

OUR STORIES

De'Anna Williams



De'Anna Williams is a fourth grader full of energy and dreams for the future. For years, her asthma slowed her down and stole away precious hours in the classroom. Thanks to her resilience, her parents' dedication and a new asthma management program at the Dayton Public Schools, De'Anna is thriving.

She is happy, bubbly proof that the new Comprehensive Asthma Management Program is making a difference for students battling the chronic disease. During the 2014-15 school year, her condition forced her to leave school early at least 15 times. Nine of those early dismissals led her straight to a family physician or the emergency room. Her experience is startling since national research indicates that a third-grader, who misses 12 or more days of school for any reason, is more likely to score poorly on achievement tests. A year into the asthma management program, and she has not missed a single minute of class instruction time this year, her grades are improving and visits to the school nurse have drastically declined.

"I used to see De'Anna nearly every day. I was in constant contact with her mother and she was struggling to keep up in class because she had to leave school so often," Lisa Montgomery, MSN, RN said. "We used the "Open Airways" program with her last year to help set her on a healthier path and this year, with the help of the new protocols, she is learning how to live with her condition through educational programs like "Lungopolis" and "Iggy and the Inhaler."

The asthma management program is a direct result of the district's work with the American Academy of Pediatrics' Training, Education, Assistance, Mentorship and Support [\(TEAMS\) project](#). A collaboration of experts was created to pinpoint gaps in the district's health care services. It concluded that Dayton schools needed a program to improve the care of students with asthma. The action plan is designed to quickly identify students with asthma and provide coordinated care for those whose conditions are poorly controlled. Among the goals are reduced trips to the emergency room and fewer 911 emergency calls.

TEAMS is a partnership between DPS, Public Health – Dayton and Montgomery County, The Ohio Department of Health and the district’s medical director, Teresa Zyrd, M.D. Community partners also include Community Health Centers of Greater Dayton, Dayton Children’s Hospital, Children’s Health Clinic, and Schear Family Practice.

Teachers received extensive training on how to spot the signs of asthma and eliminate classroom triggers of an asthma exacerbation. Nursing students from Cedarville University and Wright State University provided the training at five TEAMS pilot schools.

The program also opens a line of communication among health care providers, parents and school staff that supplies them with valuable information and resources.

“Oftentimes, parents will keep a child home who is showing signs of an exacerbation. They don’t understand that the school nurses are ready and equipped to take care of children with asthma,” Montgomery said.

Montgomery works at Louise Troy PreK-4 School where De’Anna attends. She monitors 75 students who have reported asthma. Thirty of those students had their disease verified by a health care provider, and 45 had the condition reported by a parent. De’Anna falls into the former category. Her mother says she was diagnosed at two years old after suffering from coughing fits, many of which sent De’Anna to the hospital. De’Anna would require around 20 puffs a day on her inhaler in addition to other medicines, but after proper medical care and the school’s new program, she is down to four puffs a day and rarely needs to visit the school nurse.

“It’s a relief. I’d be up all night. She missed a lot of school last year and was getting behind,” Tiffani Sanford, De’Anna’s mother, said. “I’m glad they got it under control and hopefully, she’ll grow out of it all the way. The action plan is really helping us along the way.”

In addition to Louise Troy PreK-4 School, the pilot schools participating in the asthma program this school year are Dayton Boys Preparatory Academy, Kemp PreK-6 School, Kiser PreK-8 School and Wogaman 5-8 School. The concept will roll out to all elementary schools during the 2016-17 school year.

As for De’Anna, she is busy making plans for the future. She plans to follow in her cousin’s footsteps and become a hair stylist. She is already practicing on a mannequin at home and even cuts her mother’s hair. In the meantime, she is happy to run and jump with her friends at recess and not worry about an asthma flare bad enough to send her home. She also doesn’t mind fewer visits to the school nurse.

“I do all my work and don’t have to go to the nurse a lot. I can stay in gym and run around,” De’Anna said. “I know how to use my inhaler, but I only use it now when I really need it.”

To learn more about the Dayton Public Schools Comprehensive Asthma Management Program, contact Virginia Noe, RN, director of health services, at 542-3405.

