

Dental clinic to open in school

Program improves access for children

By Ross Sneyd
The Associated Press

Burlington children whose families can't afford dental visits will be able to have dental checkups at school starting this fall.

The H.O. Wheeler Elementary School has been outfitted with a full dental clinic, including two examining chairs, which will be operated by the Community Health Center of Burlington.

Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., won \$100,000 of federal funding for the Burlington program.

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"What we have been doing over the years is bringing money into the state to improve dental access, which is a crisis situation."

Rep. Bernie Sanders,
won federal funding for program

a crisis situation," Sanders said in an interview. "Many kids throughout the state are having a hard time finding dentists."

The program will not cost Burlington schools much, according to Sanders and the school district.

The school department provided space for the dental clinic, but its operating costs will be paid by the Community Health Center. It provided \$30,000 toward launch-

ing the clinic.

The schools will pay the cost of water and electricity, which organizers said would make it possible for the Community Health Center to provide dental care to students regardless of whether they have insurance.

The program is based on a similar one that has been operating successfully for five years at the Molly Stark

See DENTAL, 3B

DENTAL: Burlington school to have clinic

Continued from Page 1B
School in Bennington.

Sanders said he hoped to expand the program statewide.

In Burlington schools, the clinic will be open to all students through eighth grade, regardless of whether they attend Wheeler Elementary. Preschool siblings of students will be eligible, also. The program is directed particularly toward those families who are on Medicaid or the Dr. Dynasaur program because many private dental practices no longer accept Medicaid patients.

"In our school district we know we have a significant number of kids who don't have dentists, who haven't

been to a dentist in the last year," said Betsy Liley, the school's grants director.

A survey of Burlington students last year found that 60 percent needed preventive care; 30 percent needed restorative care; and 9 percent needed immediate care, Liley said.

The clinic will operate noon to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Students will be released from class when they have an appointment with the dentist.

Missing class for an hour or so twice a year to go to the dentist, Liley said, will improve their academic performance.