



NORTH CAROLINA
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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**Submitted by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
and/or State Board of Education, in conjunction with North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services Division of Mental
Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services**

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

NCGS § 122C-450.4 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 will 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) Office of Exceptional Children (OEC) (formerly known as the Exceptional Children Division) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Mental Health 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), Office of Exceptional Children (OEC)

1. Sherry Thomas, Senior Director (retired)
2. Dr. Carol Ann Hudgens, Section Chief, Policy, Monitoring, and Audit (Senior Director effective April 2023)
3. Leigh Mobley, Section Chief, Policy, Monitoring, and Audit (effective June 2023)
4. Glendora Hagins, Policy Monitoring Consultant, Policy, Monitoring, and Audit

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Mental Health (DMH)

1. Petra Mozzetti, Section Chief, Community Mental Health Section
2. Keandra Cofield, Program Consultant, Community Mental Health (until December 2022)
3. Mary Ellen Anderson, Project Manager, Community Mental Health (effective January 2023)

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

1. Robin Sulfridge, Chief, Mental Health Licensure and Certification Section
2. Azzie Conley, Chief, Acute and Home Care Licensure and Certification Section

ELIGIBILITY, ALLOCATIONS AND CONTRACTS

In SFY 2023, twelve (12) contracts were initially executed to provide funding for educational services. The parent organizations managed twenty-seven (27) individually licensed 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 as an Exceptional Children Program by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Exceptional Children.

Allocations and budgets were approved by the OEC and DMH leadership teams as agreed upon in the Memorandum of Agreement between DPI and DHHS. Funding was allocated to the facilities to ensure teacher ratios were met, including the requirement of a licensed EC teacher to meet the needs of students admitted with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and to ensure that quality educational services were being provided while the children and adolescents were receiving treatment at the facilities.

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

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, MONITORING, AND SUPPORT

ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS

The DPI and DHHS consultants disseminated quarterly newsletters to the PRTF staff with agency updates, reminders, and professional learning opportunities.

PRTF COLLABORATIVE MEETINGS

DPI Office of Exceptional Children (OEC) and DHHS DMH sponsored PRTF Collaborative meetings virtually on October 27, 2022, and April 12, 2023. Administrative and educational staff received agency updates, professional development, and opportunities to network.

Both meetings included updates from DHHS and DPI. Dr. Carol Ann Hudgens introduced the process for providing the Notice of Parent Procedural Rights and ensuring parent notification during the spring meeting.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Conference on Exceptional Children sponsored by the DPI OEC was held in person at the Koury Center in Greensboro on November 2 – November 3, 2022. Information about the conference was provided an opportunity to attend was afforded to the Education Staff at each facility.

NC DPI ONLINE RESOURCES

OEC's webpage 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 OEC Consultants; and
- A calendar of professional development events and activities sponsored by the OEC.

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 OEC's webpage 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 OEC's webpage at – <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/10986/download?attachment> . Printed copies of the guidance document are available through the OEC. This handbook also serves as a resource for staff in the public school units (PSUs).

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 2022-2023 school year, EC program approval monitoring activities were conducted for facilities operated by three (3) parent organizations. All renewal monitoring activities were conducted by a monitoring team of consultants from DPI OEC.

In addition to the monitoring visits, check-ins were conducted virtually for three (3) parent agencies and onsite check-ins were conducted for six (6) parent agencies. These check-in activities are scheduled for facilities between the three year monitoring cycle.

The facilities appeared to work through the challenges of COVID-19 during the 2022-2023 school year.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

DPI, OEC Consultants, and the DHHS DMH Program Consultant 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/DMH Program Consultant performs all monitoring activities required for contract management and administration which includes monthly monitoring of contracts related to funding and operations.
- The DPI OEC Monitoring 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 and DHHS consultants. This provides updates about the facility's academic and special education programs and documents services for the upcoming school year. The self-assessments are reviewed by the DPI Monitoring Consultant and DHHS Program Consultant and are used to inform the EC Program Approval process.

INFORMATION SHARING

PRTFs have been informed of the notification requirements to the DPI OEC. 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 a child's admission to PRTFs. DPI OEC Behavior Support Consultants maintain a contact list of designated staff in the public school units (PSUs) who will assist with record requests and discharge planning when students are admitted to PRTFs. Educational staff can also contact the OEC Consultant and the DHHS DMH Program Consultant if further assistance is needed with obtaining records or planning.

AGENCY COLLABORATION

The DPI OEC Monitoring Consultant and the DHHS DMH Program Consultant maintained a partnership 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 DHHS DMH and DPI OEC on a quarterly basis. A few data elements continued to be impacted by COVID-19.

The contract PRTF agencies submitted the following data based on services provided from July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

- **Number of Children served** – 891
- **Average Daily Census** – 301
- **Average Age** – 13
- **Gender**
 - **Females** – 494
 - **Males** – 392
 - **Transgender** – 4
 - **Did not identify** - 1
- **Average length of stay** – 279 days
- **Number of Children with IEPs** (identified as Exceptional Children) - 236
- **Categories of Disability** - number of children in each category for children identified as Exceptional Children:
 - Autism – 10
 - Emotional Disability - 105
 - Developmental Delay - 3
 - Intellectual Disability - 14
 - Other Health Impaired - 69
 - Learning Disabilities - 33
 - Speech/language impairment – 2

TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES PROVIDED

The types and hours of academic services provided were determined for youth upon discharge from the PRTFs. These children received an average of six hundred seventy-nine (679) hours of general education services. Children with IEPs received an average of one hundred seventy-six (176) hours of special education and related services.

COST 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. The total reimbursement expenditures for SFY23 were \$3,100,900.95 for education services provided by PRTFs.

OUTCOMES

Children and adolescents experience a variety of challenges and barriers when they return to their homes and communities from mental health placements, such as residential treatment facilities, psychiatric hospitalizations, group home settings, etc. After treatment for a mental health crisis, these challenges and barriers include:

- fear of being disconnected from classmates,
- concerns about their academic performance, and
- stress about rebuilding routines

For patients who are school aged, educational services are vital to supporting their path to wellness. When transitioning out of the mental health treatment facility, it is an adjustment to return to a more traditional school environment. The facility and school must develop processes that will ease the student's transition back to school which may consist of:

- A discharge plan
- Communication with the student's school when receiving treatment
- Documentation of academic progress during treatment
- Ongoing one-on-one tutoring support

(Supporting Students Returning to the Classroom after Mental Health Treatment, LearnWell, October 2, 2020)

Since schools are the primary discharge environments for school-aged children and adolescents, it remains essential that individualized transition and reintegration planning from PRTF placements are intentional and purposeful. Upon reentry, the facility and the school must have evidenced based procedures and practices for reintegrating the patient in the school setting. Formal reintegration plans are "recommended to manage school related stressors, identify supports and interventions, address the psychosocial climate of the school environment, establish a safety plan, and identify key individuals supporting the student." (*School Supports for Reintegration Following a Suicide-Related Crisis: A Mixed Methods Study Informing Hospital Recommendation for Schools During Discharge*, Marisa E. Marraccini, et. al., October 2, 2021) The research shows that children and adolescents will benefit from staff collaboration and care coordination between their mental health and school services.

The State Board of Education (SBE) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) established policies (NC SBE SHLT-003) to improve school-based mental health supports. During the 2021-2022 school year, PSUs were required to develop, adopt, and implement their local school mental health improvement plans. "Formalizing protocols for transitioning students when they reenter from acute and residential mental health treatment services" remains one of the critical components of the plan.

As a part of the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), DHHS DMH drafted an educational transition process for PRTFs. It included timelines and procedures for requesting academic records, communicating with PSUs, and other elements essential to the educational success of children during and after receiving treatment at a PRTF.

DPI OEC, DHHS DMH, and the PRTFs must continue to strengthen discharge, transition, and reentry procedures for improved and sustainable outcomes for children and adolescents returning to school.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYF24

1. Enhance the collaboration, coordination, and communication between PRTFs and PSUs for treatment, discharge planning, transitions, and reentry (ongoing).
2. Continue to review and revise existing processes for quality assurance to ensure positive and sustainable outcomes for the children and adolescents (ongoing).

PARENT ORGANIZATIONS WITH CONTRACTS FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN PSYCHIATRIC RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITIES (PRTFS)

Alexander Youth Network

Anderson Health Services

Brynn Marr Hospital, Inc.

Canyon Hills Treatment Facility

Carolina Dunes Behavioral Health
(aka Strategic Behavioral Health – Wilmington)

Cornerstone Treatment Facility, Inc.

Cornerstone Treatment Facility Program, Inc. (CTFP, Inc.)

Nova PRTF, Inc.

Premier HealthCare Services, Inc.

Premier Service of the Carolina

Thompson Child and Family Focus

Veritas Collaborative, LLC