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DHS Continues Special Education Improvements at Eldora More changes underway following DE report

(Des Moines, Iowa) - The Iowa Department of Human Services continues to improve special education services at its facilities, and has filed a detailed plan with the Department of Education regarding the Boys' State Training School at Eldora.

About half of the adjudicated delinquent youth placed at Eldora receive special education services. A recent review by the Department of Education applied stringent criteria across areas of special education at the facility, and identified areas where improvement is needed.

"We appreciate the effort our partners in education have made to assist us in further improving the special education services for these delinquent youth, many with significant classroom behavioral barriers that we are working together to better address," DHS Director Charles M. Palmer said Monday. "DHS welcomes both the direction and resources identified by the Department of Education."

The review by the state's top education officials found that Eldora places an emphasis on school attendance, high school graduation, and expectations for post-secondary education. Reviewers noted an open, inviting and supportive community atmosphere which is safe and conducive to a healthy learning environment. They also found that staff are committed and work together for the benefit of the young men they serve.

The review detailed areas of special education where improvement was needed, and DHS filed its corrective action plan on Friday. Many of the actions proposed by DHS are already being implemented. Others will include additional resources from the Area Education Agency 267 and the Department of Education.

Some of the corrective actions include:

- Continuing to work closely with AEA 267 on training to improve Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) for special education students who need such plans.
- Adding staff to the program, including an AEA 267 social worker, psychologist and Individual Education Plan (IEP) training specialist.
- Reviewing IEPs, FBAs and BIPs for new special education students within 10 days of arrival at STS.
- Working with a national expert to improve secondary transition planning and services.
- Hiring an expert to review plans and assign intensive secondary transition services for special education students scheduled to leave or graduate in the next 3 months.

"These intensive transition services will address the living, learning and working goals identified by our expert, and enhance activities already underway in Eldora's classrooms," Palmer said.

Following a special education review of the Iowa Juvenile Home (IJH) in Toledo last fall, Eldora's special education program immediately identified areas of improvement and began implementing changes to its special education services. While compensatory education was recommended for some former IJH students, it is not part of the Department of Education's recommendations for the Boys' State Training School at Eldora.

"Along with supervision and rehabilitation, education is a critical component of the services provided to the seriously delinquent youth served by the state training school, and we are committed to meeting our students' special education needs," Palmer said. "Our plan shows that we are working with the AEA 267, state education officials and disability advocates to make special education services at Eldora align with the many high standards achieved by this nationally-accredited program."

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Want to know more about the State Training School? There is a full academic curriculum including middle school, high school and special education. During an average 8 month-stay:

- Math levels improved more than 80 percent in FY13, and more than 60 percent of youth increased at least one grade level. Reading levels improved more than 60 percent in FY13, and nearly 50 percent of youth increased at least one grade level in reading.
- In FY12, 34 students received high school diplomas, and 21 received GED; in FY13, 38 received high diplomas and 25 GED. In FY13, 43 students applied to college.
- Vocational programs include computer applications, air-cooled engines, grounds keeping, bakery, automotive technology, building trades, residential construction, concrete engraving and welding. Some college classes are offered through Ellsworth Community College.
- Clinical and treatment programs, which help support the learning environment for these youth, include Character Counts!, cognitive life skills, chaplaincy, honor corps, motivational interviewing, residential substance abuse, suicide prevention, violence intervention, adolescent sexual abuse program and gang resistance and intervention.
- A 2012 report shows that Eldora had 100 percent compliance on the American Correctional Association mandatory standards for a juvenile facility, and 98.7 percent compliance on the non-mandatory standards.