

**OKLAHOMA COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
OFFICE OF JUVENILE SYSTEM OVERSIGHT**

Name and Location of Facility: Oklahoma School for the Deaf
Sulfur, Oklahoma

Date of Visit: May 2, 2007

Oversight Reviewer: Ellen Harwell, Oversight Specialist

Focus of Visit: Unannounced Routine Visit

Date: June 28, 2007

Introduction

The Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO) conducted a routine unannounced visit to the Oklahoma School for the Deaf (OSD) on May 2, 2007. The OSD, a special school for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, is operated by the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). The OSD is accredited by the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD). The focus of the visit was to assess compliance with established responsibilities.

Interviews Conducted

- Entry and exit interview with the Superintendent
- Eight resident interviews
- Four staff interviews

Documents Reviewed

- Most recent inspection reports by the Oklahoma State Department of Health and the Office of the Oklahoma State Fire Marshal
- Two student files
- Four staff files

Areas Toured

Blattner, Long, and Stewart Halls were toured by the OJSO

Findings

Juvenile Interviews

Eight students were interviewed. No concerns were noted from the student interviews. All residents reported enjoying the school. Two students who had previously attended public schools felt their classes at OSD were not challenging.

All students were able to identify a staff member they could go to if they had a problem. One student was pleased that OSD offers a wide variety of sports but expressed an interest in soccer which was not currently offered.

Staff Interviews

Four direct care staff members were interviewed. One staff member reported not being trained in CPR. Two staff members reported not receiving training in first aid. [Two staff members reported that flashing emergency lights have not been installed in the residents' bedrooms or in the dormitory hallways and felt this was a safety issue. Flashing emergency lights have been installed in the main areas of the dormitories.] All staff members interviewed reported that they enjoy working with the students and felt that OSD provides a positive environment for the students.

Student Files

Two student files were reviewed by the OJSO. No concerns were noted.

Staff Files

Four staff files were reviewed by the OJSO. Three of the staff members did not have three references prior to employment. Three staff members have not been trained in behavioral intervention techniques. One was hired in August of 2006 and two in January of 2007.

Areas Toured

Blattner, Long, and Stewart Halls were toured by the OJSO. The dorms were well maintained and in good working order. The dorms were clean and homelike for the students. The dorms were nicely decorated. No concerns were noted.

Areas of Concern

The Oklahoma School for the Deaf is not required to be licensed by the Department of Human Services Division of Child Care. Minimum standards for residential facilities that are licensed include requiring three references for a potential employee to be obtained prior to hiring. DHS also requires behavioral intervention training to be completed within thirty days of employment and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid training within ninety days. OSD is not currently required by any oversight, accreditation, or licensing agency to obtain three references prior to employment, complete behavioral intervention training with thirty days, or complete CPR or first aid within ninety days. The OJSO recommends that OSD revise school policy to require three references prior to employment and establish time frames for the completion of training in behavioral intervention techniques, CPR, and first aid. One staff file reviewed did contain three references. The school is attempting to obtain references; however, a lack of three references does not violate any policy the OJSO could locate through the school or the DRS. The criteria for direct care specialist #Z12 through the Office of Personnel Management stated that one of the typical functions of an employee under this job title would be to respond "to emergencies

affecting individuals, including administering CPR and using approved intervention techniques.” In order to fulfill the typical job functions employees must be trained in CPR and a behavioral management technique. It is further recommended that the Department of Rehabilitative Services review DHS licensing standards as a guide for personnel and training policy requirements that may be beneficial to DRS operated schools serving children.

EH/lb



Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services

OKLAHOMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

Director
Linda Parker
Commissioners
Ray Kirk
Steve Shelton
Ben C. White

July 24, 2007

Sara Vincent-Spain, Oversight Specialist
Office of Juvenile System Oversight
500 N. Broadway, Suite 300
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73102

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Dear Ms. Vincent-Spain,

Thank you for your positive comments concerning the school. The school strives to offer quality services to our students from all departments. We have surveyed students, parents and staff to establish a baseline and to identify areas for improvement. The information gathered along with your valuable suggestions has helped to improve all OSB services.

At the beginning of the school year, I will ensure that each new employee has three references (OSB Reference Check List) attached to our Personnel Transaction Requisition Form DRS-A-101 for my review prior to my signature to bring them on as an OSB employee. The references will then be placed in their OSB personnel file as DRS policy dictates.

I appreciate your time and consideration into our school and programs. Working together, we can provide the best services for the children of Oklahoma.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Kizzia". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Karen Kizzia
Superintendent

TO: Ellen Harwell, OJSO - Oversight Specialist
From: Larry Hawkins, Oklahoma School for the Deaf - Superintendent
Subject: Response to the OJSO Report
Date: July 3, 2007

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I met with Ellen Harwell on May 2, 2006, to arrange her interview sessions and to arrange her tour of the campus during one of her routine unannounced visits, but I was unable to have an exit interview with her. I received her report on July 3, 2007. This is a response to the areas of concern that OJSO expressed after the visit.

OSD is well aware of DHS licensing standards. One of those standards, concerning hiring practices, requires an institution to obtain three references before a potential employee is hired. OSD administration agrees that three references is a reasonable number. In the findings Ms. Harwell stated, "Four staff files were reviewed by the OJSO. Three of the staff members did not have three references prior to employment. One was hired in August of 2006 and two in January of 2007." In checking our files, however, I found that the staff member hired in August 2006 did have three references in her personnel file. The three references were in the form of emails. I requested that HR staple email references to the standard forms to make them easier to identify. For the two people hired in January 2007, both people had previously worked at OSD. It had only been one year since one of the persons had worked at OSD. Three references from his previous application were in his file. The other employee had been a supervisor in the dormitory and, after her decision to come back after retirement, had listed three references. OSD had received two of those references back, and they were in her file. In addition, OSD had first-hand-knowledge of her work and character.

Another concern (findings from interviews with staff) was that not all DCS staff members were trained in CPR and first aid. I have addressed this issue with OJSO in previous reports. Our CPR and first aid training has traditionally been conducted the first week of school. Most teachers and DCS are hired prior to the beginning of school. For the few DCS staff members who are hired after school begins, those staff members may not be trained for a while until training can be arranged with the coaching staff who teach the classes. Children are seldom left with only one DCS in an area; therefore, trained staff members in CPR and first aid are readily available. Because this had previously been a concern of OJSO, OSD had already taken the initiative to send all of the nursing staff to become CPR trainers. OSD will still train most of the DCS staff before the beginning of school. All new DCS, hired after school has begun, will be trained by the nursing staff during the first few days on the job.

In summary, OSD requests three references. If staff members have previously worked at OSD, OSD is probably the most important reference they could have. I feel that all three examples that were cited met the requirement of three references. All new DCS will be trained in CPR and first aid within the ninety day period set by DHS. OSD's goal will have the DCS trained in CPR and first aid within the first two weeks of being hired.

OSD wants to provide the safest, best environment that we possibly can. We realize that OSD is not only a school, but a home away from home.