of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Currently, in collaboration with Duke, the Durham County Health Department, and the Center for Child and Family Health, the Wellness Center is providing pregnancy prevention services as part of an ACCESS grant funded by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. The aim is to increase self-esteem, high school attendance, and to prevent a second pregnancy in young women who already have a child.

Kathleen Loucks, FNP, serves as the clinic manager at the Center and loves the interaction between education and health. She explains that the best way to improve health is to help students graduate from high school and that students are better able to succeed when they come to school ready to learn. Teachers can then help students focus on education rather than have them miss school for medical reasons. Helping one child at a time, the John H. Lucas, Sr. Wellness Center is a prime example of a positive collaboration between quality health care and public schools.

Kathleen Loucks, FNP, clinic manager at the John H. Lucas, Sr. Wellness Center, contributed to this article.