Knapik visits Gateway School-Based Health Center

Huntington – The Director of Governor Charlie Baker’s Western Massachusetts Regional Office, former state senator Michael Knapik stopped in at Gateway Regional on November 22nd to tour the School-Based Health Center, which is operated by Hilltown Community Health Center (HCHC).

On hand were School-Based Programs Manager Kiirsten Cooper, Medical Assistant Lisa Lynch and Nurse Practitioner Brenda Jaeger, to answer questions from Knapik. Also on hand was HCHC CEO Eliza Lake, along with HCHC board member and Gateway staff member Wendy Long.

During the visit, which was part of a tour of HCHC’s medical sites in Huntington, Knapik learned that the Gateway School-Based Health Center now serves 60% of the students enrolled in the Gateway Regional School District. They are seen at the center for routine and sports physicals, vaccinations, illnesses, injuries and behavioral health counseling. Staff also work with Gateway nurses and adjustment counselors on treating chronic illness or long-term behavioral health issues such as anxiety and depression. Jaeger is also trained with Gateway’s school nurses on SBIRT screening, which will be used in schools throughout the state to address alcohol and drug use.

When asked about the stability of funding for Gateway’s SBHC, Lake informed him that they had enjoyed fairly level funding over the past 15 years, but that it was always uncertain during things like 9C cuts (when a Governor enacts emergency funding cuts due to state budget problems). A second funding issue for the SBHC is the ability to obtain a referral when a student’s primary care provider is not a HCHC provider. Referrals enable the School-Based Health Center to bill insurance for treatment.

Staff told Knapik that 40% of the students seen at the SBHC for emergent situations are able to return to class that day, which saves working parents the trouble of picking their child up and bringing them to an outside doctor.

Knapik also visited Gator Grins, the school-based dental program (also operated by HCHC), which provides comprehensive dental exams, x-rays, dental cleanings, fluoride varnishes, dental sealants, amalgam fillings (silver fillings), composite fillings (white fillings), and emergency dental care. He met with Coordinator/Dental Assistant Kristen Brakey, who informed Knapik that over 30% of Gateway’s students are enrolled and receive their dental care at school.

Staff at both programs communicate with parents whenever their child is seen for a visit.

Anyone wishing to enroll their child in the Gateway School-Based Health Center or in Gator Grins may contact Kiirsten Cooper at 667-0142 for more information.

###
Photo (left to right): Eliza Lake, CEO of HCHC; Mike Knapik, Director of the Governor’s Western Mass Regional Office; Kiirsten Cooper, School-Based Programs Manager; and Brenda Jaeger, School-Based Nurse Practitioner at the Gateway School-Based Health Center on November 22.