

## **Wellspring's Counseling/Learning Support System**

Wellspring Learning Community has a unique and comprehensive counseling/Learning Support system that originates from its mission of developing students' "intellectual, emotional and social capacities, academic skills, and individual talents in all areas". The basic counseling objectives are nurturing students' sense of independence, self reliance, respect for self and others, and establishing an intrinsic motivation for life long learning among our student diverse population. Services are either rendered directly to students and parents or indirectly through instruction and the Wellspring website.

### **How does the process start?**

The process starts as parents are asked to complete the application for admission, which includes parts that need to be filled out by previous teachers whenever applicable. Questions on physical, personal, and academic aspects of the child's life, aim at providing the school with as much data as possible on every unique student. Moreover parents are requested to include psycho-educational assessments whenever available. Upon acceptance, the file of every student is thoroughly studied by the principal, the counselor, special educators, and concerned teachers, in an attempt of familiarizing ourselves as much as possible, with all our students, ahead of time. Afterwards, internal meetings are held among parties concerned to discuss individual students, exchange ideas, share experiences, and come up with general strategies for the student concerned.

### **What happens once school starts?**

Once school starts, the student undergoes preliminary observations by the principal, the related teachers, the special educators and the counselor. The aim is to detect patterns in the child's behavior that lead to the identification of student needs. The child goes through a number of observations from the different Wellspring professionals, at different times, during different lessons, and with different teachers and peers. Afterwards, meetings are held among the different observers in order to compare observations and identify, as objectively as possible, any development area the student might have, be it in the academic, personal or social fields. Once the patterns are identified, research articles from prominent sources are reviewed, and if necessary experts in the field are consulted, in order to come up with the most appropriate recommendations, and classroom accommodations, that include well researched instructional techniques. Then, meetings are held with parents to discuss development areas, and gain more insight of the child's behavior outside the school context. During such meetings, parents are requested to provide as much information as possible on the child.

After meeting the parents, the staff concerned keeps collaborating to come up with a specific educational plan that will address the student's development area(s). Once the plan gets

finalized, and approved, by everyone concerned within Wellspring, another meeting is scheduled with the parents. During this meeting, the psycho-educational plan is clearly described, justified, and discussed, with the parents in order to get their approval and start the implementation phase.

### **What are possible aspects of the Wellspring psycho-educational plan?**

An educational plan might consist of one, or many, aspects, depending on the uniqueness of each individual child. It could include a set of well-researched recommendations, to parents, teachers, and the child's home tutor. The aim here is updating parents, and maintaining consistency, between home and school, to ensure student progress. It could be a number of classroom accommodations in the effort of eliminating factors that might jeopardize the child's learning in any way. Some examples are seating the child in the front of the classroom, or close to a peer role model, providing visual cues, extended time, repeating instructions, breaking down tasks, etc. In the case where a child has minor academic gaps, teachers implement differentiated instruction in class.

The second aspect could be a short-term referral to the learning support system. This occurs when the student is below grade level in a certain subject. In this case the first step is evaluating the child at baseline. Then, the child's teachers collaborate with the special educators, to set specific objectives, with specific time frames, to help the student attain the level of his/her peers. In addition to providing the required academic support, the special educators also help the student develop learning strategies, study habits, and organizations skills that would help promote his/her academic achievement. Throughout this phase, ongoing assessments and observations occur in order to monitor the child's progress. In the case where little progress is evident, the plan is adjusted or changed according to the child's needs. Naturally parents are continuously updated, and consulted. Furthermore, recommendations are provided to parents in order to ensure consistency and achieve better results. The more cooperative the parents are, the more the Wellspring Effect becomes evident to everyone concerned. Eventually, we all work a bit harder but end up with a win-win situation where everybody is better off; the school, the parents, and most importantly, the child himself. In the case where objectives are not attained and no sufficient learning occurs, a meeting is rescheduled with the parents.

During this meeting, the parents are requested to refer the child to a professional, in the field of psycho-education, for formal assessment, in order to identify the specific factors hindering his/her learning. Once the school receives the assessment report, educational plans and/or classroom accommodations are redesigned according to the child's needs.

Another aspect of Wellspring's psycho-educational plan is individual counseling. The rationale behind this service is helping the child resolve any issue that is interfering with his/her concentration in class, and hence his/her learning. This service is rendered provided no serious issues, that require expertise beyond the counselor's capabilities, are at hand (Otherwise, the parents are advised to seek specialized expertise). Confidential short-term counseling sessions

are held with the child, upon parent consent, mostly through the Rogerian and the cognitive/behavioral approaches. Examples of such situations are family problems, emotional problems, anger management, stress management, lack of social skills, low self esteem, etc. Naturally continuous collaboration and communication occurs with the child's parents and teachers.

The last aspect is preventive emotional educational sessions, implemented in class, where students learn, as a group, about expressing emotions in healthy ways, problem solving in social contexts, conflict resolution, the role of thoughts in feeling and behaving, etc.

Furthermore, continuous updating of parents occurs through workshops, provision of necessary articles, and the Wellspring website and on-line library.

