

# Supporting Students with Therapeutic Classrooms

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# Mental Health's Impact on Schools

*Without support, these challenges impact entire systems*

- + Disrupted instruction
- + Increased suspension and removals
- + Teacher burnout and turnover
- + Lost learning time
- + Surface-level interventions often fail to address the root causes of student mental health challenges

# What is a Therapeutic Classroom?

A small structured learning environment designed to develop emotional regulation, social skills and academic stability.

## Key features

- + Small class size
- + Structured routines
- + Mental health support/professionals
- + Social emotional skill development
- + Individualized behavior supports

# What a Therapeutic Classroom is Not

- + A forever placement
- + A place for all challenging behavior
- + A behavior management program

The goal is to provide:

- The student with skills and supports, and
- The adults with strategies
- So that both can successfully support reintegration.

# Why Therapeutic Classrooms?

- + Early intervention prevents higher costs in the future.
- + Without therapeutic support, students may require:
  - + Out-of-district placement
  - + Out-of-state placement
  - + Residential treatment programs
  - + Juvenile justice involvement
  - + Long-term, restrictive special education placements

# Program Structure

## Staffing

- + Special Education Teacher
- + Behavior Interventionist
- + Mental Health Professional
- + Paraprofessional

## Programming

- + Social emotional learning
- + Behavior skill building
- + Trauma informed practices
- + Reintegration planning

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Therapeutic Classroom</b>	<b>Conduct Disorder Classroom</b>
<b>Main focus</b>	Mental health & emotional support	Behavior control & rule compliance
<b>Root issue addressed</b>	Emotional disorders, trauma	Chronic rule-breaking or aggression
<b>Approach</b>	Therapy-based, supportive	Behavior management, structured
<b>Staff</b>	Therapists, mental health counselors	Behavior specialists, trained support staff
<b>Atmosphere</b>	Calming, treatment-oriented	Highly structured with strict expectations

# Critical Components

- + Thoughtful referral process
- + Collaboration with home districts
- + Progress reviewed every 30, 60, 90 days to target specific gaps
- + Relationship-based practices
- + Explicit skills teaching and time to practice skills
- + Carefully planned transition back to home district is crucial to student's long-term success

# Student Outcomes

- + Reduction in incidents
- + Increased attendance
- + Improved academic engagement
- + Strengthened peer and adult relationships
- + Success in the home district and general education setting, as appropriate

# Program Impact

- + **55** students served across several districts
- + In HEART, over **60%** of students made a full year's growth in key social-emotional skills in two months.  
(Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-DESSA)
- + **74%** students maintained or improved skills
- + Average DESSA scores increased from 36.6 → **41.9**

# Key Insights & Trends from HEART

- + **High recommendation rate** - 100% agree or strongly agree that they would suggest the program to others
- + **Communication and collaboration** - 100% strongly agree that communication and collaboration between HEART and the home school were key in success
- + **Reintegration success** - with targeted support students can transition to their home school gradually and with success

# Building & Sustaining Therapeutic Programs

- + Specialized, trauma-informed expertise and commitment from the host and sending districts is critical
- + Dedicated effort and expertise is needed
- + Highly individualized programming for each student
- + Build ongoing capacity of staff in the program
- + Build ongoing capacity of staff in general ed classrooms
- + Competitive compensation - this is intensive work
- + Accessibility in rural areas

# An Investment in Students' (+ Schools') Success

## **Therapeutic Classrooms:**

- + Keep students in schools
- + Support educators and paraeducators
- + Strengthen school communities
- + Prevent more costly interventions
- + Reduce out-of-district placements

# Feedback

“My child’s mental health has improved dramatically. They feel like they belong and are being heard. For the first time, my child is actually happy to go to school.” - *Parent*

“The reintegration process was seamless . . . the student demonstrated they were ready for the transition and there was complete support every step of the way.” - *Teacher*

# Building Stronger Schools

The Therapeutic Classroom option is a stabilizer for students with emotional needs. Our most vulnerable students get what they need to be successful in a safe, supportive environment. It also supports the learning for adults who may not have the skills, yet, to support students who need different supports to successfully navigate school.

# Building Stronger Futures

We aren't just teaching math and reading.

We're teaching children how to exist in a world that once felt completely overwhelming.

We urge you to continue funding—and expanding—therapeutic programs in Iowa.

This work gives children the chance to build stable, productive lives—and to grow into resilient, contributing citizens of Iowa.

# QUESTIONS & COMMENTS





# Thank You!