

# FSU, FAMU collaborate on Havana health clinic



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Yvonne Nelson-Langley, program coordinator for FAMU Community Health Alliance, FSU's Dr. Maggie Blackburn and Cindy Lewis make comments on the proposed reconstruction for a joint venture health-care center during a tour Thursday. FSU, FAMU and Gadsden County Schools are joining forces to create a school-based health center at Havana Middle School.

**By Reshonda Scott**  
Democrat writer

**H**AVANA — A first-time collaboration involving health-care professionals at Florida State University, Florida A&M University and Gadsden County Schools is taking root in Havana.

Volunteering their time to help the neighboring community, officials from FSU and FAMU have teamed up with the Gadsden County School Board and the Gadsden County Health Department to develop a school-based clinic at Havana Middle School. Its official name is the Havana Health and Wellness Training and Service Center.

"All of these high-powered people have come together and

have the heart to see the desperate need in Havana and attempt to fill it in such a generous way," said Shirley Aaron, chair of the steering committee.

Since April 2010, Aaron has been the driving force behind the health initiative. A resident of Havana, she understands the need for medical services and the impact the universities will have by teaming up.

"I think it's important to build community partnerships in health-care delivery that are multi-disciplinary," she said. "When we're training medical students and nursing students, it's important they each respect what the other brings to the

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Wayne Shepard, director of facilities for the Gadsden County School Board, shows his proposed plans for the renovation project for the new health center in Havana.

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service of care.”

Dr. Maggie Blackburn, a committee member and director of rural health at FSU’s College of Medicine, said the partnership is about building on one another’s strengths. Blackburn, who oversees the school-based health clinic at Shanks Middle School in Quincy, said the Havana facility will offer more comprehensive services and provide better care.

“It has become a real partnership between the schools and the communities,” Blackburn said. She acknowledges the committee’s goal to make sure there is some type of sustainability of the healthcare services that will be provided.

On the campus of Havana Middle School, the former industrial arts complex will operate as a training center for interns and health professionals in the region. The 4,000-square-foot structure will provide space for exam rooms, a child-care section and a pharmacist’s headquarters, among other things.

The health-care services that will be provided include primary care, dental, mental and behavioral health services to students at Havana Elementary and Middle schools starting in August. Eventually, the services will be available to the local community which, for a large part of the population, are Medicaid recipients or those without health insurance.

“Gadsden County, because they have such dramatic and poor services, is an area that many people go to do research and studies there, but they really don’t get the services they need,” Blackburn said.

With only one physician, who does not accept Medicaid, the residents of the primarily minority community must travel to surrounding towns to address health care concerns. The center will provide residents with medical treatment in a timely manner.

“I had concerns with students showing up on Mondays with headaches or injuries, and couldn’t wait to come to get treatment (from the school nurse),” said Major Jackson, principal at Havana Middle School.

Yvonne Nelson-Langley, program coordinator for F A M U C o m m u n i t y H e a l t h Alliance, plans to conduct focus groups, funded by the Department of Health’s Office of Minority, from July to mid-August to get Havana residents involved in the decision-making process.

“There is more than a desire, there is a need,” she said, referring to the lack of physicians and exclusion of a local EMT.

Nelson-Langley, who was brought on board in December, worked with FAMU architecture students to present three renovation models to the committee.

The students were asked to provide the blueprints as a starting point and to help committee members become better informed clients, said Gretchen Miller, visiting assistant professor in the FAMU School of Architecture.

“We really involved the students, because it was an educational opportunity for them,” she said.

The project has yet to be funded, but there are plans to have the renovations fully funded by federal grants, awaiting approval, and donations.

Cindy Lewis, a professor at FSU’s College of Nursing, said there are alumni who are looking for projects to become invested in and who may be potential donors.

“We have a place for them to feel like they can make a difference,” she said.

This is not the first time this type of initiative has taken place in Gadsden County.

In 2008, FSU’s College of Medicine contributed to the reduction of health disparities in the county through a dance marathon, which raised funds for the schoolbased health care centers of George Monroe Elementary School and Shanks Middle School in Quincy.

“Because the Havana community was so interested and enthusiastic about the project, we started brainstorming how we can fund another center,” Blackburn said.

Aaron added, “It’s been my dream to have services for the under- and un-served in this community for a long time.”

The new center, however, represents a noteworthy collaboration between FSU and FAMU.

“This level of partnership and teamwork between FAMU and FSU is important to our community. The partnership symbolizes a mutual commitment to work together as we contribute to the elimination of health disparities,” FAMU Provost Cynthia Hughes Harris said. “Part of our institutional goals and our mission guide us toward providing support and addressing the health initiatives of our local agencies and organizations.”

— *Senior writer Doug Blackburn contributed to this story.*