

## Kindergarten screening at Ellis Health Center gets high marks

By Michael Goot

SCHENECTADY — Five year-old Will McLeron put on the stethoscope and took a listen.

“You got to hear your own heart,” said his mother, Pam McLeron.

Will was getting a quick checkup at Ellis Health Center on Monday to prepare for entering Paige Elementary School this fall. He was one of 38 participants in a kindergarten screening/registration event where students could get a medical, dental and eye checkup, be screened for illnesses and health problems, get required immunizations, register for school and even obtain health insurance.

“I think it’s a really great concept to have so many things co-located here,” said Dr. Tricia Hughes, who was examining Will.

Pam McLeron said she likes the fact that it is more convenient. “I have a daughter in second grade, and they didn’t do this,” she said.

Her son is very eager for school. “He thinks he’s going to start tomorrow,” she said. “He’s excited to go to the big kids’ school and play on the playground.”

This event was part of a partnership between the Schenectady City School District, Ellis Medicine, Schenectady County Public Health Services, Schenectady Community Action Program, Child Guidance Center and Fidelis Care. There was no specific cost for the program as the physicians and health care professionals were already on staff.

Lynn Rafalik, director of pupil personnel services for the school district, said the goal was to provide one-stop shopping for parents. Physicals are required by state law for students entering kindergarten. The children also had their weight taken and body mass index measured. They were also screened for any problems in their motor skills or other issues that would affect their learning.

“Many of our kids get their physicals done at school. They don’t have a primary care physician,” Rafalik said.

Rafalik said this is a more orderly approach than the typical flood of new registrants that happened in August. Those students have to then get screened, a process which spills over into the start of school. Under the new system, those students are ready to learn.

Students received a T-shirt at the end of the process that said “Ready. Set. Kindergarten,” as well as a bag with crayons, pencils and math and reading materials that the students are using in school. They also received a sticker that said “Class of 2023.”

“We wanted to set that goal, pushing that expectation,” Rafalik said.

The idea grew out of a collaboration that started in January, when the school district established its Family Welcome Center at the Ellis McClellan Street campus, where parents could register and arrange transportation for their children.

Dr. Matthew Hall was busy giving dental checkups. “We’ve had everything from absolutely no problems to kids who have never seen a dentist before and had several cavities.”

He said some students were a little apprehensive and one even hid in a cabinet. “Once they realized I wasn’t coming

after them to give them a shot or a treatment, they were fine.”

Some high school students were also volunteering their time to assist parents moving their children through the various stations.

Eleventh-grader Theresa Chiweteoke, 16, said she was considering becoming a doctor. “I love kids.”

Ellis spokeswoman Donna Evans said the event is also an opportunity to identify where the health needs are in the community.

Margaret Rogers-Meagher, a health services navigator for Ellis Hospital, said one of the goals of the partnership is to fill the gaps in health care coverage. “Some of these children have not been seen by a physician since birth,” she said.