

## Mifflinburg Area School District will switch mental health providers for students

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MIFFLINBURG — The Mifflinburg Area School Board approved a one-year contract with a new mental health provider that is nearly five times less in costs than its current provider.

At Tuesday night's public meeting, the school board members approved the contract with Cartwheel, of Cambridge, Mass., at a total cost of \$27,500 for up to 50 students starting Dec. 1. The provider will replace Gaggle.

"Cartwheel offers another option for us," Duane Snayberger, the director of Curriculum and Instruction, said. "It connects students with the services we need, but it takes the burden off of us to manage those kinds of things. It's a little bit less of a financial burden as well."

This program is funded through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) Mental Health grant, according to Business Manager Renee Jilinski.

"This particular grant our award was \$123,529," Jilinski said. "This was slotted for all mental health services, initially Gaggle."

"From July 1 through the present, the district paid Gaggle \$63,930, of which \$31,650 was for the 2023-24 school year services, Jilinski said.

"We were waiting for grant approval, therefore even though they supplied the services, we did not make payment until the grant was approved," Jilinski said. "It was approved in July 2024."

The district paid Gaggle directly \$93,930, plus an additional \$30,000 through the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, totaling \$129,930, all of which was funded by PCCD through several grants, Jilinski said.

### 'Kids going untreated'

"When it comes to mental health, kids are basically going untreated," Jim Vandy, of Cartwheel, said. "One out of every five students is actually getting care for the concern they're actually dealing with. The primary reasons why are lack of providers or very long waitlists. School supports are stretched really thin. The more rural you go, the less access you have to care. Lack of ESL support, lack of accepted insurance, flexible hours or parent engagement. Whatever the reasons may be, kids simply aren't getting the care they need."

Vandy presented information to the school board via videoconference at Tuesday's meeting.

Cartwheel guarantees no waitlists, 1-1 group therapy, all languages and extended hours for students; 1-1 bilingual case manager for every family and educational community workshops; clinic program manager for the district; a portal to refer students, track progress, collaborate with clinicians and review real-time impact data.

Cartwheel employs child psychiatrists, licensed therapists, case managers and clinical program managers to work with students in K-12, Vandy said.

An average of 80 percent of the individual services are paid through by the family's insurance providers. Three uninsured students are covered at no cost, Vandy said.

The district has the option of expanding the services if more than 50 students need to be referred, Vandy said.

### 'Better than what we have'

Superintendent Ken Dady Jr. said that remote counseling services "tend to be quite expensive" and Cartwheel "will be much better than what we have."

"What I really like about this, it takes us out of the mental health management part," Dady said. "It takes us out of it. It turns it over to them. If kids need the service, if the family wants the service, we refer them. We do a lot of managing right now, and we shouldn't be in that business. We're not mental health professionals like the folks at Cartwheel or Gaggle."

Dady said the money from the PCCD grant was all going to Gaggle. The district can now use the money toward safety improvements as well.