



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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# Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

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

*S.L. 2014-100, sec. 8.39(e)*

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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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## NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN 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
2. Carol Ann Hudgens, Section Chief, Policy, Monitoring, and Audit
3. Glendora Hagins, Monitoring Consultant, Policy, Monitoring, and Audit

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

1. Saarah Waleed, Section Chief, Community Mental Health Section
2. Petra Mozzetti, Program Operations Lead, Community Mental Health
3. Mary Ellen Anderson, Project Manager, Community Mental Health
4. Kristin Jergen, Program Consultant, Community Mental Health
5. Sharon Bell, Program Consultant, Community Mental Health
6. Terri Grant, Program Consultant, Community Mental Health
7. Keandra Cofield, Program Consultant, Community Mental Health

#### **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 2022, fifteen (15) contracts were initially executed to provide funding for educational services. The parent organizations managed thirty-two (32) 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, Office 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**

### **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 on October 27, 2021 and April 12, 2022 using a virtual platform. Administrative and educational staff received agency updates, professional development, and opportunities to network.

Meeting topics included updates from DHHS and DPI and a presentation by Alliance Behavioral Health and Wake County School Based Program.

### **Professional Development Opportunities**

The 71<sup>st</sup> Conference on Exceptional Children sponsored by the DPI OEC was held in person at the Koury Center in Greensboro on November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Details about the conference were provided to the educational staff for each agency.

### **Website:**

DPI 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-schoolsprtfs>

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 2021-2022 school year, EC program approval monitoring activities were conducted for facilities in five (5) parent organizations. Renewal monitoring activities were conducted virtually for 4 facilities and onsite for 1 facility. These visits were conducted jointly by DPI OEC and DHHS DMH consultants.

In addition to the monitoring visits, DPI and DHHS consultants conducted virtual check-ins and coaching activities with the remaining facilities that were not scheduled for monitoring visits.

During the 2021-2022 school year, COVID-19 continued to present challenges in the facilities. However, the educational staff maintained focus on the provision of academic services.

### **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.
- 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, 2021 – June 30, 2022.

- **Number of Children served** – 970
- **Average Daily Census** – 364
- **Average Age** – 14
- **Gender**
  - **Females** – 602
  - **Males** – 364
  - **Transgender** – 4
- **Average length of stay** – 190 days
- **Number of Children with IEPs** (identified as Exceptional Children) - 283
- **Categories of Disability** - number of children in each category for children identified as Exceptional Children:
  - Autism – 9
  - Emotional Disability - 109
  - Developmental Delay - 6
  - Intellectual Disability - 13
  - Multiple Disabilities - 1
  - Other Health Impaired - 88
  - Learning Disabilities - 49
  - Speech/language impairment - 7
  - Visual Impairment - 1

### **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 eighty (680) hours of general education services. Children with IEPs received an average of one hundred ninety-five (195) 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 SFY22 were \$2,504,518.91 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 SYF23**

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<sup>1</sup>

Barium Springs Home for Children<sup>2</sup>

Brynn Marr Hospital, Inc.

Canyon Hills Treatment Facility

Strategic Behavioral Health – Wilmington  
(doing business as Carolina Dunes Behavioral Health)

Cornerstone Treatment Facility, Inc.

Cornerstone Treatment Facility Program, Inc.

Eliada Homes, Inc.<sup>3</sup>

Nova, Inc.

Premier HealthCare Services, Inc.

Premier Service of the Carolina

Strategic Behavioral Health Center - Raleigh<sup>4</sup>

Thompson Child and Family Focus

Veritas Collaborative, LLC

<sup>1</sup>Facility reopened; contract reactivated

<sup>2</sup>PRTF closed; contract terminated

<sup>3</sup>PRTF closed; contract terminated

<sup>4</sup>Facility closed; contract terminated