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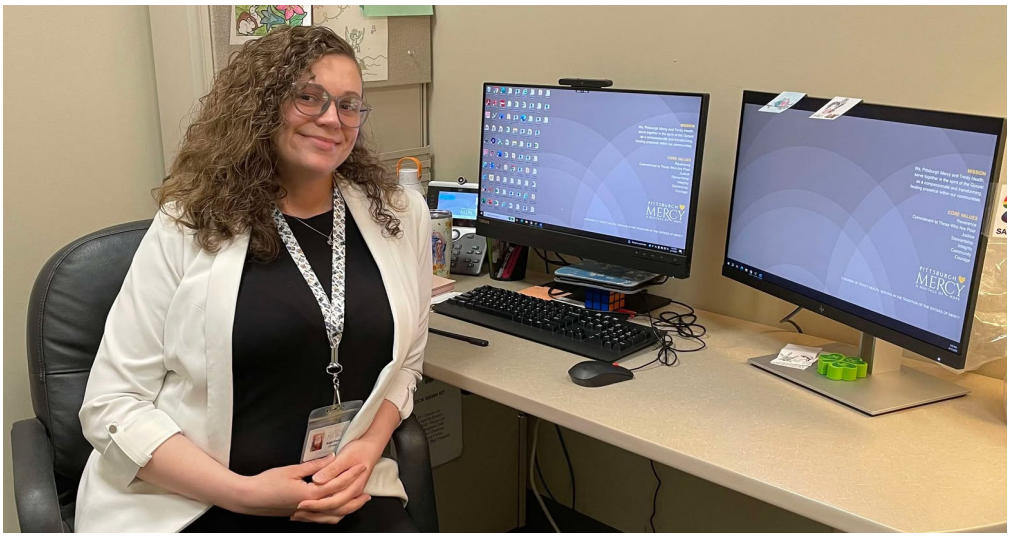
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# Pittsburgh Mercy's Integrated School-Based Therapy Expands to Penn Hills School District

*By Emilee Howells-Cribbs*



*Angel Glancy who will be Penn Hills newest integrated school-based therapist. (Photo by Emilee Howells-Cribbs)*

This month, Pittsburgh Mercy's Child and Adolescent school-based therapy program is expanding to the Penn Hills School District (PHSD), serving students from kindergarten through 12th grade across all three district schools.

PHSD is a mid-sized public school district located Penn Hills, which is about 10 miles east of Downtown, and a small portion of Wilkins Township.

This integrated school-based therapy program takes a more comprehensive and supportive approach compared to traditional school-based models. It is called integrated school-based therapy. It fosters collaboration between therapists and teachers to provide therapeutic services within the school




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setting. This approach integrates therapy into the students daily learning environment, addressing both behavioral and developmental needs.

Integrated school-based therapy emphasizes four key areas:

- Therapeutic support integrated into the educational milieu
- Individual and group therapy services
- Trainings for educators tailored to the behavioral health needs of their students
- Fostering a close partnership with educators and families to ensure a whole health approach to wellness for students.

The therapist will function as a school employee, becoming an integral part of the school community and actively engaging in its daily environment which makes this model different from other school-based therapists.

Beyond benefiting the students, teachers taking part in integrated therapy programs have opportunities to expand their skill set by observing and working together with therapists to guide children, track outcomes, and determine what works best with adjusting treatment plans.

The on-site therapist will also provide mental health training to applicable Penn Hills' staff.

PHSD reached out to Heather Beachler, senior manager of outpatient services to express interest in Pittsburgh Mercy as a new school-based outpatient provider as the relationship with the previous provider had come to an end.

Heather and Sarah Fallica, vice president of Behavioral Health Services informed district leaders that Pittsburgh Mercy would only consider a true partnership, not a contractor role. This would require additional funding from the district to support the enhanced services needed for a successful model to which they agreed.

> "This allows any single child who would otherwise not have access to be able to get help from one of our therapists" – Nathan Omasta, program administrator, of child outpatient & school-based therapy.

The additional funding from the district ensures that every child in need can receive support, regardless of insurance coverage, making this partnership truly impactful and in alignment with our mission

"This allows any single child who would otherwise not have access to be able to get help from one of our therapists," said Nathan Omasta, program administrator, of child outpatient & school-based therapy.

"Penn Hills selected us over the other providers they were considering because they said Pittsburgh Mercy was the most passionate and believed we would make the best partner," said Sarah.

This pilot project will guide our school partnerships in the future and hopefully will be the adopted model across all providers in the future.

By integrating therapy into the school setting, it helps normalize mental health support and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help. It will also allow our organizations to learn from each other to best improve the outcomes of the students in our community.

Angel Glancy will be the full-time integrated school-based therapist at Penn Hills School District. They are actively interviewing candidates for a part-time position as well.