



102 Founders Court • Orangeburg, SC 29118  
Phone: 803.534.5454

**Monday, September 14, 2020**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Merry Glenne Piccolino  
Assistant Superintendent for Communications  
and Business and Community Partnerships  
merry.piccolino@ocsdsc.org

**DISTRICT PARTNERS WITH COMMUNITY TO PUT TELEHEALTH  
INTO THE HANDS OF EVERY FAMILY**

ORANGEBURG, S.C. – Orangeburg County School District is pleased to partner with Palmetto Care Connections, a non-profit telehealth network, to connect rural and underserved South Carolina families and individuals to quality virtual health services.

On Monday, September 14, Orangeburg County School District (OCSD), Palmetto Care Connections (PCC), and healthcare partners The Regional Medical Center, Family Health Centers, Inc., and Bamberg Family Practice, announced the S.M.A.R.T. (Students' Medical Access to Resources in Telehealth) Virtual Health Collaborative, a conduit that, in concert with the school district's deployment of student technology (laptops, chromebooks and iPads), puts much-needed remote access to medical care in the hands of each OCSD family.

The S.M.A.R.T. Virtual Health Collaborative app appears now on all district-issued devices and leads to a webpage of telehealth providers offering virtual services to families.

During a conference call with the local chapter of the NAACP, District Superintendent Dr. Shawn Foster was intrigued by a challenge shared related to COVID-19. Telehealth services existed throughout the county and were being encouraged to help slow the spread of coronavirus, however broadband challenges and the lack of updated technology were barriers to many rural and underserved families' ability to access life-saving and -improving virtual health visits.

"The idea sparked from that conversation, Dr. Foster stated. "Knowing that every one of our students would soon have technology, and internet hotspots, if needed, I felt confident that our school district could be part of improving access to the virtual health needs of our community's families."

Palmetto Care Connections and other leaders in telehealth collaborated on the project, each sharing a passion for improving the lives of Orangeburg's families through increased access to high-quality healthcare.

"We are excited to partner with Orangeburg County School District on this initiative," Regional Medical Center's President and CEO Charles E. Williams commented. "Rural families will now have connectivity not only for education purposes, but for health care tele-visits as well. Regional Medical Center has significantly expanded telehealth services to our patients over the past year and this partnership will allow us to reach even more families who need healthcare services. We are honored to partner with Dr. Foster and the Orangeburg County School District as we continue to expand healthcare services to the citizens of Orangeburg County."

Family Health Center's Mr. Leon Brunson, Sr., shared similar sentiments about the collaborative. "We are honored to work with Orangeburg County Public Schools, and expand our service offerings by increasing access to Orangeburg County students and families," Brunson stated.

Palmetto Care Connections is seeking to expand the list of providers in the S.M.A.R.T. Virtual Health Collaborative and support additional providers in their remote medical visit implementation. There is no expense to the medical entity for participation in the collaborative. S.M.A.R.T. requires simply the ability to provide high-quality and affordable virtual health services and the commitment of each partner agency to "hold its providers and staff members to the highest levels of professionalism, patient care, ethical and moral standards."

Students and families can begin accessing telehealth services through the district's website by clicking on the S.M.A.R.T Virtual Health Collaborative app and selecting the provider of their choice.

"Palmetto Care Connections (PCC) is proud to be a part of the S.M.A.R.T. program offered through Orangeburg County School District," Palmetto Care Connections CEO Kathy Schwarting commented. "Dr. Foster is a visionary in his planning and had the best interest of his children in mind when he thought through this program. This program will allow children and parents that are enrolled in the school district to see their health care provider and access services virtually while at home. PCC is a non-profit telehealth network serving all of the rural and underserved communities in South Carolina and this program emulates what we believe is our purpose in this great state."

Students and families are encouraged to please clean their technology after each S.M.A.R.T. Virtual Health Collaborative visit.

Eric Ham, Technology Director, and Patti Padgett, Nurse Supervisor, recommend a simple disinfectant wipe or disinfectant applied to a cloth for cleaning the device after a telehealth visit.

"I have appreciated the collaborative spirit that this project has allowed me to experience among our medical, educational and technical community," Dr. Foster commented. "Orangeburg is thinking 'smart' and solving community challenges together. We Are One."

###