

I am writing in support of LD 979, the legislation to support Student Based Health Centers. I retired in 2017 as the School Nurse at Maranacook Community High School where I worked for 27 years. Maranacook Community High School has the distinction of housing the longest existing Health Center in the State of Maine. My unique position was that of having served as the School Nurse at Maranacook both before the Health Center existed, and then for more than two decades afterwards. Let me give you three concrete examples of this perspective.

1. Before the Health Center existed, should I identify a student with depression, the best I could do was to offer the student and their parents a list of counselors in the area. Often a long waiting period ensued, even if a connection had been made. After the Health Center was in place, we had counselors on site with whom the student could connect with that very day, after parental permission was given. This helped enormously with students reluctant to seek help, as a low pressured “meet and greet” would increase their comfort level and have them more likely to follow through with counseling.
2. Another example was early identification of communicable diseases. Should a student come to the Health Center with a sore throat lasting more than twenty four hours, a strept test could be done in the Health Center and the student could be sent home, should there be a positive result, with a prescription and instructions not to return to school until medication was taken for twenty four hours. If this student had remained in school without testing and treatment, strept could have spread to classmates and teachers. And parents, I might add, did not need to take time off work to take their child to a doctor’s office.
3. And my third is example is that sexually active students could receive confidential family planning services with education in our Health Center. Testing for sexually transmitted infections could also be done in our Health Center confidentially. Making an appointment outside of school, finding transportation to go to that appointment are all barriers we were able to eliminate by having service right in our Health Center.

These are but a few examples of how our Health Center concretely helped the lives of our students and their parents. It was one of the biggest honors of my life to work in our Health Center because I could see how it improved student’s lives. Adolescents are reluctant to seek health care of any kind. Making access available in a confidential, trusted manner makes all the difference and this is what Student Based Health Centers accomplish.

Thank You

Sandy Hunter, R.N.