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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor honors dedicated educator and health care advocate with PATH Award

Diane King's commitment to community health results in a school-based health center serving hundreds of children

CARBONDALE— Governor Rod Blagojevich today named Diane King of the Gallatin County School Based Health Center as the latest recipient of the People Are Today's Heroes (PATH) Award for her remarkable work bringing health services to hundreds of students and the community.

“Diane is a shining example of the impact one person with vision and strong commitment can have to make great things happen in a community,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “She has been able to improve the lives of hundreds of her students, bringing a health center to a community that was without a doctor. This truly makes Diane King one today's heroes.”

The Governor's PATH Award recognizes groups or individuals who, through their hard work and commitment, improve the lives of those in their community and help Illinois move forward in the areas of health care, public safety and education. The PATH Award was given to Ms. King by Randy Dunn, State Superintendent of Education on behalf of Gov. Blagojevich.

In 2001, Diane King was teaching high school English at the Gallatin County School when she learned of an opportunity for funding from the Welborn Foundation. She immediately got to work writing a grant proposal to plan and put in place a school based health center for the 1,000 students at the school. The grant proposal was successful and the concept of the Health Center soon became a reality. Gallatin County is a high poverty area in deep Southern Illinois that has no doctor, dentist, hospital or licensed child care center.

After two years of planning the Gallatin County School-Based Health Center opened its doors in 2003 with a focus on critical health issues for the community's Pre-K through 12th grade students. Services provided at the center include: physical exams, prenatal and infant care; individual and group counseling; vision screening and treatment for minor illnesses.

"The Illinois State Board of Education and educators around the state applaud Ms. King's work to help the children in her community stay healthy and safe," said Superintendent Dunn. "We know that students have much more success in the classroom when they are healthy and know how to make good decisions."

After her success in writing the grant to get the Center started, Diane King left the classroom to serve as administrator for the Center, which also has a nurse practitioner, registered nurse and social worker. The staff now serves an average of ten students per day and is open twelve months a year. This past summer the Gallatin County School Wellness Board voted to expand the Center's services to serve all community members, not just the students at the school.

Also receiving support from the Southern Illinois University Carbondale Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development, the Gallatin County School Based Health Center is connected to the school and offers convenient access for students. Parents who sign consent forms for their children to be patients of the Center don't have to miss work to take their children to appointments. Students don't have to miss classes because they can schedule appointments during study halls, before school and after school. Any prescribed medicines are delivered to the school by 2 p.m. so the medicine can go home with the student and the parents don't have to pick it up at the pharmacy.

School health centers often serve low-income children who are in poor health because they have not received routine primary health care services in the past. One in seven teens has no health insurance and private health insurance plans frequently place restrictions on services for teens.

School health centers are often considered safety net providers because they provide health services to children and adolescents who would not otherwise have access to services. A student's encounter with a School Health Center is often his or her first encounter with any health care provider, thus the centers are in a unique position to link these children and adolescents to the health care system. Centers are cost-effective in that they play a vital role in providing preventive services that reduce potential for engagement in high-risk behaviors at an early age, thus preventing the need for acute care in the future.

At the centers, students have the opportunity to develop caring relationships with a team of health professionals who can address their physical and mental health needs and promote healthy behavior. A growing number of centers in Illinois and nationally serve elementary schools, providing an opportunity to intervene as early as possible through primary prevention strategies to promote healthy child development and prevent the kind of problems affecting so many adolescents. Nationally, according to a May 1995 Advocates for Youth Fact Sheet:

Research has demonstrated that School Health Centers can contribute to:

- Fewer school absences (IDHS, 1997)
- Higher compliance with required immunizations and physical exams (IDHS, 1997)
- Decreased smoking of tobacco and marijuana (Ounce of Prevention Fund, 1996)
- Fewer hospitalizations and emergency room visits (Santelli, et al, 1996)
- Decline in teen pregnancy (Koo et al., 1994)

School Health centers provide primary and preventive health care services to students while reducing lost school time, removing financial barriers to care and promoting family involvement. Benefits of School Health Centers include:

- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Convenient Access for Parents
- Child and Adolescent-Friendly Staff
- Safe Environment