

## School health centers rate among program successes

BY JOE DEJKA  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Building Bright Futures cites successes and a commitment to build on them in its annual report released Monday.

The 2010 Community Update highlights the opening of six school-based health centers this year in areas with high poverty rates.

The centers, set up in collaboration with a variety of community groups and organizations, seek to eliminate health issues that serve as a barrier to education.

The centers — at Belvedere, Indian Hill, Kellom and Liberty elementary schools, Spring Lake Magnet Center and King Science and Technology Center — provide health screenings and onsite care for acute and chronic health conditions that affect attendance and performance.

“What we’ve done is expand access to health care to about 35,000 kids in the community,” said John Cavanaugh, executive director of Building Bright Futures, a local education-focused philanthropy effort.

“The school-based health centers have already had tremendous impact,” Cavanaugh said. “We had very large numbers of students who did not have their immunizations when they came to school, and so were at risk of not being allowed in school, or delayed entry into school for two or three weeks until they could get immunized. Now they can get their immunization in the school.”

A presentation was planned for Monday evening to update the public on Building Bright Futures and the Avenue Scholars Foundation. The event was to begin with a reception from 4 to 5 p.m., followed by a program from 5 to 6 p.m. at the Qwest Center Omaha.

The report released Monday also cites promising results from the Avenue Scholars program, a project of the Avenue Scholars Foundation that matches high school students with advisers to help them transition to college.

The Avenue Scholars program exceeded its 2009-10 goals, the report says. The program served 175 students in four pilot programs at Ralston High School, Omaha’s Northwest and Benson High Schools and Metropolitan Community College.

Avenue Scholars achieved a 96 percent high school graduation rate for the year, the report says. The program is expanding this year to serve 486 students as centers open at Omaha’s North, South and Bryan high schools and at Millard South High School.

The organization also partners with a host of groups that provide early childhood services.

“In terms of early childhood, we are targeted on the 3,500 live births that are born into poverty in the community, and targeting them for intensive services in the first three years,” Cavanaugh said.

The organization also has a school attendance program that operates in 24 schools to reduce truancy and chronic absenteeism. The group also has a service learning program designed to engage kids in the community and encourage civic involvement.

Building Bright Futures budgeted \$4.5 million last year for programs aimed at erasing obstacles to the academic achievement of low-income students in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. That’s nearly the same as the Learning Community will raise through its 1-cent program tax levy this year.

Building Bright Futures will receive a \$365,000 boost from the City of Omaha in January that is earmarked for truancy prevention programs.