

**JJMU FACILITIES REPORT
DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES YOUTH CENTERS
JANUARY - MARCH, 2008**

Department of Juvenile Services Response

Population, p. 2

On a case-by-case basis, the Youth Centers may accept youth with significant delinquency histories only after the results of a comprehensive evaluation determine that the youth can be successful within the Positive Peer Culture program. Part of the evaluation process includes assessment of the mental health and medical needs of the youth by local Health Departments, which must concur that they can provide appropriate treatment to the youth during their stay at the Youth Centers. The Youth Centers admissions process supports the Department's goal to serve Maryland's Children in Maryland consistent with public safety. The substantial majority of youth who have been accepted through this case-by-case evaluation and admissions process have done very well at the Youth Centers.

Staffing – Direct Care Staff, pp. 2-3

The Youth Centers actually received approval to hire an additional 29 staff: 10 at Green Ridge, 7 at Savage Mountain, 8 at Meadow Mountain and 4 at Backbone Mountain. (JJMU note – corrected.)

As of 4/23/08, the 10 Youth Center staff have returned to their responsibilities at the Youth Centers and are no longer temporarily assigned to Victor Cullen. Two highly experienced Youth Centers trainers will continue to assist with training their colleagues at Victor Cullen as needed.

Savage Mountain has continued to take youth off grounds to cultural, educational and recreational activities at Frostburg State, regional parks, and the Pittsburg Zoo.

The JJMU assertion that uncertified staff independently supervise youth is inaccurate. The Youth Centers maintain adequate supervision levels and do not have uncertified staff members working alone with groups.

DJS agrees that the timeframe for certification of Youth Centers staff should be reduced and is actively taking steps to accomplish this.

Staffing - Interdisciplinary Team Meetings, pp. 2-3

PPC training and coaching is offered on an ongoing basis by the Youth Centers trainers. The JJMU Report does not provide sufficient information to identify the context or reasons why staff may "sometimes accept behavioral compliance" for example, and it is therefore not possible to conclude that PPC is not implemented appropriately.

Safety/Security – Admissions Criteria, p. 4

As identified earlier in this response, the Youth Centers may on a case-by-case basis accept youth with significant delinquency histories and/or that exceed admissions guidelines following a comprehensive evaluation that determines the youth can be successful within the Positive Peer Culture program. The evaluation process includes assessment of the mental health and medical needs of the youth by local Health Departments, which must concur that they can provide appropriate treatment to the youth during their stay at the Youth Centers for admission to be approved. The Youth Centers admissions process supports the Department's goal to serve Maryland's Children in Maryland consistent with public safety. The substantial majority of youth who have been accepted through this case-by-case admissions process have done very well at the Youth Centers.

Education – Educational Regulations, p. 7

DJS has responded to previous JJMU reports with clarification of the educational standards that are applicable to the Youth Centers. The schools in DJS facilities, whether operated by DJS or MSDE, are governed by applicable Maryland public school regulations and are most similar to community-based public alternative schools. With regard to special education services, DJS is required to adhere fully to the same standards that are applicable to public schools in the State.

In response to the current JJMU Report, the DJS Education Director states that "The Youth Center schools and all schools in other DJS facilities are not Non-Public Schools and do not follow Non-Public School regulations. The schools are governed by applicable COMAR requirements for public schools."

The Department's response to previous JJMU Reports that have raised this issue include the following:

DJS Response to JJMU Preliminary Timely Report for the Youth Centers dated October 16, 2006:

At a recent meeting with the Juvenile Justice monitors that was initiated by DJS, Dr. Meisel stated that while the Youth Centers are not considered to be a separate local education agency, the COMAR provisions that apply to special education and related services in local education agencies do apply to the Youth Center schools.¹

DJS Response to JJMU Reports for Youth Centers covering the period **January 1, 2007 to March 31, 2007:**

There need be no confusion with regard to the educational requirements or calendar for DJS schools, including the Youth Centers. There may be some misunderstanding about the Superintendent of Education's statement in a meeting a few months ago with the Monitors that DJS schools do not constitute a separate LEA. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) applies to eligible youth in juvenile facilities. Therefore, as we discussed at our recent meeting, with regard to regulations governing special education services, DJS schools including the Youth Centers are obligated to follow and in fact, do fully implement, the IDEA and the same State regulations that implement the IDEA and that govern the provision of special education services in all Maryland LEAs. The Superintendent of Education also

¹ Dr. Meisel was then DJS Superintendent and Managing Director of Educational Services.

explained that juvenile facility schools nationally, including DJS schools, are comparable to alternative public education programs in some respects such as class size and student:teacher ratio.

Programming – Recreation, p. 9

One-hour of large muscle activity is scheduled daily for all youth; recreation may occasionally not be provided as scheduled due to inclement weather, an emergency or other circumstances.

Programming - Application of Treatment Principles, p. 9

The Youth Centers are exploring training additional experienced staff in gang intervention.

Advocacy/Investigations/Monitoring-Visitation by Community Aftercare Case Managers, p. 12

Release dates for youth are determined jointly by the Youth Centers and community case managers following an assessment of readiness for return to the community. Youth are aware of and work toward scheduled release dates, and accept additional responsibility in the program as they prepare for discharge. Case managers request approval of the juvenile court for the Department's recommendations for release.

Conditions Unabated for More Than 30 Days

1. Staffing

- a. On second shift and on weekends a minimum staff ratio of 1 to 8 should be maintained.

DJS RESPONSE

The 1:8 ratio will be maintained throughout the week when the additional staff allocated to the Youth Centers are hired and certified.²

- b. Two additional trainers should be provided to help with the need for follow-up PPC training in the Youth Centers.

DJS RESPONSE

While PPC training and coaching is currently provided on an ongoing basis, the Department will consider additional strategies to increase training capacity for the Youth Centers.

- c. DJS Headquarters should notify the Youth Centers immediately when a staff member's background check has been completed and the staff is eligible to be provisionally certified.

² DJS youth/staff ratios are comparable to or better than those in neighboring states, including the District of Columbia, 1:10 staff/youth ratio; Delaware, 1:8 or 1:10 staff/youth ratio depending on the number of youth at a facility, Connecticut, 1:8 staff/youth ratio; New Jersey, 1:8 staff/youth ratio; Pennsylvania, 1:7 staff/youth ratio; Virginia, 1:10 staff/youth ratio; and West Virginia, 1:8 staff/youth ratio.

DJS RESPONSE

The Youth Centers are notified as soon as the Office of Human Resources is notified of certification status by MCTC.

2. Safety and Security

- a. Youth admitted into the Youth Centers should meet the written admissions criteria cited. Youth with significant juvenile crime histories and those not meeting the IQ, behavioral or mental health criteria should not be admitted.
- b. Uncertified and Provisionally certified staff should not be alone with youth.

DJS RESPONSE

On a case-by-case basis, the Youth Centers may accept youth with significant delinquency histories only after the results of a comprehensive evaluation determine that the youth can be successful within the Positive Peer Culture program. Part of the evaluation process includes assessment of the mental health and medical needs of the youth by local Health Departments, which must concur that they can provide appropriate treatment to the youth during their stay at the Youth Centers. The Youth Centers admissions process supports the Department's goal to serve Maryland's Children in Maryland consistent with public safety. The substantial majority of youth who have been accepted through this case-by-case evaluation and admissions process have done very well at the Youth Centers.

Uncertified staff does not independently supervise youth.

3. Education

- a. MSDE should clarify standards applying to the Youth Centers and promulgate regulations to guide the unique programs at the Centers.
- b. Extensive vocational training, certification, and job placement should be provided to facilitate entry into the work force.
- c. A physical education teacher should be hired at each Youth Center.

DJS RESPONSE

As DJS has responded to previous JJMU reports, the schools in DJS facilities, whether operated by DJS or MSDE, are governed by applicable Maryland public school regulations and are most similar to public community-based alternative schools. With regard to special education services, DJS is required to adhere fully to the same standards that are applicable to public schools in the State.

DJS agrees additional vocational preparation would be beneficial and is exploring options for the Youth Centers.

4. Programming

- a. Groups should be limited to nine youth (maximum of ten) as prescribed in

the PPC model.

- b. Protocol for earned home passes should be developed and implemented at all the Youth Centers as appropriate for the population in the Center.

DJS RESPONSE

A home pass protocol has been completed and implemented at all Youth Center sites.

- c. Interactive video and/or computer capability should be implemented for family and Community Case Manager meetings as at Victor Cullen.
- d. Each youth should have a comprehensive and intensive aftercare plan in place with commitments for immediate implementation before release from the Centers.

DJS RESPONSE

Aftercare planning is in place and will continue to be enhanced.

7. Advocacy/Investigation/Monitoring

- a. Community Case Managers should visit youth at the Youth Centers as required.
- b. DJS should develop Commitment Care Standards

DJS RESPONSE

DJS is addressing community case manager visits and commitment standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Staffing

- a. Overnight staffing should be increased so that there is one staff on duty for each group.
- b. ELT training should be scheduled more frequently.
- c. New staff should be assigned to experienced staff that model effective application of all aspects of PPC.
- d. A Gang Intervention Specialist should be added to the staff roster at each Center.

DJS RESPONSE

The DJS Professional Development and Training Unit schedules Entry Level Training in cooperation with Youth Centers Training Coordinators and administrators. The number of ELT sessions provided for the Youth Centers is determined by projecting the number of new staff expected to begin employment at the Youth Centers during the calendar year. Entry Level Training for Youth Centers staff is being restructured to incorporate

instruction in the implementation of the PPC and EQUIP models. The Youth Centers is examining options for training additional staff in gang intervention.

3. Education

- a. Teachers should be monitored to ensure that they are actively involved in teaching, and present an appropriate attitude toward all youth and staff.

DJS RESPONSE

The Youth Centers teachers have been and continue to be consistently observed and evaluated by educational administrators with specialized training and expertise in supervision of educational personnel. The implication by the JJMU that monitoring of teaching staff does not occur is unfounded.

4. Programming

- a. Youth must be given at least one hour of large muscle exercise each day.

DJS RESPONSE

All youth receive at least one hour of large muscle activity daily; occasionally, inclement weather or other circumstances interfere with the recreation schedule.

6. Advocacy/Investigation/Monitoring

- a. Aftercare Workers should refrain from telling youth when their date for release from the Youth Centers has been set.

DJS RESPONSE

Youth need to be aware of their release date and work toward the scheduled date throughout their stay at the Youth Centers. As release dates approach, youth assume increased responsibilities within the Youth Centers program as an additional step in preparing for discharge to the community. Best practice models for transition and aftercare planning consistently include high levels of youth involvement in planning and preparing for their release from juvenile facilities to the community.