



**Supporting the mental health
and academic success of
DeKalb students**

Board of Education Meeting

August 2026

www.cartwheel.org



Juliana Chen, MD

Chief Medical Officer - Cartwheel Care



- Board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist, licensed in Georgia
- Over 15 years working with students and families
- Faculty at Harvard Medical School
- Testified in Georgia House on mental health's connection to student absenteeism

Dr. Chen is passionate about promoting resiliency and overall wellness in children. Her clinical skills and experience span many contexts, including school- and family-based interventions.



Who we are

Cartwheel is the leading partner for schools on mental health, attendance, and behavior

30+

Districts served in Georgia



92%

Our students improve in mental health outcomes

96%

School staff recommend Cartwheel to a peer



For students

Evidence-based telehealth for students and families

Direct referrals from the school:

- 1-1 evidence-based therapy (3-12)
- 1-1 parent guidance (PreK-12)

Cartwheel internal referrals:

- Medication management
- Psychiatric evaluations
- Family therapy
- Intensive Outpatient partnerships



For schools

Wraparound supports for your families & staff

- **Family support:** Care coordination for every family referred for services
- **School support:** Clinical consultation as needed and care team collaboration throughout care
- **Support with traumatic events**
- **Skill-building community webinars**
- **Data platform:** Portal to refer students, track progress, and assess outcomes



District mission

Promote the academic, social, and emotional growth of each student by fostering a safe, supportive, and engaging learning environment

A partnership aligned to the strategic goals of Dekalb County School District

Goal 1

Student Academic Success with Equity and Access



Goal 2

School, Family & Community Engagement



Goal 3

Recruit, Develop & Retain Talent



Goal 4

Culture & Climate



Goal 5

Mental Health & Wellness



Goal 6

Organizational Excellence



Cartwheel directly advances all six goals

Mental health support that drives district outcomes

We are already laying a strong foundation in support of District goals. With continued partnership, DeKalb can expect operational impact in line with the gains other Cartwheel partner districts have realized.

62%

fewer student absences

From 16 → 6 absences per student per year — recovering instructional days and the attendance-based funding tied to them.

84%

fewer behavioral incidents

5.3 → 0.9 incidents per student per year — freeing administrator and staff time for core operations.

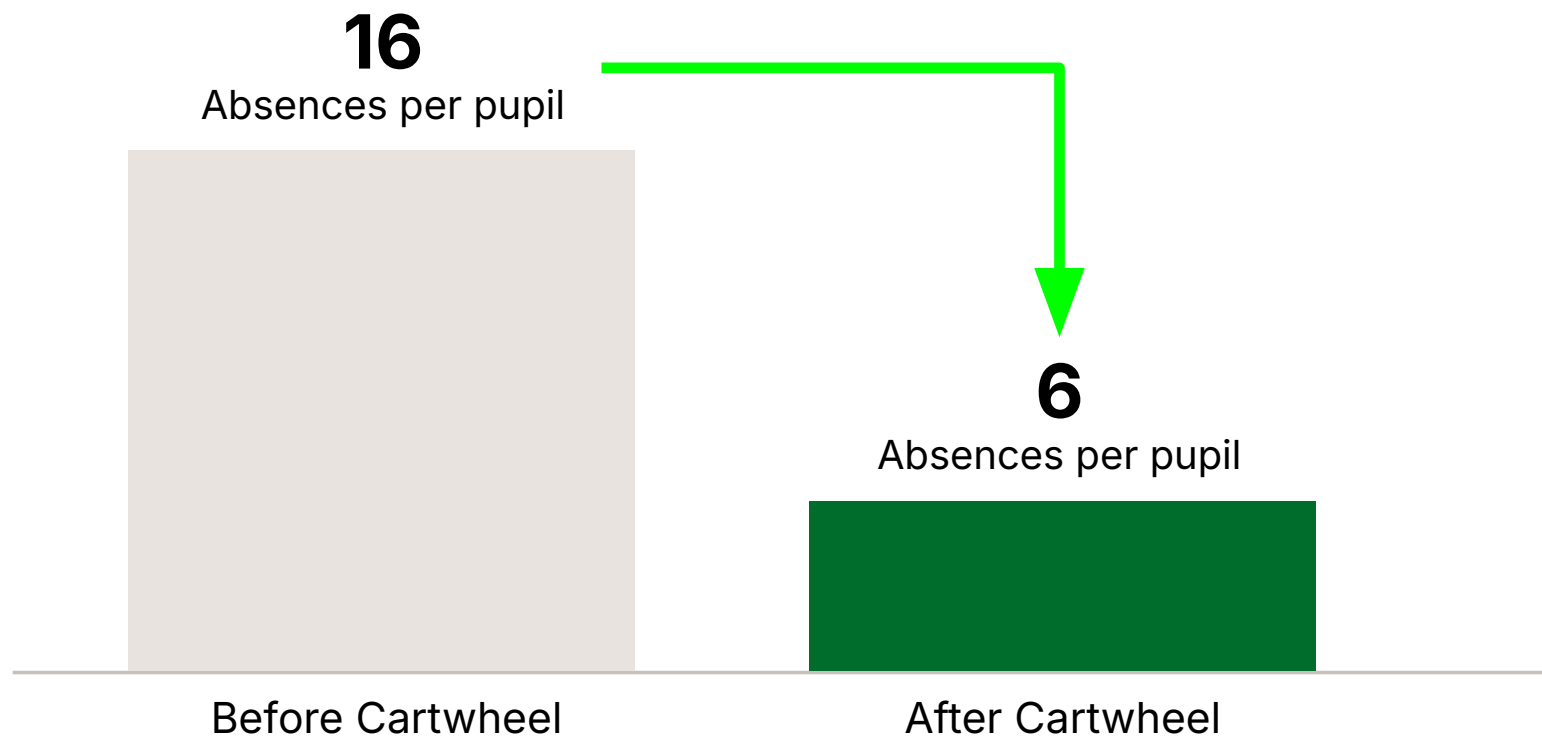
Comparison students who did not receive Cartwheel saw no comparable improvement — these gains reflect the program itself, not a district-wide trend.

Illustrative results from Cartwheel partner districts — not DeKalb's own data; each cohort compared before vs. after starting Cartwheel telehealth. Absences: Peoria Public Schools (13,000-student urban, 75% FRL), n=141 referred students, SY 2022–25. Behavioral incidents: Acton-Boxborough School District (5,000-student suburban, 12% low income), among the 72 of 594 referred students with documented incidents, SY 2022–26.

Case Study: 62% reduction in absences per student for students receiving Cartwheel telehealth



Absences per student before and after Cartwheel services



Sample size: n=141 students who engaged in Cartwheel telehealth services in a 13,000 student urban district (75% free/reduced lunch) during the 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 school years. First bar shows the average number of absences per pupil in the year they were referred for services. For the same cohort, the second bar shows the average number of absences per pupil in following years.

"Over the past two years, Cartwheel has become an indispensable partner in addressing absenteeism."

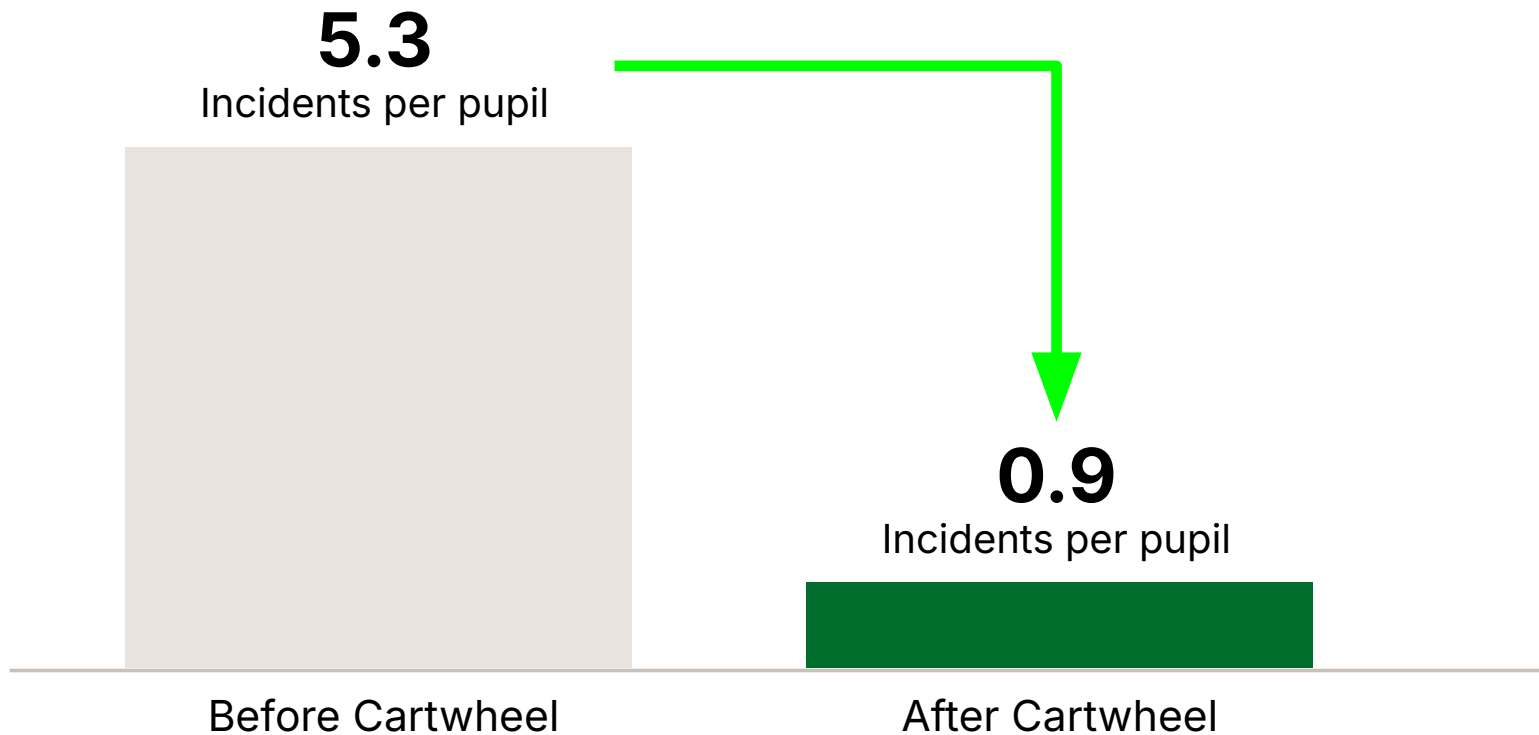
Peoria Public Schools

Comparison group:
Students who did not receive Cartwheel services did **not** see improved attendance

Case Study: 84% reduction in behavioral incidents, increasing instructional time per student



Behavioral incidents per student per year before/after Cartwheel



Sample size: n=594 students who were referred to Cartwheel telehealth services in a 5,000 student suburban district (12% low income) during the 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25, and 2025-26 school years. Of these students, 72 committed behavioral incidents and attended sessions with Cartwheel. First bar shows the average # of incidents per year before starting treatment with Cartwheel for the 72 students. For the same cohort, the second bar shows the average # of incidents per year after starting services with Cartwheel. Incident defined a code of conduct violation requiring documented administrative response, such as bullying or physical aggression.

"We have seen firsthand how Cartwheel's model can transform student outcomes"

Acton-Boxborough School District

Comparison group:
Students who did not receive Cartwheel services did **not** see fewer incidents per year

Cartwheel increases access to care

74%

receive care at no cost (Medicaid plan or uninsured)

34%

of students served have an IEP / 504 plan

7%

of students served in a language other than English

15%

of guardians served in a language other than English

How DeKalb families use Cartwheel

82%

in Individual Therapy

12%

in Individual Therapy + Parent Guidance

6%

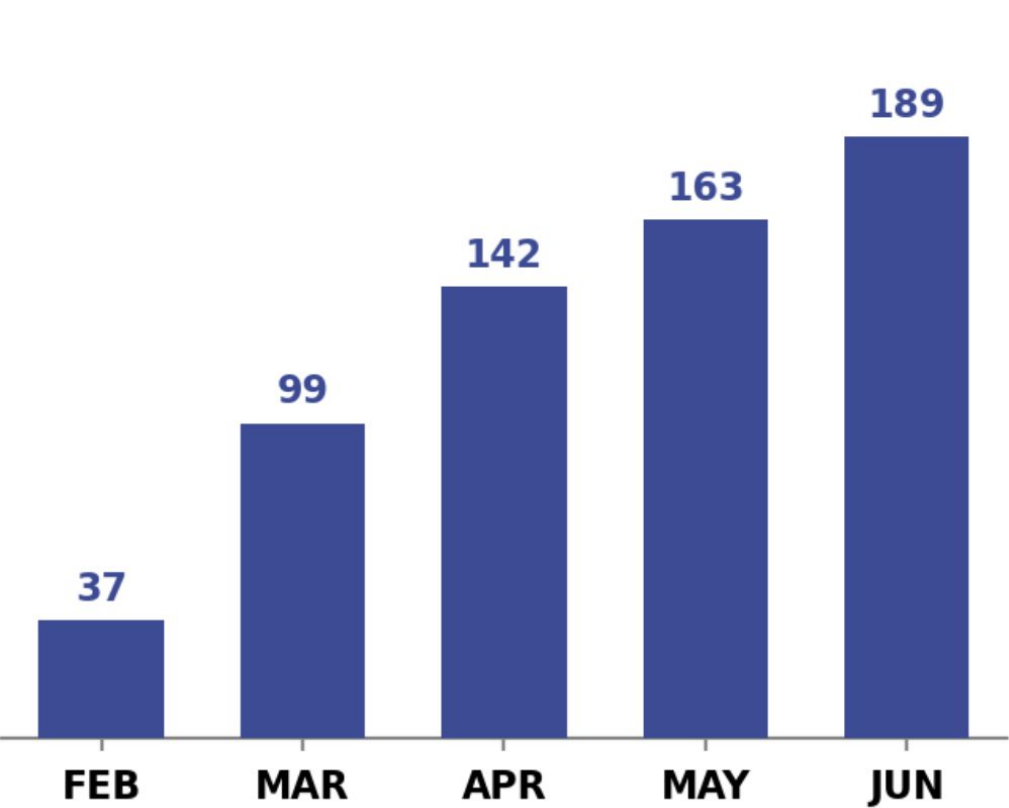
in Parent Guidance + Psychiatry

Languages served:

Spanish, Arabic, and American Sign Language



DeKalb families trust Cartwheel care



Students referred, Feb–Jun 2026

5× growth

in students referred since launch
— 37 (Feb 2026) to 185 (Jun 2026)

200%

increase in families raising their
hand

57

referrals to the School
Avoidance Program

We support your staff's wellbeing, too

82

school faculty & staff reached out confidentially for clinical care from a Cartwheel therapist

Why it matters:

Supporting staff wellbeing strengthens DeKalb's ability to retain talent (Goal 3) and sustain a positive culture and climate (Goal 4).



Students value their Cartwheel care

83%

of students say they enjoy meeting with their Cartwheel therapist

80%

of students say it has been helpful to meet with their therapist

Based on completed surveys by DeKalb students.



DeKalb students are getting better

100%

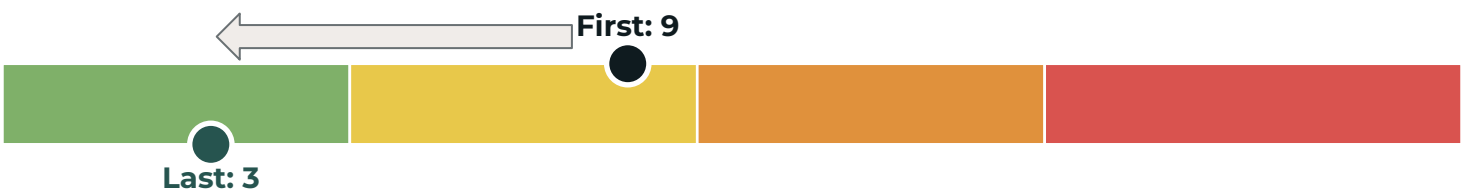
of students in Cartwheel
care show clinical
improvement

Minimal (0–4) Mild (5–9) Moderate (10–14) Severe (15+)

Depression • PHQ-9 (27-pt scale)

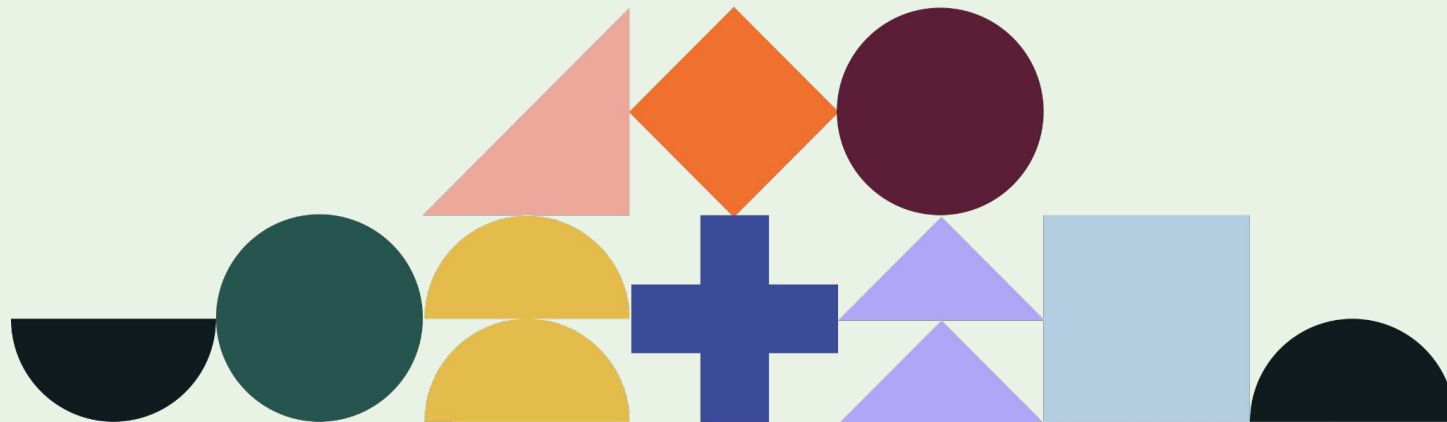


Anxiety • GAD-7 (21-pt scale)



*Scores plotted on the standard PHQ-9 / GAD-7 severity bands; lower scores reflect improvement.
Measured for participants ages 12+ and excluding parents receiving Parent Guidance.*

Partnership accomplishments and next steps for year two



Looking ahead to Year Two

Trusted, proven, and ready to grow

Seeds of success this year

5×

growth in referrals — 37 to 185
since launch

100%

of students in care show clinical
improvement

74%

receive care at no cost to their
families

82

staff confidentiality in care with
a Cartwheel therapist

Where we're headed

We'll deepen sponsorship across every DeKalb school and keep expanding specialty programs that meet students where they are.

Care Programs

Currently available:

- School Avoidance

Coming in 2026:

- Big Behaviors, Big Feelings
- Screens & Social Media

Activation Targets

Driving deeper engagement at
the individual building level

Driving activation across more
buildings

Sharing Cartwheel more
broadly through family-facing
communications

The foundation is set.

Year Two is where the impact compounds — for more DeKalb students, families, and staff.





Thank you!

Juliana Chen
Chief Medical Officer
juliana@cartwheelcare.org
www.cartwheel.org

