

## SCHOOLS AND MORE

# Children's health is fundamental to school readiness

BY MARSHA BASLOE

Durham Partnership for Children

**D**id you know that a child's health can impact school readiness oftentimes more than as a child not knowing their ABCs and 123s?

Over the past 15 years, Durham's Partnership for Children has been committed to ensuring young children have access to medical care and opportunities for good health and nutrition to arrive at school ready to learn. The partnership, as the local administrator of state Smart Start funds, is accountable to meet communitywide standards such as the percentage of young children identified for early intervention services and the percentage of young children receiving Medicaid that visit their primary doctors for regular check-ups.

A healthy lifestyle, which includes healthy nutrition and regular exercise that is critically important for children's development, is not the norm in many families. Social and economic factors affect health at every stage of life, but the effects on young children are particularly dramatic. While all parents want the best for their children, not all parents have the same resources to help their children grow up healthy.

In fact, recent statistics from the North Carolina Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System (NC-NPASS) found that Durham County's low-income children ages 2 to 4 ranked near the bottom of North Carolina counties for children in this age group at-risk for being overweight or obese. Overweight and

obese children not only suffer poor self-esteem and ridicule from other children, but also are at increased risk for health disease and diabetes later on.

The good news is that most health problems can be prevented and treated. As Health Awareness Month comes to an end, we are reminded that the timing of preventative health care and early intervention is extremely important in the early years as young children develop rapidly. Countless studies show that the earlier a young child is identified with a developmental delay or special need, the greater the child's likelihood for later success in school and life.

The Partnership determines gaps in health services for children and invests in many health-related programs.

One program, the Child Care Nutrition Consultation Program delivered through the Durham County Health Department, helps to revamp child-care center food programs with fresh foods while keeping costs down and works with parents, child-care providers and young children to learn more about healthy eating and living. Other programs provide linkages to the early intervention and health services by addressing physical and behavioral concerns. The Partnership also promotes collaboration with screening services for programs such as the More at Four pre-kindergarten program to make sure young children are screened for developmental delays, vision and hearing problems and speech delays that could impact school readiness.

Two years ago, the Partnership leveraged funding to launch Docs For Tots NC in collaboration with Duke University Medical Center to teach pediatric residents about the community and public impacts on young children's health, such as poor housing, poverty, diet and early care and education. Today, through community rotation programs and Docs For Tots, more emerging pediatricians are looking at young children more holistically and paying greater attention to the child's developmental health.

The Partnership is also a convener and collaborator around health services through the facilitation of the Durham County Health Check Improvement Task Force to develop new county-wide strategies for health care partners to address

barriers that prevent young children from receiving the care they need and deserve. These efforts have resulted in more children birth to 5 receiving well-child care.

These strategies of funding direct services, building capacity with existing services and focusing on improving community-wide systems have helped to make sure that child care centers, families and Durham's health system are stronger and more focused on the health of our youngest children. Our goal is to ensure that all young children in Durham County are healthy and ready for school.

Marsha Basloe is the Executive Director of Durham's Partnership for Children. She can be reached at [marsha@dpfc.net](mailto:marsha@dpfc.net).

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## SCHOOL BRIEFS

The Northern High School PTSA will host the "Northern Knights Market Place" vendor and craft fair on April 17 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the school's Poe Gym. Admission is free to the public.

The PTSA fundraiser offers vendors and crafters an opportunity

Matthews and Jessie Duan of Cary. Dr. Myra Halpin led the team.

PBS is launching a contest for innovative kids ages 5 to 19 on April 5. The Trash to Treasure competition encourages youngsters to recycle, reuse and re-engineer everyday materials for

this fall.

Anna Frost, the director of secondary English and language arts and literacy for the Durham public school system, has received the National Scholastic Heroes Award from the Scholastic publishing company. Frost earned a mas-

Michael William Shannon of Durham (Cardinal Gibbons High School) and Jordan Christian Rank of Rougemont (Granville Central High School) to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

Southern High School senior Kaylynn Danielle Webb has been awarded a

their accomplishments in the Advanced Placement program. The foundation is recognizing only two winners per state.

A number of Durham students were honored recently at the Youth Legislative Assembly in Raleigh.

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Nicholas Liu of the N.C. School of Science and Mathematics received an honorable mention for his entry in the Bill of Rights Institute's Being an American essay contest, which bills itself as the nation's largest such contest for high schoolers. Liu and his