

The Wolf School immersion model

As The Wolf School began its mission to serve students of average cognitive potential who have multiple learning issues, we designed a unique method of instruction. The immersion model blends the students' individual speech and language, social, emotional, and occupational therapeutic goals into the academic curriculum.

Therapeutic support is interwoven within the curriculum and provided throughout the day in each classroom. Our curriculum includes language-based instruction, social skills programming, hands-on experiential learning, self-regulation training, social story scripting and the development of self-advocacy. We identify each child's needs and teach him/her to apply strategies to help listen, attend, and complete activities independently. This model allows our students to attend to task and be ready to learn. Since we individualize our program, we divide the class of eight students for each math, reading, spelling and writing lesson into smaller learning groups. The groups are identified by skill level, and our low teacher:student ratio allows each child in the class to progress at his/her rate.

The immersion model includes a unique method of joint team planning and implementing a therapeutically guided academic program. This way each team member understands the child's goal areas and they can be addressed by any of the faculty who interact with the student. Our team, which includes a classroom teacher, speech language therapist, and occupational therapist, meet formally on a weekly basis and informally on a daily basis. In addition, a teaching assistant also participates in the delivery of classroom assignments. Joint planning allows the therapists to discuss each child's needs as the lessons are developed. In effect, we have created an errorless learning approach to the curriculum.

Our model addresses three major learning challenges: language processing/production, sensory regulation, and socially effective communication. We approach each student's needs from an individual and developmental level and address their challenges within the classroom. Teaching methods include collaborative transdisciplinary teaching whereby there are at least two faculty members in each class for each content area, depending upon the number of educational groupings per class. In this way, an occupational therapist or speech pathologist could be teaching any subject. We address social skills, classroom management, and organizational abilities as part of our daily curriculum.

Since our foundation for learning requires the students to be "ready to learn" and "ready to listen," we start each day for grades K-5 with a sensory regulation activity, which we call Move-to-Learn. This class is taught by an occupational therapist and physical education teacher or teaching assistant. We alternate movement with sedentary learning every ninety minutes throughout the day to maintain sensory modulation. Conversely, our middle school students end the day with a physical education class to help the children transition from school to home.

The social effective communication goals are identifiable by the pragmatic skills needed in verbal, nonverbal and paralinguistic aspects of social effective communication. These individual objectives are identified each day/week and monitored throughout the day by all the staff. Both individual and collective classroom goals are considered. As the students progress to middle school, these social skills areas are also addressed through service learning opportunities and electives.

By invisibly integrating therapy goals into the daily academic curriculum, we have immersed the students in a successful and secure learning environment, and we have provided a highly specialized program so that each student develops into an independent learner. As a result, Wolf School students require fewer intensive therapy supports as they progress each year.