

BUNCOMBE SCHOOL NURSES MOVING TO MAHEC

JULIE BALL , *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 28, 2015



ASHEVILLE – Buncombe County will contract with the Mountain Area Health Education Center to provide school nurse services for county and city schools.

Those services are currently provided through the county Department of Health and Human Services, and most of the school nurses working for Buncombe County will move to MAHEC.

“The school nurses take care of some very vulnerable and in some cases chronically ill children, and we think that by being connected to primary care in general, we’ll be able to give them more support and resources in caring for those children,” said Dr. Jeff Heck, MAHEC president and CEO.

The change will be official as of Aug. 31, Heck said.

The school nurse program employs 27 people. Between six and nine employees will remain with Buncombe County, according to MAHEC officials.

“They’ve accrued benefits that will make it more favorable for them to stay with the county,” Heck said.

Those employees will continue to serve as school nurses and will be managed through the MAHEC program.

Buncombe Health and Human Services “has administered the school health program and contracted with the county and city schools to provide school health services to 30,000 school age children,” according to Stacey Wood, public information officer for the county’s Health and Human Services department.

Buncombe County Health and Human Services will contract with MAHEC.

County leadership and both school systems endorsed the partnership with MAHEC, Wood said via email.

“One of the things we are talking about initiating is a telehealth component so that if the school nurses need to have a direct contact on an urgent or even a non-urgent basis with a physician, a behavioral health specialist or a clinical pharmacist, we have that capacity within our program,” Heck said.

MAHEC also will be providing more continuing education for school nurses “so they can keep up with their professional certification and also learn the latest in school health,” he said.

Schools, students and parents likely won’t notice any changes right away. It will take time to develop some of the additional services, Heck said.

MAHEC previously partnered with Buncombe County on community health services. Three county employees moved to MAHEC as community health specialists who work on population health and improving public health in the community.

“It enabled us to really just magnify the work they were already doing,” Heck said.

MAHEC also employs the providers who manage the student health service at UNC Asheville.

For those school nurses moving to MAHEC, Heck said the salaries and benefits will be comparable.