John LaCour of the state Department of Health and Hospitals, left, talks with Sybil Turnbull, the Glen Oaks High School Health Center nurse, while touring an examining room in the health center.

Clinics help keep students healthy, in the classrooms

By CHANTE DIONNE WARREN
 Advocate staff writer

Glen Oaks High School Coach Thomas Jordan couldn’t figure out what was bothering the eyes of his varsity football team during a practice session last month.

One by one players started complaining of red, itchy and burning eyes which began affecting their performance on the practice field.

“They were squinting trying to catch passes,” Jordan said.

One player sought help from Sybil Turnbull, the school nurse.

Turnbull then called in a doctor who diagnosed conjunctivitis, commonly known as “pink eye.”

After that, Turnbull called the entire team into the school’s health center for an eye exam. The doctor diagnosed 80 percent with the “pink eye” virus and prescribed eyedrops, Jordan said.

Had the school’s health center not been available, Jordan said he doubts the team would have been ready in time to play against a rival football team that evening — not to the mention the time students could have missed from school.

The Glen Oaks High School Health Center opened last November but held a ceremony Tuesday to show the public the type of services and health care the clinic provides students.

Glen Oaks High students have made 1,800 visits to the school’s health center since last November, said Sue Catchings, executive director of Health Care Centers in Schools.

The grant from the foundation and a $2.6 million appropriation from the Legislature helps pay for other school-based clinics, such as the one that offers health care to students at Northeast High and Northeast Elementary, Catchings said.

Four other school-based clinics in the parish — at Istrouma High, Glen Oaks Middle, Prescott Middle and Westdale Middle — are operated by the LSU Medical Center.

Catchings said.

Health clinics benefit students whose parents are working, but are unable to afford health insurance for their children, Catchings said.

The clinics are essential for students who have no primary care doctor and need regular check-ups, she said.

The clinics provide treatment for colds, headaches and minor injuries.

Adolescent School Health Initiative found that the most common physical health conditions seen at the health center are earaches and headaches, diabetes, respiratory conditions, injuries or poison, sexually transmitted diseases, dental or skin problems and gynecological and pregnancy issues.

The top mental conditions seen at

Fifteen-year-old April Dyson said she visits the clinic when her allergies act up. “My eyes water and I get headaches and fever. I come to the clinic and get medication. Before, I used to check out of class.”

Helping students stay well enough to stay in class is exactly what health care administrators say they are hoping to accomplish.

The idea of the centers is to help “keep kids in school and keep parents at work,” said David Stopeck.

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Chip Thompson, immunization specialist with the Office of Public Health for the state Department of Health and Hospitals, checks vaccines and expiration dates for the clinic.

Advocate staff photos by Bill Feig