



## About Northwestern School District

Northwestern School District (NWSD) provides K-12 public education for over 1,200 students with an emphasis on enabling students to reach their fullest potential. Located in western Erie County, Pennsylvania, NWSD services a wide range of learners through regular education opportunities as well as special education programs supporting specific learning disabilities, speech and language, emotional support, autistic support, and life skills support.



*Based on data, Ukeru has moved us solidly away from physical restraint and seclusion. Prior to Ukeru, we averaged 1 restraint every 3 school days. Last year, we delivered instruction for an entire year without a single restraint. We have momentum and want to continue reinforcing a trauma-informed approach with our students and staff.*

**Brad Johnston**

Middle School Learning Support  
District Ukeru Trainer



## Challenges

Prior to Ukeru, students escalated frequently, often resulting in physical restraint and seclusion, especially in their elementary emotional support classroom. **“Staff members involved with these students experienced their own trauma as a direct result of supporting this population”** said Brad Johnston, Middle School Learning Support at NWSD. Staff knew that their students needed something different. They began actively searching for an alternative to physical restraint and seclusion and that’s when they discovered Ukeru.



## Working with Ukeru

Ukeru provided an alternative that aligned with NWSD's mission. Staff instantly recognized the importance of preventing re-traumatization using pads and de-escalation. "The focus on soothing and comforting while actively working with the child to develop new neural pathways represented a pathway to success for our students while maintaining the positive relationships crucial for success in school," said Johnston.

NWSD began piloting Ukeru in the 2017-2018 school year in their elementary emotional support classroom with a single classroom teacher. This classroom experienced physical restraint and seclusion multiple times per week. After observing almost an instant reduction in restraint and seclusion, leadership immediately supported the initiative and decided to offer the training district-wide. "In our business, we are always looking at data and trends. Ukeru was delivering real, observable results that impacted our students and staff in a positive way," said Johnston.

The 2022-2023 school year began NWSD's fifth year of supporting students through a trauma-informed approach. At the beginning of that same year, Ukeru training expanded to include transportation staff, ultimately supporting the districts efforts to create safe environments everywhere.

## Results

The overall result of Ukeru has been incredibly positive for NWSD's students, parents/ guardians and staff. When NWSD began using Ukeru in the 2017-2018 school year, they started with reporting 52 restraints. **During their first year, they reduced restraints by 50%. Then, in the 2021-2022 school year, NWSD recorded zero restraints.** "From the outside looking in, it would be easy to suggest that student need has changed. In reality, our students need us more today than ever. So, what changed? The district bought into Ukeru and has better tools available to support our students," said Johnston.



*We have found that our students and staff actually feel safer now that we have moved away from restraints and seclusions. Relationships and trust are developed and nurtured over time without the negative impacts of imposing our will physically upon a student suffering from trauma.*

**Brad Johnston**

Middle School Learning Support  
District Ukeru Trainer

100 %

**Restraint  
reduction**



**District cultural  
shift**

100 %

**Staff injury  
reduction**

- Since implementing Ukeru, NWSD has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from students who have previously experienced frequent restraint and seclusion.
- NWSD trains parents to utilize Ukeru in their home, ultimately strengthening the school-to-home partnership.
- Ukeru allows relationships and trust between students and staff to be developed and nurtured over time.
- Staff can prioritize treatment and education goals rather than responding to behaviors.