



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Reasons For A Happy, Healthy Smile

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE October 25, 2019

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Recently, the North Country Family Health Center celebrated a major milestone. The center's Maynard P. Wilson Elementary School-Based Health and Dental Program—in the South Jefferson Central School District—turned 10 years old. The program provides students in the school with a number of dental services, as well as other health care.

Wilson Elementary though, is just one of the center's school-based success stories. From the Watertown City School District to the Alexandria Central School District, the North Country

Family Health Center is in more than a half-dozen area schools, helping to provide dental health care to students. One of its newest centers, at Lyme Central, opened just earlier this year.

Dental health care is one of the most important aspects of a child's health. For example, if left untreated, cavities can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with speaking, eating and distract from learning. In addition, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children who have poor oral health, often miss more school and receive lower grades than children who do not.

While dental health care is critical for all people—and especially children—it is often a challenge for families to access dental services in rural regions, like ours. That is why I was proud to have secured \$300,000 in funding recently to help the North Country Family Health Center's school-based dental program. The funding allowed the center to expand into new schools, serve more students, and purchase additional, updated equipment to grow its preventative dental health program. The funding also allowed the center to buy four portable dental units and hire a new, licensed, dental hygienist to provide care and support current staff.

This funding, combined with \$500,000 I was able to secure for similar dental programs in St. Lawrence and Oswego Counties, will help connect more families throughout our region with the care they need to live healthy lives.

I believe those that think outside of the box to ensure children have access to the health care they need, should be commended for their efforts. Congratulations to the North Country Family Health Center for ten years of keeping kids healthy, and thank you for your efforts to improve the wellness of families throughout region.

For more information on their programs, as well as tips for improving the dental health of your children, I encourage you to visit the North Country Family Health Center website by clicking [here](#).