

PRESS RELEASE

## FSU Expanding Health Care Services in Gadsden County Schools

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By Doug Carlson

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – The Florida State University College of Medicine is working to help reduce health disparities among Gadsden County children through a project funded by FSU Dance Marathon, which is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday at the Tallahassee-Leon County Civic Center. The College of Medicine has been working with the Gadsden County Department of Health and Gadsden County School District to expand services in student health centers at James A. Shanks Middle School and George W. Munroe Elementary School in Quincy. Last year, 1,400 FSU student volunteers raised \$315,000 through Dance Marathon. Proceeds from the annual event are split evenly between the FSU College of Medicine and the Children's Miracle Network. Funds raised through the 2008 Dance Marathon once again will be used to fund pediatric outreach efforts of the College of Medicine, such as the project in Gadsden County schools. College of Medicine faculty members have been working part time in the school-based health centers since last fall, expanding the clinics to include full-service primary care, as well as mental health services. The College of Medicine welcomed Susan LaJoie, a nurse practitioner with more than 23 years of experience, to its faculty in January. LaJoie is assigned to oversee clinical operations in the Gadsden school health centers on a full-time basis. In addition, medical school faculty, FSU medical students and psychology graduate students work in the health centers on a part-time basis. Involvement affords the students the opportunity to experience an integrated model of clinical and behavioral health-care services in a community setting. Compared to most other counties in Florida, residents of Gadsden County have more health care problems and fewer treatment options. "Rates of teen pregnancy, heart disease, obesity and diabetes are far higher in Gadsden County than for the rest of Florida," said Dr. Maggie Blackburn, assistant professor of family medicine and rural health at the College of Medicine. "School-based health clinics have been shown to provide a health-care safety net for school-age children, so we believe this project will have a measurable impact." Gadsden County also has an infant-mortality rate double the national average and higher than that of 75 countries. However, data suggest that early intervention, preventive care and health education could improve some of these health outcomes. The College of Medicine's involvement is consistent with its mission in several ways, including the improvement of access to primary care and mental health services for a medically underserved population, and providing service-oriented learning opportunities for faculty and students.