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State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction



NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Education of Children in Private Psychiatric
Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs)

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Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services**

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Education of Children in Private Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs)

NCGS § 122C-454 requires the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), in collaboration with other interested agencies, to submit a joint report annually on the delivery of educational services in Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services. The report is to include (i) the annual number of children by age residing in a PRTF both with and without an Individualized Education Program, (ii) the average length of stay of these children, (iii) the types of educational services, including number of hours each type of service has been provided, (iv) the costs and outcomes of providing educational services, and (v) recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of delivering educational services to children residing in PRTFs. DHHS and the DPI have assumed the responsibility of the qualification and disbursement of funds for educational services in private PRTFs.

Leadership Team

Staff from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Exceptional Children Division (EC), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (DMH/DD/SAS), and the Division of Health Service Regulation (DHSR) have continued to work together this State fiscal year (SFY) to ensure that children in Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) are receiving an appropriate education and to ensure that the requirements of the legislation are met. The leadership team is composed of the following agency representatives:

Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Exceptional Children (EC) Division

- Sherry Thomas, EC Director
- Carol Ann Hudgens, Section Chief, Policy, Monitoring, and Audit
- Glendora Hagins, Monitoring Consultant; provides on-going assessment, monitoring, consultation, and technical assistance to the special education programs.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (DMH/DD/SAS)

- Saarah Waleed, Community Mental Health Section Chief
- Eric Harbour, Child Lead, Community Mental Health Section
- Mary Ellen Anderson, Project Manager; provides on-going execution and monitoring of PRTF education contracts for funding.

Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation (DHSR)

- Michiele Elliott, Interim Chief, Mental Health Licensure and Certification Section
- Azzie Conley, Chief, Acute and Home Care Licensure and Certification Section

Eligibility, Allocations and Contracts

In SFY 2021, fourteen (14) contracts were initially executed to provide funding for educational services. The fourteen (14) parent organizations in North Carolina manage twenty-nine (29) facilities. These facilities met the following requirements for funding:

- Licensed through the DHHS, DHSR, to provide PRTF services that fall under the requirements of the legislation.
- Registered as a non-public school with the NC Department of Administration, Division of Non-Public Education.
- Approved Exceptional Children Program by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Exceptional Children.

Allocations and budgets were approved by the EC Division and DMH/DD/SAS leadership teams as agreed upon in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between DPI and DHHS. Funding was allocated to providers to ensure teacher ratios were met, including the requirement of a licensed EC teacher if a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) was enrolled, and to ensure that quality educational services were being provided to students.

A contract was terminated with one parent organization during SFY 21 following actions against their license by DHSR and subsequent revocation of EC Program approval by DPI.

A list of the parent organizations is attached at the end of this report.

Technical Assistance, Monitoring and Support

EC Summer Institutes

Due to COVID-19, a face to face event was not scheduled for the 2020-2021 school year. The EC Division sponsored virtual events in July. The live sessions were scheduled from July 14 – July 31, 2020. Pre-recorded sessions were also available to the participants. Information about the scheduled sessions were provided to the educational staff at the PRTFs prior to the event.

In addition to the summer institutes, DPI and DHHS hosted the PRTF Summer Academy. This event was designed to meet the specific needs of the PRTFs. The session focused on the “Essential Elements of an Instructional Model for Specific Learning Disability Identification” and was held on July 28, 2020.

PRTF Collaborative Meetings

DPI EC Division and DHHS sponsored two (2) PRTF Collaborative meetings on October 23, 2020 and April 16, 2021 using a virtual platform. In these meetings, the administrative and educational staff received agency updates, professional development, and opportunities to network.

Topics on the agenda included updates from DHHS and DPI, Every Child Accountability Tracking System (ECATS) new forms for the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process, NC School Mental Health Policy, and the Transition/Reentry Process.

Professional Development Opportunities

The 70th Conference on Exceptional Children sponsored by the DPI EC Division was cancelled in November 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19.

In lieu of the Conference on Exceptional Children, a variety of virtual sessions were offered by the EC Division on December 9-10, 2020, January 20-21, 2021, and February 17-18, 2021. The administrative and educational staff from the PRTFs were afforded the opportunity to participate in the virtual events.

Website:

DPI EC Division’s website serves as a resource for all special education programs. While the division maintains information specifically for PRTFs on its website, access to a wide-range of subjects is also available to support the PRTFs’ special education programs for students with disabilities in the areas of:

- Conferences, Professional Development (PD) and Webinars to promote professional learning and growth;
- Disability Resources to obtain information about a variety of eligibility categories and services;
- Instructional Resources to access a variety of disability specific instructional services;
- Parent Resources to provide support to families;
- Policies to ensure federal and state compliance to improve services for students with disabilities;

- Recruitment and Retention to support recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers with EC licensure;
- Directory of regionally and statewide assigned EC Division Consultants; and
- A calendar of professional development events and activities sponsored by the EC Division.

Specific information for the PRTFs can be found at –

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/exceptional-children/federal-regulations-state-policies#non-public-schoolsprtf>

Links to general information can be located on the EC Division’s homepage at -

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/exceptional-children-division>

PRTF Handbook

The PRTF Handbook was collaboratively developed by DPI and DHHS, and it continues to serve as a resource for the facility staff. The handbook provides guidance to the PRTF administration and educational staff focusing on the legislative, special education, and contract requirements. An electronic version of the handbook is available on the EC Division’s website at – <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/10986/download?attachment> . Printed copies of the guidance document are available through the EC Division. This handbook also serves as a resource to staff in local education agencies (LEAs).

EC Program Approval Visits

The EC Program Approval (ECPA) process is the monitoring activity used to ensure that students with disabilities are provided a free and appropriate public education and to improve their academic and functional skills while they are receiving treatment in a PRTF setting. This activity occurs upon initial licensure as a PRTF and every three years to renew the facility’s status as approved to provide special education services.

During the 2020-2021 school year, EC program approval monitoring activities were conducted virtually for six (6) parent organizations. Renewal monitoring activities were conducted for five (5) of the existing programs and one (1) monitoring activity was completed for a new program that will have a contract for the SFY22. These visits were conducted jointly by DPI and DHHS staff.

In addition to the monitoring visits, DPI and DHHS consultants conducted virtual check-ins and coaching activities with the eight (8) facilities that were not scheduled for monitoring visits. These activities occurred throughout the school year.

While the impact of COVID-19 existed throughout 2020-2021 school year, the facilities continued to focus on maintaining client and employee safety and well-being.

Technical Assistance and Support

DPI, EC Division Consultants, and the DHHS Project Manager provided customized and individualized support to educational staff in PRTFs through a variety of exchanges (phone calls, virtual meetings, and emails) in the areas of record requests, process and policy questions, transitions and discharges, budgets, and contracts, etc.

Monitoring

The DHHS Project Manager performs all monitoring activities required by DHHS for contract management and administration.

The DPI EC Division Consultant conducts monitoring activities as outlined in the EC Program Approval process.

PRTF Self-Assessment

Each PRTF is required to submit the ECPA Self-Assessment annually to the DPI EC Division Consultant. This provides updates about the facility's academic and special education programs and documents services for the current school year. The self-assessments are reviewed by the DPI Consultant and DHHS Project Manager and are used to inform the EC Program Approval process.

Information Sharing

PRTFs have been informed of the notification requirements to the DPI EC Division. A procedure is in place to report admissions and discharges and to request records from previous schools. A form letter has been developed and revised, as appropriate, to request records upon admission to PRTFs. DPI EC Division consultants maintain a contact list of designated staff in the local education agencies (LEAs) who will assist with record requests and discharge planning when students are admitted to PRTFs. PRTF staff can also contact the EC Division Consultants and the DHHS Project Manager if assistance is needed with obtaining records or discharge planning.

Agency Collaboration

The EC Division Monitoring Consultant and the DHHS Project Manager collaborated with the Division of Non-Public Education (DPNE) Education Consultant throughout the school year. All requirements for non-public schools are monitored by DPNE.

Reporting Requirements

A database was developed and implemented for the PRTFs with education service contracts. Data is reported to DMH/DD/SAS and DPI EC Division on a quarterly basis. COVID-19 impacted several of the data elements this past school year. Specifically, there were fewer transitions in and out of PRTFs due to limited step-down options and slower placement opportunities due to testing requirements. In addition, fewer family visits were available to prepare for transitions as a result of COVID-19 related concerns. Consequently, length of stays were longer and fewer children were served than anticipated. Finally, expansion efforts were impacted due to licensure requirements and staff availability.

The contract PRTF agencies submitted the following data based on services provided from July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021.

- **Number of Children served** – 1086
- **Average Daily Census** - 359
- **Average Age** – 13.5
- **Females** – 657
- **Males** – 424
- **Transgender** – 3
- **Does not identify with a gender** - 2
- **Average length of stay** – 237 days
- **Number of Children with IEPs** (identified as Exceptional Children) – 275
- **Categories of Disability** - number of children in each category for children identified as Exceptional Children:
 - Autism – 7
 - Emotional Disability – 123
 - Developmental Delay – 5
 - Intellectual Disability – 13
 - Other Health Impaired – 97
 - Learning Disabilities – 29
 - Speech/language impairment - 1

Types of Educational Services Provided

The types and hours of academic services were reported by the PRTF for each child. The children received an average of eight hundred eleven (811) hours of general education services. Children with IEPs received an average of one hundred sixty (160) hours of special education and related services. The DPI EC Division Monitoring Consultant reviewed and verified special education services at each facility during the EC Program Approval monitoring process.

Costs of Services

Ensuring that teacher ratios and EC requirements are met continues to be the priority for funding allocations. Funding allocations are based on the average daily census reported by each parent organization. In SFY21, DHHS requested reimbursement of \$2,987, 895.34 from DPI for education services provided by PRTFs.

Outcomes

In a survey of youth discharged from psychiatric placements, they reported having considerable difficulty with school reintegration. Youth identified challenges in managing the following - social situations, academic pressures, and emotions (*Youths' Experiences of School Re-Integration Following Psychiatric Hospitalization*, published online January 1, 2018). The research also suggests that understanding and addressing school-related difficulties may improve youths' school experiences, academic achievement, and reduce recidivism (*School reintegration and perceived needs: The perspectives of child and adolescent patients during psychiatric hospitalization*, Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal, 2017). For successful outcomes, it is critical that discharges, transitions, and reintegration in the school setting are purposefully planned for youths receiving services in PRTFs.

The State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction established policies and procedures regarding school-based mental health supports. During the 2020-2021 school year, LEAs were required to develop, adopt, and implement school mental health improvement plans effective July 1, 2021. As one of the supports, the plans address transitions within and between, school and community-based mental health and substance use services. This area includes "formalizing protocols for transitioning students when they reenter from acute and residential mental health treatment services".

Through the PRTF Building Bridges Initiative, DMH/DD/SAS established standards for the educational transition process of children as they enter and leave PRTFs. The standards include timelines and processes related to the record requests, communication with sending/receiving LEAs, and other elements critical to the educational success of children during and after PRTF placement. These standards were presented to PRTF providers and DPI representatives in the spring of 2021.

DPI and DMH/DD/SAS have been collaborating to improve discharge/transition planning processes and procedures for PRTFs since 2019. As a priority for improvement, ongoing technical assistance and implementation support will be provided throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

Recommendations for 2021-2022

1. Increase the communication and collaboration between education and treatment staff in the PRTFs.
2. Improve the collaboration, coordination, and communication between PRTFs and Public School Units (PSUs) for treatment, discharge planning, transitions, and reentry.
3. Continue to review and revise existing processes for quality assurance to ensure positive educational outcomes for the children and youth.

Attachment
Parent Organizations with Contracts for Educational Services In
Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities

Alexander Youth Network

Barium Springs Home for Children

Brynn Marr Hospital, Inc.

Canyon Hills Treatment Facility

Cornerstone Treatment Facility, Inc.

Cornerstone Treatment Facility Program, Inc.

Eliada Homes, Inc.*

Nova, Inc.

Premier HealthCare Services, Inc.

Premier Service of the Carolina, LLC

Strategic Behavioral Health Center - SBH Raleigh, LLC

Strategic Behavioral Health Center - SBH Wilmington, LLC

Thompson Child and Family Focus

Veritas Collaborative, LLC

*Contract terminated during SFY21