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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 15, 2017

New Paltz, New York

New Paltz High School Launches On-Campus Mental Health Clinic

The New Paltz Central School District (NPCSD) has launched a new effort to help its high school students thrive in both school and life by providing them with more access to mental health services.

Starting this month, a therapist from Astor Counseling Center will be located at New Paltz High School (NPHS) three days a week from 8 AM to 6 PM, providing counseling for students during the school day and for both students and their families after school. The services are available through a contract with Astor Services for Children & Families.

"I'm very excited about this," said Mary Kay Fiore, school psychologist at New Paltz. "Having a therapist right in school will really benefit a lot of students."

Fiore, along with social worker Lisa Watkins and the school's three guidance counselors, currently provides support to students on issues that range from academic stress and family and relationship problems to anxiety and depression.

Anxiety, in particular, is increasing among teens, according to Fiore and Watkins.

"Definitely anxiety is what we see the most," Watkins said.

Fiore said that students face "a lot of difficult, challenging situations" and often don't realize that their emotional reactions to those situations are normal.

"Never a day goes by that there isn't something crucial going on," Fiore said, adding that a "good handful" of students simply stop by her office each day hoping to talk about problems they're facing.

Principal Barbara Clinton said that making sure emotional issues and problems are addressed makes a difference for students, both in the short-term and beyond. "They're better prepared for school and for life," Clinton said.

Having Astor services available without leaving the building will provide additional resources for students. "This goes beyond what we can do within a normal school day."

"It provides additional options for students and families to obtain treatment," Watkins added. She also said an on-campus therapist would be able to provide valuable support if any kind of crisis situation were to occur.

The NPHS clinic will function as a satellite location of the Astor Counseling Clinic in New Paltz, and students who receive services at the High School will be able to receive psychiatric services through the main Astor clinic, as well telepsychiatry at the school clinic in the future. The Astor therapist will also be available on campus during the summer months to help maintain continuity of treatment. As a satellite site of the Astor Clinic in New Paltz, session fees will be processed through insurance and parents will be billed for any co-payments.

According to Fiore, students seem really open to the idea of obtaining counseling in the school building, a setting they're already comfortable and familiar with. Clinton said she has already received positive feedback about the program from parents.

Having the Astor therapist on campus also fits with the District's philosophy of supporting and educating the whole child. "As educators, we know that good mental health is a key component of student success," said Superintendent Maria Rice. "We believe that increasing the availability of assistance to our teens is an important endeavor that has the potential to impact many students."

Parents wishing to have their child attend therapy should schedule an intake appointment by calling 845-419-0850. Parental consent for services is necessary. If a student is already a patient at the Astor Clinic in New Paltz but would prefer to be seen at their satellite location at the High School, please speak to their therapist to arrange a transfer.

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