

SMART Clinic heads into its second year

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The SMART Student Health and Wellness Center had a good first year at Oakman Elementary/Middle School, seeing hundreds of students and several faculty members, according to a year-end report from clinic partners.

At a recent leadership team meeting for the Walker County Health Action Partnership, members learned about the results from Oakman's first year with a SMART clinic. The program is supported by CVS Health, in collaboration with Ginn Group Consulting. Whatley Health Services provided health care, both physical and behavioral, inside the school last year and will continue to do so for the next two years with the funding provided by CVS Health.

Once the three year plan for the clinic comes to an end at the close of the 2018-2019 school year, the clinic should then be self-sustaining and serve the students of Oakman for years to come, according to Ginn Group Consulting.

The clinic opened at the school in August 2016 as one of two pilot locations in Alabama, with the second school being Aliceville High School in Pickens County.

Melanie Ginn, president and CEO of Ginn Group Consulting, described the SMART clinic as "proactive. We work to ensure that all children in the building are well."

During Oakman's first phase-in year with the clinic, a part-time team was put in place until moving to full-time in February. Although a nurse practitioner wasn't in the clinic every day at first, it was still open and delivering care to students five days a week, triaging, scheduling appointments and follow-ups, and referring patients with urgent issues to other local care providers.

"The Oakman pilot saw 464 unique patients with 1,129 total encounters for the elementary, middle and high school students and faculty," a press release from Ginn states. The SMART pilot gained consent from 77 percent of the school population to administer medical services, allowing the clinic to reach 56 percent of the students in the building.

During the 2016-2017 school year, the clinic saw 407 children, 18 high school students and 40 faculty members as patients, Ginn said. The clinic provided preventive and urgent care to faculty and staff to reduce their own loss of classroom time.

"The school has already shown notable improvement in several of the key areas that SMART intends to positively impact and track, including overall average test scores improving from 38.8 percent to 41 percent and the school climate and culture—for example, disciplinary incidents were lowered, with out-of-school suspensions reduced by 13.6 percent," the press release also stated.

According to data from Ginn, regarding the results of Oakman's first year, chronic absenteeism — missing 15 or more school days — also went down, from 17 percent to 16 percent.

This school year, Oakman has a family nurse practitioner or doctor in the SMART Clinic five days a week, as well as a full-time clinical social worker, a larger mental health team and two interns from the University of Alabama, according to Ginn.

"When the school doors are open, we're there. We are part of the principals' team," she said.

The Walker County Board of Education recently received a \$100,000 check from CVS Health and Ginn to go towards the Oakman SMART Clinic as it begins its second year.

"In 25 years of working with schools and communities to improve the lives of at-risk children and youth, I have never seen an approach or intervention with the potential that the SMART model has to bring about dramatic improvements," said Dr. Karl Hamner, director of the Office of Evaluation and School Improvement at the University of Alabama.

Ginn "designed the SMART business model to support the goal of ensuring the wellness of every student in an educational setting," according to the consulting firm's website.

The SMART clinic program was launched in 2013 in two schools in Chicago, Ill.

The August press release also gives information about the success of the program in the two flagship schools, stating, "Those sites experienced record-breaking utilization levels and extraordinary impacts on school climate and culture, attendance rates, Freshman On-Track rates, graduation rates and college acceptance and persistence."

