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District's Chief Compliance and Privacy Ofzcer Sees Firsthand How the Health Support Technicians from School Health are Making a Difference in Our Public Schools



ELLEN PENTLAND, ARNP, MPH, LHRM, CHIEF COMPLIANCE & PRIVACY OFFICER WITH HEALTH SUPPORT TECHNICIANS FROM SCHOOL HEALTH NOVEMBER 2017

WALK A MILE IN YOUR SHOES



SPOTLIGHTING DEDICATED PEOPLE
WHO DO AMAZING WORK.

From left to right: Diane Urena, Health Support Technician; Denise Risser, Health Support Technician; Liz Henderson, RN, Vision and Hearing Program Coordinator; Erin Smith, RN, School Nurse; Ellen Pentland, ARNP, MPH, LHRM, Chief Compliance and Privacy Officer

Profiled by Ellen Pentland, ARNP, MPH, LHRM,
Chief Compliance and Privacy Officer

You've probably heard the saying, "Seeing is believing." Well, this sums up my visit to Limestone Creek Elementary School in Jupiter. Until I "Walked a Mile in the Shoes" of Diane Urena and Denise Risser, Health Support Technicians with the School Health Program, I didn't realize the Health Care District provided vision and hearing screenings to public school students at so many stages of a child's development.

TOP

Diane and Denise are among ten health support technicians assigned to

public schools throughout the county, two for each area, to carry out this state-mandated program. They screen students in kindergarten, first, third, sixth and ninth grades.

Students in first grade also receive a screening for color vision deficiency, commonly known as color blindness.



“Parents are not always able to take their children for vision and hearing exams,” Denise told me. “I like to see the outcomes, especially when the children get glasses and can see clearly for the first time.”

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Look at the blinking lights!

I watch as the School Nurse, Erin Smith, escorts a class of kindergarten students single file into the room, including her own daughter. Diane instructs the students to take a seat and be very quiet. She asks them one by one to look into a portable camera that she holds about three feet away from their eyes. Lights twinkle in a variety of colors and data is collected in a few seconds. The instrument, called a “Spot Vision Screener,” quickly and accurately tests for six conditions: myopia (nearsightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness), anisometropia (unequal refractive power), astigmatism (blurred vision), anisocoria (unequal pupil size) and strabismus (eye misalignment).





Gone is the eye chart of yesterday and the bulky machines that required students to read letters and shapes out loud. Diane and Denise agree these more advanced, handheld devices speed up the screening process, which is especially helpful with the younger children who have short attention spans. They are also more reliable when testing students where English is not their primary language.

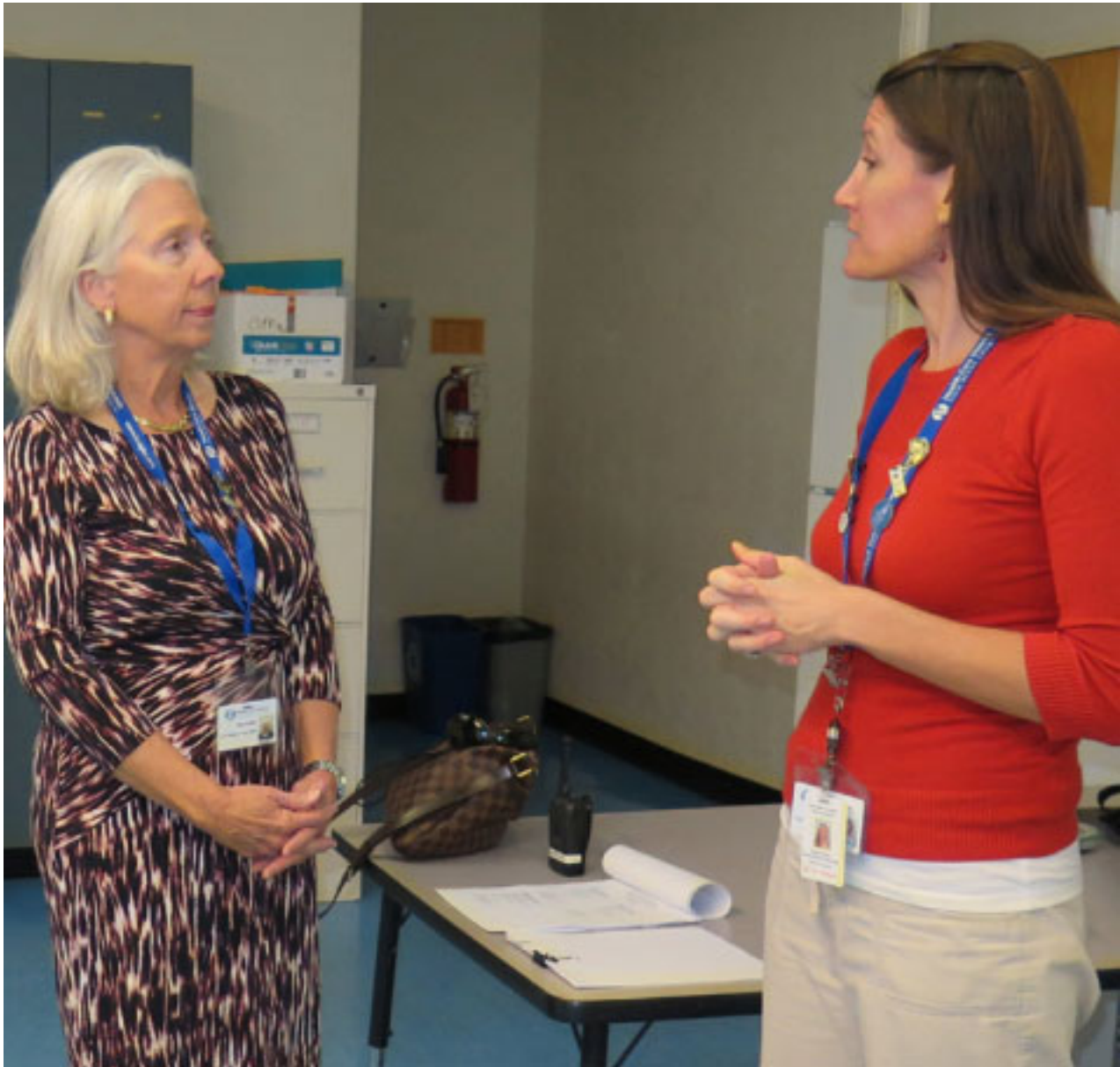
Raise your hand when you hear the beep!



On the other side of the room, Denise instructs the students one at a time to raise their hand when they hear a sound. She gently places the headphones over their ears and monitors their progress. The room is quiet as the screening is underway. It's clear that this is a valuable program, especially for working parents, those who are uninsured, or have limited means. These professionals can identify hearing and vision changes as the children mature, ensuring students receive the care they need so they are not compromised in school or in their daily lives.

Liz Henderson, Vision and Hearing Program Coordinator, monitors the ^{TOP} Health Support Technicians. She began working for the Health Care

District as a School Nurse when the School Health Program began 20 years ago. She told me that last year the team screened a total of 48,000 students across the School District. Of those, two percent were referred for follow-up hearing screenings and ten percent were referred for additional vision exams. Students with financial need can participate in several programs that provide free follow-up screenings, free hearing aids, and free glasses, including a discounted second pair if their first pair breaks or is lost. The students like having the opportunity to select the style frames they prefer. When the glasses are delivered to their school, they put them on immediately and wear them with pride.



“We identify problems early and get children the help they need,” Liz said. “This is important in order to prevent further damage. Principals appreciate our work and they accommodate our techs with locations at the school and the time needed to conduct the screenings.”

Making a difference

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I could tell from the minute I saw Diane and Denise screening several classes of kindergarten students that they both love their jobs and interact well together. They have a great bond that connects them to the children and to the Health Care District's safety net mission.

Denise worked for 25 years as a medical assistant for a pediatric group in Palm Beach County where she conducted hearing and vision tests. She has a 14- year-old son who attends high school in the public schools. For the past five years she has worked at the Health Care District as a Health Support Technician. During that time she says she identified three students who were fitted for hearing aids as a result of the screenings.



"We're making a difference, one student at a time," Denise said.



Diane has been with the Health Care District for a little over one year. She was a stay-at-home mom who has a background in teaching and advertising. She has a five-year-old son and a six-year-old daughter who attends one of the schools in her service area.

“I wanted to get a job that would help the kids,” Diane said.

As a healthcare clinician with nursing experience, it was a pleasure to see firsthand how the Health Care District is reaching out to students who might otherwise never have their vision or hearing tested by a physician. The impact these Health Support Technicians have on the ability of children in our public schools to see and hear is a gift. It’s just another way the Health Care District touches the lives of the youngest in our community and improves their ability to learn.

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Medical Executive Committee

Date: May 07, 2024

Location:

In-Person & Zoom Meeting - SEE MEETING DETAILS INCLUDED.

Lakeside Medical Center

39200 Hooker Highway

Belle Glade, FL 33430

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