April 2025

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PITTSBURGH MERCY
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New Program Reflects Pittsburgh Mercy's Mission

Students at Penn Hills School District (PHSD) are now benefiting from Pittsburgh Mercy's child and adolescent school-based therapy program, thanks to a recent expansion of the program to serve grades K-12 across all three district schools.

Known as ***integrated school-based therapy***, the program takes a more comprehensive and supportive approach compared to traditional school-based models. It fosters collaboration between therapists and teachers to provide therapeutic services within the school setting, integrating therapy into the students' daily environment while addressing both behavioral and developmental needs.

Normalizing mental health support

This type of program emphasizes four key areas:

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

What differentiates this program is that the therapist functions as an onsite employee, becoming an integral part of the school community and its everyday activities. *By integrating therapy into the school setting, it helps normalize mental health support and reduce the stigma of seeking help.*

In addition to helping students, the onsite therapist provides mental health training to PHSD staff. Teachers take part in integrated therapy programs that expand their skills as they observe and work with therapists to guide children, track outcomes, and determine which treatment plans are most effective.

Changing demographics and increased needs

PHSD is a mid-sized public school district about 10 miles east of downtown Pittsburgh; it serves Penn Hills and a small portion of Wilkins Township. In the last several decades, the area has seen a significant demographic shift: the proportion of Blacks has risen to 41% of the population, with other minorities comprising about 10%. Median household income in 2023 was $62,567.

PHSD reached out to **Heather Beachler**, Pittsburgh Mercy's senior manager of outpatient services, when their previous outpatient provider relationship ended. Heather informed district leaders that we would only consider a true partnership, not a contractor role—an arrangement that required additional funding to support the enhanced services needed for a successful model. The district agreed, providing funds to make services available to all students regardless of insurance coverage.

The additional funding is critical to the program's success. "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 and school-based therapy. "It's a partnership that's truly impactful and aligns with our mission."

Tackling the challenges

Angel Glancy is the full-time integrated school-based therapist at PHSD, transferring from her position with Pittsburgh Mercy's regular school-based therapy program. "I believe working with children is my calling, so I'm excited to be part of this new program," said Angel.

Understanding that many children struggle to communicate their feelings in a healthy way, she often uses "game therapy" as a way to get them to open up and actively participate in therapy. The onsite integrated model gives her "a better idea of what's happening in the classroom, in the hallways, and from the teachers in a way [that the traditional model didn't]."

To adequately serve all students, Pittsburgh Mercy is actively interviewing to add a part-time therapist for PHSD.

Pittsburgh Mercy hopes that the PHSD project will guide our school partnerships in

the future and be the adopted model across all providers in the future. To learn more about Pittsburgh Mercy's school-based therapy and other programs, visit pittsburghmercy.org.

Share Your Time & Good Vibes!

April is Global Volunteer Month, so we took the opportunity to host an event celebrating all those who have given their time to Pittsburgh Mercy and Bethlehem Haven. Our volunteers provide a truly meaningful and enriching experience for community members in need. ***Thank you to our compassionate and inspiring volunteers!***

Would ***you*** like to make a difference in the lives of the thousands of people served by our programs? Pittsburgh Mercy offers numerous ways to get involved.

Consider these volunteer opportunities:

- Serving food at Second Avenue Commons.
- Hosting a sporting event watch party at a behavioral health residential program.
- Making arts and crafts at our adult day programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Making PB&J sandwiches for persons served at Pittsburgh Mercy's Engagement Center at Second Avenue Commons.
- Sorting donated clothing and basic hygiene supplies for people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, or other crises.

For more details or to sign up, contact Pittsburgh Mercy's Volunteer and Engagement Coordinator Brendan Copp at **Brendan.Copp@pittsburghmercy.org** or 412-897-8822.

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