

ELLIS PARTNERS ON KINDERGARTEN EVENT

Schenectady hospital aids screening of new students

LAUREN STANFORTH STAFF WRITER

Section: Capital Region, Page: B1

Date: Monday, April 26, 2010

SCHENECTADY -- Signing a child up for kindergarten in the city schools is something some parents traditionally delay -- showing up at the school closest to their house the week classes start, assuming that's all that's needed.

Now, facing a kindergarten enrollment boom and wanting to avoid a registration headache in the fall, the city school district is moving to streamline the process with a series of registration events that will for the first time include health screenings and other services designed to ensure that new kindergartners are ready for school.

Starting today, parents of 5- and 6-year-olds can bring their children to the Ellis Health Center on McClellan Street and have their youngsters seen by a school psychologist, speech therapist, nurse, pediatrician and dentist -- while getting shots from county public health services that the child will need to enter school.

A kindergarten registration event today is already filled but appointments are available for Friday and May 3.

"By being preventative, agencies won't be massively overworked come September and October," said Lynn Rafalik, Schenectady's director of pupil personnel services. "And we'll see kids and their abilities and do some better placement activities. They'll be ready to learn."

The district saw an increase in kindergarten enrollments last fall, and expects 850 to 950 kindergartners in September. The registration days

will serve up to 120 kids, Rafalik said, with more events likely to be scheduled as summer approaches.

The district had originally just asked Ellis Medicine to use its auditorium at the McClellan campus for the registration event; school officials already set up a registration office for all grades at the McClellan campus last fall. The health system asked if clinical services should be offered at the registration event, too, said Margaret Rogers-Meagher, a health services navigator and registered nurse at Ellis. About 50 people, including doctors, school nurses and public health workers, are donating their time. No payment is required for the registration services. Fidelis Care will be on hand, however, to walk families through health insurance if they don't have coverage. A play area will also be set up to entertain younger children during registration sessions.

Rogers-Meagher said it's an opportunity to also to get families linked with preventive care. Some children entering city schools haven't seen doctors since they were infants, she said.

Parents of incoming Schenectady kindergartners can sign up for the registration and health screening events being held at Ellis Health Center, 600 McClellan St., from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Friday and May 3 by calling 881-3412.