In-District Programming

Collaborative Learning Programs
A SUCCESSFUL, COST-EFFECTIVE IN-DISTRICT SOLUTION

Wheeler’s Collaborative Learning Programs (CLP) offer school districts in-district alternatives to out-of-district placements. The CLP model utilizes a transdisciplinary team approach to provide direct clinical and special education services to high-risk students with serious mental health and behavioral challenges who struggle to succeed in traditional academic settings. This innovative partnership between school districts and Wheeler provides a cost-effective in-district solution to best meet student, family, and district needs. Recognizing that the needs of each district are unique, Wheeler works collaboratively to design and provide customized programming within a supportive and trauma-informed framework, effectively meeting the unique needs of students, and creating efficiencies in educational expenditures. CLPs are designed to:

- Reduce the need for out-of-district placement
- Improve academic performance
- Reduce truancy
- Reduce disciplinary referrals
- Create positive partnerships between school districts and families

STUDENTS SERVED

Wheeler’s CLPs serve special education students in grades K–12 with significant mental health needs that impact their ability to learn in traditional academic settings.

Many of the students served have experienced unresolved or untreated trauma and may be:

- oppositional and at times threatening
- emotionally and/or behaviorally dysregulated
- non-compliant/disengaged from academics and not working to potential
- socially challenged and/or disconnected from staff and positive peers
- school avoidant and/or missing classes on days they do attend

Typically, many of these students are considered for outplacement in a private special education school at significant cost to the district.

To prevent the need for outplacement, CLPs focus on:

- Social skill development
- Impulse control
- Cognitive restructuring
- Values clarification
- Goal-setting
- Decision-making
- Anxiety reduction
- Anger management
- Empathy training
- Life skills
- Societal consequences
- Emotional and behavioral regulation
PROVEN OUTCOMES

Wheeler has repeatedly demonstrated that high-risk students with significant mental health and education needs can be successfully programmed for and sustained in their home school district. We work collaboratively with districts to ensure model fidelity, implement quality assurance practices and analyze outcomes. These practices are employed to determine the success of interventions, identify trends, assist with program development, make improvements in program model, and determine training needs.

Our most recent CLP outcomes:

- 90% of students served remained in their district school
- 97% of students referred remained in school either until graduation or until mainstreamed
- Average 14% increase in GPA, the equivalent of one letter grade, since entering the program
- 44% reduction in disciplinary referrals

CLP COMPONENTS

Trauma-informed Relational Approach

Since most high-risk students have experienced some form of trauma, trauma-informed strategies, practices and interventions are the foundation of Wheeler’s CLP model. Wheeler helps students:

- Develop meaningful relationships, the single most important factor in helping high-risk students
- Focus on relational approaches and whole-person care
- Develop skills in the areas of emotional and behavioral regulation, social skill development, self-esteem building, and decision-making
- Maintain accountability

Transdisciplinary Teaming

CLPs feature a unique transdisciplinary team approach that blends educational and clinical strategies to meet each student’s individual needs. Transdisciplinary teaming requires program staff, school staff, community providers, and parents/guardians to draw from and integrate expertise and experience from each of their professional disciplines and/or roles. Expertise from staff trained in individual disciplines is modeled and shared with all team members, which allows each to develop a working knowledge of other areas of expertise. This broadens everyone’s skillsets, enriches strategies, and improves student outcomes in and out of the classroom.
**Wheeler’s Clinical Expertise**

Wheeler provides experienced clinical staff and a clinical manager who work as part of the transdisciplinary team along with the district’s classroom teachers, paraprofessional staff, school social workers, school psychologists, guidance counselors, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and building administrators to ensure that student needs are met. These staff work in tandem to ensure that the school program provides the necessary level of support, structure and consistency required for success, as well as to ensure model fidelity. Wheeler’s clinicians facilitate team member interaction, consultation and integration of expertise from professionals involved to put transdisciplinary programming into action. Clinical services are an integrated and supportive adjunct to each student’s education and are provided directly within the school environment to offer immediate access to consistent mental health services to students in the program, as well as provide classroom staff with team support throughout the school day. Clinicians also provide input regarding therapeutic intervention and other strategies to engage a particular student or strengthen the therapeutic nature of the classroom. Specific services include:

- Individual Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Case Management
- Group Counseling
- Crisis Intervention
- Aftercare Services

- **Wheeler Clinicians**: minimum of a Master’s Degree in psychology, social work or a related field who are either licensed/license-eligible or certified. In addition to providing direct clinical service, the clinicians provide clinical consultation in weekly team consultation meetings, direct intervention in the classroom milieu in milieu-based programs and case management to coordinate service delivery both in and outside of school.

- **Wheeler Clinical Manager**: provides clinical and program consultation, as well as weekly clinical supervision to Wheeler’s CLP clinical staff throughout the school year. The clinical manager holds a minimum of a Master’s Degree in a clinical field and is licensed. The clinical manager has extensive experience working with children with special education needs, families and school systems.

**Enhancing District Expertise, Curriculum and Coursework**

School districts have a wealth of talented special education teachers and paraprofessionals who are extremely dedicated and skilled in meeting the needs of most students classified as having special education needs. Yet, some students’ needs are so complex that even the most talented teachers struggle to meet their needs with traditional supports and programming. Coupled with the skills of Wheeler’s school-based clinicians and CLP model, district teachers are able to experience success with many of these students, avoiding the need for outplacement. The curriculum and coursework for the Collaborative Learning Program is provided by the school district. Modifications to the curriculum are made via an IEP. While the special education teacher is the lead in this regard, the clinician is present in the classroom to provide support to students and classroom staff.
**Family Engagement**

Active family participation is an integral part of each student’s individualized plan. Families are encouraged and supported to become involved in all aspects of the program. They are viewed as part of the transdisciplinary team and are empowered as a vital voice to help make decisions regarding their child’s educational and clinical programming. Identifying and addressing potential barriers to active parent participation, such as language, transportation, finances, and child care, enables families to willingly and actively participate in these supports. Every effort is made to identify educational training opportunities available in the community for parents. Families are also offered short-term, solution-focused counseling with their child when indicated. When needed or deemed beneficial, in-home family sessions or meetings are offered help to remove barriers to family participation.

**Student Engagement**

Program success depends not only on external opportunities and controls, but on the student’s investment in his/her own success. In addition to active involvement in the development of his or her plan, students are encouraged to set personal goals and to monitor progress toward meeting those goals. Student engagement is a key element in addressing school truancy issues. Along with following district policies and procedures regarding truancy, Wheeler offers a structured process for addressing truancy and developing an active intervention plan. This process is focused on early intervention, family involvement, thorough assessment to identify specific precipitants that contribute to truancy and successful intervention strategies, and involvement of community providers. The CLP team actively works with students to increase engagement and attendance through the use of several strategies.

**Classroom-based Therapeutic Intervention**

Classroom-based therapeutic programs are designed to work with students who struggle in mainstream classes and require a smaller, supportive, structured and consistent learning environment in order to experience success. In these types of classrooms, it is important that all aspects of the school program assure and promote the physical safety and psychological well-being of clients and staff. Therapeutic classrooms:

- Prefer crisis prevention over crisis intervention
- Utilize the relational strength of each team member to prevent crises from arising, as well as de-escalating them if they do arise
- Prevent negative student behavior through enhanced student engagement
- Focus on the principles of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), as well as relational and trauma-informed models.
- Focus on strength-based interventions
- Utilize restorative approaches, as opposed to punitive measures
- Hold students accountable for their behavior, while maintaining respect and support
PRE-SERVICE AND ONGOING TRAINING FOR DISTRICTS

All Collaborative Learning Program staff and involved district staff receive training that encompasses a variety of areas related to working with high-risk students in the district. Wheeler draws on its extensive pool of clinical and educational resources to execute this training plan. Based on the program's focus and structure, Wheeler works with the school district to develop a comprehensive training plan and schedule. At a minimum, CLP pre-service training topics include:

- CLP Model Design
- Creating a Therapeutic Milieu in the Classroom
- Enhancing High-Risk Student Engagement and Motivation
- Crisis Prevention, De-escalation and Early Intervention Techniques
- Utilizing Relational Interventions in School Settings
- Maintaining Confidentiality and Professional Boundaries
- Engaging Building Personnel to Support In-district Programming for High-Risk Students
- Engaging Parents in their Child's Education
Connecticut’s Proven Leader in Special Education

Wheeler has over 40 years of experience providing specialized educational and clinical services to Connecticut’s students:

- In-district Collaborative Learning Programs
- Private special education schools, serving students from more than 60 school districts
- Pre-K programs
- School-based behavioral health clinics

Our school-based programs serve approximately 300 students annually, ranging in age from 3–21, and focus on the use of best-practice and evidence-based models to assess, diagnose and remediate educational and clinical issues. Programs utilize transdisciplinary team and relational approaches that consider the whole child. Over the years, Wheeler has partnered with multiple school districts, including Region One, Thomaston, Plainville, Bristol, and Plymouth, to establish Collaborative Learning Programs for students with significant behavioral and mental health needs. Wheeler has also provided in-district clinical and special education consultation to the Hartford, Middletown, Old Saybrook, Litchfield, Plymouth, Southington and East Hampton school systems. This consultation included educational and clinical program development, individual case consultation, and staff training. Most recently, Wheeler has partnered with Bristol to provide in-school behavioral health clinics.

Across the whole organization, Wheeler provides comprehensive solutions that address complex health issues, providing individuals, families and communities with accessible, innovative care that encourages health, recovery and growth at all stages of life. Our integrated approach to primary and behavioral health, education and recovery creates measurable results, positive outcomes and hopeful tomorrows for more than 30,000 individuals across Connecticut each year.
• OUR MISSION •

Wheeler provides equitable access to innovative care that improves health, recovery and growth at all stages of life.

Approved by the Connecticut State Department of Education

Member of the Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities

Contact us to learn more about our education programs and services or to schedule a tour: 860.793.3552

www.WheelerClinic.org/clp