



**State of New Hampshire
Department of
Health and Human Services**

Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC)

Workgroup Report

September 29th, 2021

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Executive Summary

Overview

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services has undertaken the process of designing the future of Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC); the following report outlines the emerging principles and recommendations that will inform the establishment of a new, 18-bed, secure residential facility, incorporating an integrated treatment program for the detained and committed youth, which the State will serve there.

The Department has incorporated feedback from a stakeholder group including various representatives from the treatment, education, advocacy community and Legislature, which has met on a series of topics coinciding with the structure laid-out in this report. The details herein describe the recommendations developed through this process, including (but not exclusive to) the facility design, staffing levels and qualifications, practices prescribed for treatment and behavioral health programming, education, recreation, and community engagement. These recommendations and principles reflect the Department's view of emerging best practices while simultaneously addressing the myriad of factors that currently and in the past have posed challenges to the successful treatment of youth.

Background and Challenges

Decline in Population

The Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC), serving committed and detained youth of New Hampshire ages 13 to 17, has faced significant population decline in the last few decades, a trend which accelerated within the last two years. This general population decline is consistent with national trends in juvenile justice, which are in large part a response to research and experience demonstrating that incarceration is inappropriate for most juveniles. It is now widely accepted that juvenile offenders, both committed and detained, should be placed in the *least* restrictive environment possible, while ensuring the safety of the individual and the outside community. Best practice has shown that many youth eligible for detention can be better supervised at home, which leads to better outcomes. Additionally, the emerging trend has been that youth are in the facility for shorter periods of time, sometimes only days or weeks.

Detained vs. Committed Youth

The number of detained and committed youth at SYSC has also shifted significantly. Since 2000, the population of committed youth, youth that have already been adjudicated as delinquent, has progressively declined: In 2001, SYSC's average daily census for committed youth was 98; in 2021 the average daily census has dropped to 9, a decline of 90%. However, the detained youth population has remained consistent, hovering at an average of about 7-8 per week.

Correctional vs. Residential Treatment Model

As has been historically the case with youth detention centers across the country, SYSC's program was originally modeled after an adult correctional facility.¹ Over the past few decades, many youth detention programs have had success transitioning to models which are more residential in nature and focus on the behavior and clinical treatment needs of the youth instead of their incarceration and restraint.²

While some changes have been made related to the behavioral, educational, clinical, and social-emotional treatment youth receive at the facility, the overall structure of the program, along with its mission, vision, and values will need to be addressed in the new program design. The SYSC Audit conducted by the Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant in March of 2021 summarized a number of challenges with the current detention model, including a lack of evidence-based treatment programming, a need for a new strategic plan and a deeper examination of their staffing model.³

Operational Budget

The annual operational budget required to maintain the program and facility remains at approximately \$13 million, excluding the capital expenditures required to address the various needs of the physical facility every few years. In FY 2020, the daily estimated cost per juvenile was \$1,712, compared to \$530 only three years earlier. In summary, the declining population served, coupled with high overhead costs contributes to a consistently high cost per youth that detracts from resources available for investment in continuing to improve juvenile justice programming.

Scope

House Bill 2, signed by Governor Sununu in June 2021, stipulates that the closure of the current Sununu Youth Services Center will occur upon the opening of a new facility (and overall model) for youth detention in the State of New Hampshire, which is scheduled to occur in March of 2023. The bill also stipulates that a special committee in the legislature will be responsible for developing a plan for the closure of SYSC and the opening of a new facility.

To support the development of the programming, model, and design of the new facility, in addition to the legislative planning and budgeting processes, the Department of Health and Human Services, with the support of consultants from Alvarez & Marsal Public Sector Services (A&M), partnered with a workgroup of stakeholders to develop consensus around SYSC's transformation. The goal of this workgroup was to develop recommendations for the

¹ Ryan, L. (2021). Toward transformation: The Youth justice movement in the United States on ending the Youth prison model. *The Palgrave International Handbook of Youth Imprisonment*, 563–592. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68759-5_26

² Mallett, C. A., & Boitel, C. (2015). From juvenile Offender institutions to residential TREATMENT CENTERS: Evidence of the Shifting paradigm to Improved youth and Community Outcomes. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 13(2), 155–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2015.1013367>

³ Kane, M., Shea, C., & Smith, S. (2021). State of New Hampshire Sununu Youth Services Center: Performance Audit March 2021 (pp. 28). Concord, New Hampshire: Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant.

establishment of a new facility and model for youth detention in New Hampshire that will be informative to the legislative planning process.

Approach

The workgroup met regularly via video conference in the months of July and August of FY 2021. In addition to prepping materials and sharing relevant content with members prior to each meeting, the A&M team conducted outreach and interviews with additional stakeholders to ensure workgroup members heard a variety of voices regarding the future state of the facility. The team also visited the facility several times throughout the engagement.

Membership

The workgroup members included members from New Hampshire’s Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), representatives from members of the Legislature, and key leaders from prominent youth advocacy groups in addition to education and clinical professionals. DHHS Commissioner Lori Shabinette, Deputy Commissioner, Lori Weaver and Director of Operations at SYSC, Rhonda Chase, were all regular attendees of these meetings. See Appendix I for a full list of workgroup members.

Meeting Cadence

Table 1 outlines the meeting schedule and the key topics discussed.

Table 1: Workgroup Meeting Schedule

#	Meeting Topic	Key Topics Included	Date
1.	Physical Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bed count, unit configuration, ambiance and culture, amenities, space 	July 2 nd
2.	Staff Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational structure, qualifications, leadership 	July 30 th
3.	Behavioral Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based models, trauma-informed practices, current changes 	August 6 th
4.	Daily Schedule and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to current schedule, staffing, growth measurement, school re-entry 	August 13 th
5.	Recreation and Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice activities, partner organizations, re-entry, visitations 	September 2 nd

Engaging Youth and Families

Objective

At the request of the DHHS leadership and members of the workgroup, the A&M team conducted interviews with a small number of current and past families. The goal of these

interviews was to share their input with the work group members so that their voices could be heard and help inform the workgroup’s dialog around developing recommendations.

Approach

The A&M team worked with the facility’s Director of Operations, who completed outreach to over 20 youth and families asking for their willingness to participate in an in-person or phone interview. The Director was successful in scheduling 10 interviewees, 3 of whom canceled prior to the interview due to last minute scheduling changes; 7 interviews were conducted in total. The interview script was standardized and ranged from questions about the facility to questions about their experience with clinical, recreational, educational and behavioral programming.

COVID-19

Impact on Facility

Like all juvenile facilities across the country, SYSC experienced significant changes due to COVID-19. The following table outlines key impacts of COVID on the facility.

Table 2: Summary of COVID-19 Impact on Facility

Area of Impact	Summary
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, the population of detained youth decreased slightly at the facility during the beginning of the pandemic. This is mostly likely due to youth being out of school and fewer incidents occurring. This decline in population is consistent with national trends.
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to its large size, SYSC was able to accommodate social distancing and necessary quarantining. Upon admission to the facility, each youth had to quarantine for 14 days. Each residential unit also traveled together and had no more than four youths. To date, the facility has had no documented cases of Covid transmission between staff or youth within the facility. Any case that was discovered either from a youth entering the facility or from a staff member working at the facility was contained as the individual was quarantined.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers at the facility utilized online education programs to support differentiated instruction. The closure of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) made contact and communication with home districts challenging.
Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffing shortages prior to and during the pandemic limited the programming available to youth and the amount of options youth had for recreation time and specialized treatment. Video conferencing was utilized for clinical services, community connections and bringing external provider services to youth for both social activities and services.
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visitations from outside family members and community organizations were extremely limited, which seemed to create an isolating affect for the youth population.

Area of Impact	Summary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While some visitations occurred through video conferencing, these visits required family members to have reliable internet access, something that was not always the case. • Some partner organizations (local colleges, non-profits, etc.) that would have typically visited the youth in person, paused their engagement.

Future Considerations

The new model should consider opportunities to mitigate the risk and impact on youth from future pandemic-like situations.

- Integrate video conferencing in safe and secure ways to connect youth to family and / or treatment programs that they would not otherwise have access to.
- Connect students to educators and/or counselors in their home district to begin re-entry, while they sill still residing in the facility.
- Ensure future staffing plans include ability to bring on additional personnel in the event of an emergency.

Summary of Recommended Considerations

The following table outlines key recommendations in the report. Please see each respective section for additional details.

Table 3: Summary of Recommended Considerations

Topic	Recommended Considerations
Facility Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for a bed count of 18. • Prioritize creating a home-like exterior and interior. • Include key amenities: outside interior courtyard, communal cafeteria, indoor gym and workout facility and multiple multi-purpose rooms. • Prioritize visibility and staff proximity in the smaller facility. • Design with experts who understand program model’s vision, mission, and values.
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing structure should reflect an integrated environment approach where the program’s development is everyone’s responsibility. • Create a new organizational structure based on teams and clear lines of communication. • Define new roles and responsibilities and prioritize hiring personnel with more advanced qualifications. • Establish a career ladder and educational advancement opportunities for junior staff. • Create a “team of teams” culture by scheduling youth specialists on designated teams that rotate through a set schedule. • Explore opportunities for contracting when appropriate, although designated state-employees are preferable in most circumstances. • Develop effective and purposeful communication pathways for new staff organizational model.

Topic	Recommended Considerations
Behavioral Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider adoption of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), an evidence-based and widely accepted overarching behavior management system. • Consider adoption of Trauma Affect Regulation (TARGET), an evidence-based milieu and clinical program. • Evaluate and improve initial intake assessment protocols through standardized evaluation and structured decision making [risk] instruments. • Ensure the continued support of a unique “re-entry” team for youth, which should include parole officers, social workers, clinical staff, and targeted facility staff.
Education Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamlessly integrate academics and behavioral programming. • Create meaningful 1-1 teacher-youth pairings • Reduce reliance on subject-matter teacher model and rely on less expensive contract tutors to provide advanced-educational needs as they may arise. • Include regular experiential learning into academic programming. • Incorporate and standardize academic benchmarking in new model. • Hire three committed, full-time educators and supplement with tutors as needed • Continue offering High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) training.
Recreational Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to integrate recreation into the academic school day. • Appropriately staff facility to ensure youth make meaningful choices regarding their recreation activity. • Incorporate more music (both listening and creating) into recreation time. • Expose youth to non-traditional recreation activities. • Schedule regular and consistent recreation along with opportunities for resident group decision-making for shared activities.
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family visits should continue to be encouraged, with no limitations on their frequency. • Establish and nurture partnership programs with local non-profits that have a vested interest in supporting detained and committed youth. • Establish community service as a positive experience for youth. • Alter the “Trust” behavior structure so that youth can interact with the community on a more regular basis. • Focus on re-entry programming and wrap-around care.

Report Structure

This report summarizes the workgroup’s considerations and recommendations. The document will be submitted to the Legislative Commission on September 29th 2021. For ease of review, the report is organized into key topic areas, which are outlined in Table 1. Each major topic is broken into three distinctive sections: (1) “Current State,” (2) “Key Considerations,” which the workgroup and Legislative Committee should review prior to making decisions about a new model, and, finally, (3) “Future State – Emerging Principals.” Recommended next steps are also included in sections when applicable.

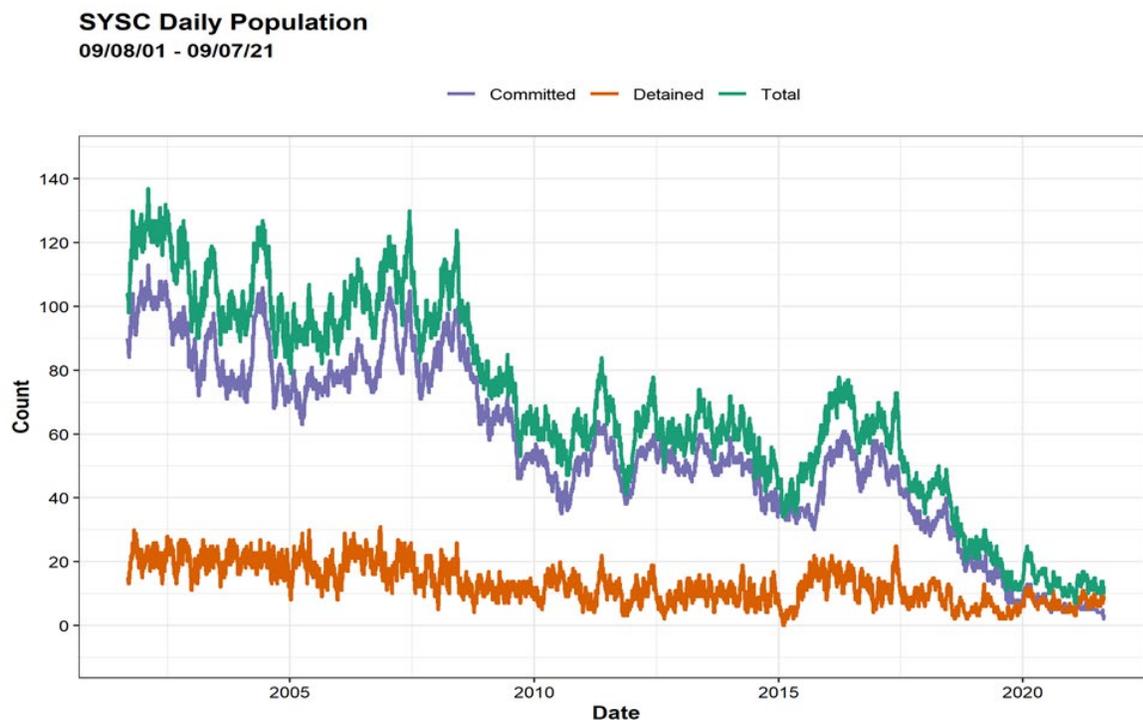
Facility Design

Current State

SYSC's facility is designed for a much larger population than it currently serves. At 108,000 square feet, the facility has the capacity to house 144 beds, all split between four residential clusters. SYSC's campus includes nine classrooms, a large library, a full-size cafeteria with a state-of-the-art kitchen, a special automobile technology classroom, and a building trades classroom. Today, some of the facility's spaces are used on a very minimal basis.

The population in the facility has also been on steady decline since 2000. While the population of detained youth has stayed relatively consistent, the population of committed youth has drastically decreased (see Figure 1 below) as a result of statewide legislative changes and ongoing juvenile justice reform efforts. This change in population size and make-up have led to different levels of facility usage. Many amenities and rooms are either underutilized or no longer used consistently.

Figure 1: SYSC Population Decline



Key Considerations

The workgroup discussed the following questions in considering the design of the new facility:

- How many units should the new facility contain?

- How many beds should be assigned to each unit?
- Should we consider having a reserve capacity of beds? If so, how many, and would these units include double-occupancy rooms?
- Will the future facility be designed for additional youth-serving purposes as the project moves forward?
- What design principles should be considered when creating a “residential home” (vs. a correctional facility) type of environment?
- How might new staffing structures and programming affect the facility design?
- What does the current facility lack that may need to be present in the future facility?

Future State – Emerging Principals

Bed-count and Unit Structure

While it is difficult to project future census data with precision, the facility will need to start with a bed count that is small enough to foster a residential environment, while also housing enough beds (and units) to accommodate the needs of each youth. For the future facility, the committee should consider a bed count of 18. This bed-count aligns with census data from recent years. In 2021, the highest daily census has been 17, with a daily average of 9. In 2020, the highest daily census was 24, with a daily average of 15 (see Figure 1: “SYSC Population Decline”).

For unit configuration, the new facility could include three five-bed units and one three bed unit. This unit configuration would accommodate separated female and male units and could also accommodate separating long-term youth and short-term stays. The committee should explore the possibility of utilizing adjustable barriers to accommodate additional unit configuration needs. **Moreover, establishing a new baseline with the general size of the facility in-line with directional trends will mitigate against the risk of building a facility that is larger than required in future years.**

Necessary Amenities

The committee should consider the new facility as a single-story “home,” which includes an indoor recreational facility (gymnasium), an indoor common area, and an outdoor recreation option. An interior courtyard design for the outdoor space would allow for natural light and visibility of youth at play or engaged in school or treatment. There should be several multi-purpose rooms, which can be used for behavioral, recreational or clinical programming. The units should feel more home-like to create a positive, therapeutic environment. The dining area of the facility should have home-like, durable décor and should be based on family-style meals and communal conversation where the staff guide productive conversation with youth. Cafeteria tables should be round and able to serve 6-8 individuals at a time.

Emphasize proximity and visibility in building design.

The offices of administrative, treatment, security, and educational leadership should be housed in close proximity to each other (in addition to the youth communal spaces) to enhance communication and the flexibility required to make continuing adjustments to care and programming. The facility staff offices must be within eye (and ear) sight of common youth spaces to maximize visibility and limit the number of staff required for supervision. Sturdy glass should be used whenever possible so staff have greater visibility as they walk through the facility. Additionally, the committee should consider a model where the administrative and

educational treatment leadership personnel are housed together for exchange of information and the ability to quickly drive consensus as problems develop.

Facilitate a residential culture and environment.

The facility should have characteristics of a home-like, residential environment, all of which reflect the values, intent, and purpose of this unique approach to residential needs of court-involved youth. A facility of this small size can have a “group home” design, which puts families and youth at ease and when they step into the building and which can better integrate into the neighborhood chosen for its construction.

Prioritize a home-like exterior and interior.

The facility design, finishes, and exterior appearance should be in keeping with the program, mission, vision, and values. Creating a home-like environment in the interior of the building is essential but needs to be consistent with durability and safety standards. The exterior should reflect the home-like appearance of a New England-style home and not an institutional appearance. The interiors should have surfaces, materials and furnishings that are “home-like” but durable, functional, and of a weight that resists manipulation.

Recommended Next Steps:

The State of New Hampshire should consider the following important steps while continuing to plan for the design of the new facility:

- Senior leadership should visit two to three youth-oriented behavioral health facilities to understand available options, design, and functionality to ultimately suite New Hampshire’s needs.
- Draft Request for Proposal for an architect that includes vision, mission, and values of the new program to estimate capital costs and assess potential contractors.
- Involve experts who have worked with this type of youth population in its building design.
- Approve and adjust staff organizational design structure which complements the building design.

Staffing

Current State

Historical Structure

In September 2020, SYSC had 108 funded staff positions, 81 of which were filled. See Appendix II for the full organizational structure at that time. In October of 2021, the funded positions will be reduced to 83 positions, some of which are unfilled.

Recent Shift

The reduction in funded positions is the result of both eliminating several middle management positions and right-sizing staff based on census data. In the current structure, Department leads report directly to SYSC Director of Operations, with the exception of the Education Department lead, which reports to the SYSC Administrator II. The current staffing model also reduced the number of teachers from 11 to 5, in recognition that staffing levels for the education program did not align with the current census.

Performance, Qualifications, and Turnover

The 2021 SYSC audit found that the current SYSC administration lacked a formal strategic plan and / or formal goals and objectives. The audit formulated that a lack of strategic planning led to an inability to measure success – both at the individual personnel level and larger programmatic level, and that performance management standards are often unclear or ineffective. Lastly, staff turnover at SYSC is problematic; the 2021 audit found that last year the facility had a turnover rate of 32.2%.⁴

Key Considerations

In creating a new staffing plan, it is critical to acknowledge the shift large shift in program and treatment model. New Hampshire will no longer operate a “juvenile correctional facility” it will be providing a “residential behavioral treatment” program in this new facility.

This significant shift may require recruiting new staff with backgrounds in social work and/or education and may also necessitate a reorganization of the staffing structure. The current structure is based on a model that was designed for a correctional facility, not a residential treatment home.

Additionally, the current staffing structure was developed to serve a large facility with a variety of units, highly spaced out. The new organizational staffing structure should be informed by the innovative vision for the facility model – both its physical design as well as its mission and vision.

When planning the staffing model, the workgroup considered the following key questions:

⁴Kane, M., Shea, C., & Smith, S. (2021). State of New Hampshire Sununu Youth Services Center: Performance Audit March 2021 (pp. 28). Concord, New Hampshire: Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant.

- What qualifications should staff possess in a residential model (as contrasted with a correctional model)?
- What reporting structure will best foster clear communication and delegation of tasks?
- Are there current staffing protocols that should change within the new residential model?
- What shifts in staff schedules may facilitate more communication and cooperation between staff?
- Proper direct supervision means staff is in ear-shot of direct residential conversation while they are also being viewed directly by staff or offsite by camera – how will the facility leadership ensure this oversight while also right-sizing for the current (and future) census?
- What other challenges need to be addressed within the current staffing model?

Future State – Emerging Principals

The workgroup discussed the recommendations for a future state staffing model that will support the new mission and vision for the residential home.

Staffing structure should reflect an integrated environment approach where the program's development is everyone's responsibility.

The responsibility of any youth treatment residential facility is to first recognize that it is an unnatural environment. Successfully exercising dominion over other people is a challenge. The culture of the new Sununu Center must recognize that staff and youth will be competing over scarce resources to deal with their individual needs. Residents and staff all have similar needs and must learn to participate and share in an environment that emphasizes essential equality but recognizes that everyone has unique roles and responsibilities toward the common goal.

Giving residents the knowledge skills and ability to function independently and cooperate with others successfully upon returning to the community is only half of that goal. Fulfilling the need for staff to exist in an environment where they are engaged, involved in the decision making, and valued for their contribution on a consistent basis is also essential. Programming, treatment, education, leadership, and support staff are all part of this integrated milieu. They engage with residents, family and outside decision makers in an ongoing effort to create an environment that meets the needs that all within the program share.

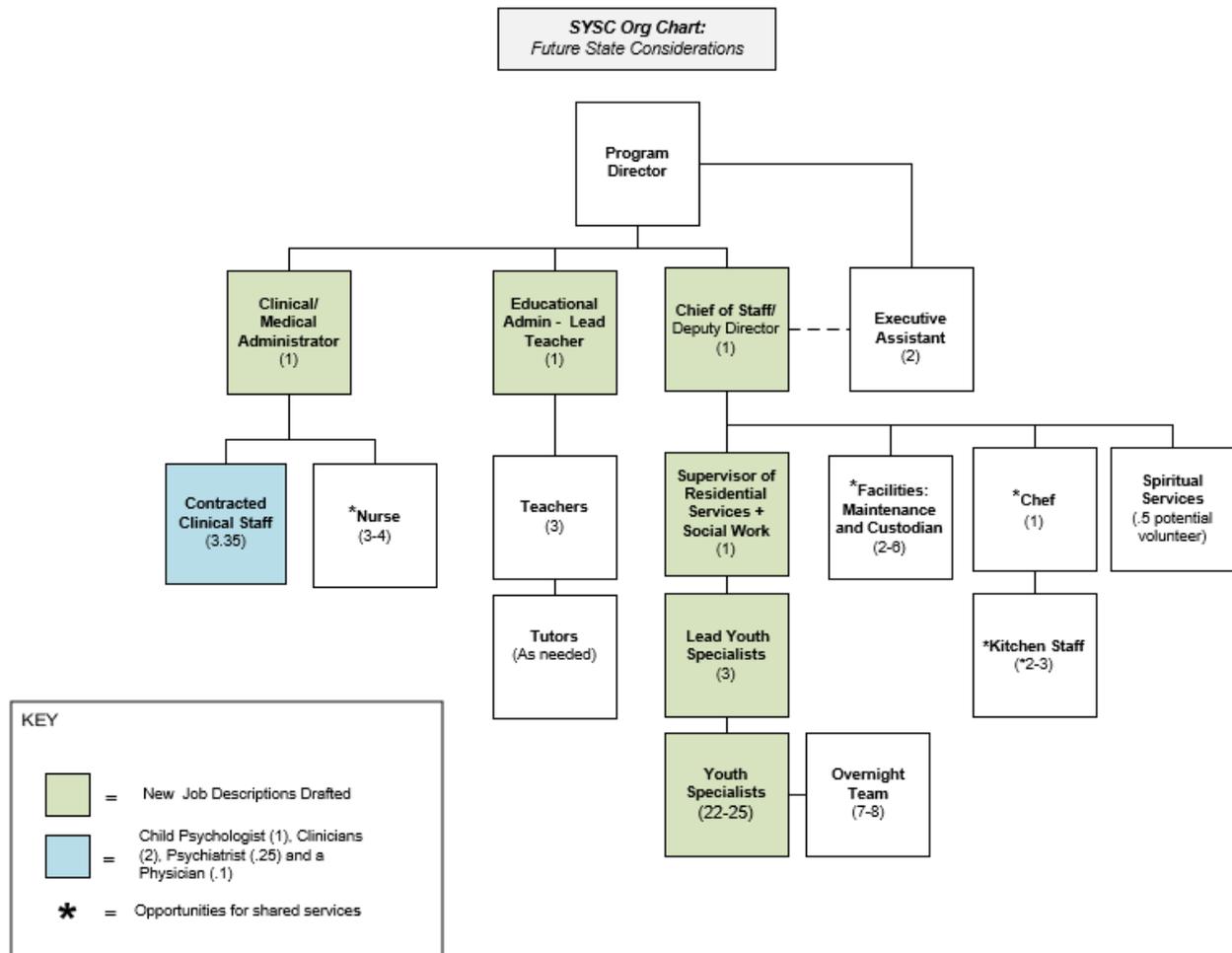
When the staff is selected, the program's development is everyone's responsibility. Youth Specialist teams must be in consistent and ongoing communication with the service providers and assist them in education, treatment and decision making in conjunction with the residents and their families. The program belongs to all and to the extent possible the staff should maintain communication with community service providers to assist with resident adjustment upon release. Every resident and staff member needs to feel that they are and will be part of the community they have created and are engaged in its continued evolution.

Create new organizational structure based on teams and clear lines of communication.

The new staffing model should redefine frontline staff, currently titled, "Youth Counselors," re-think supervisor functions, minimize inefficiencies between roles, and provide more leadership opportunities for junior staff.

All of these changes should increase staff's job satisfaction as lines of communication become clearer and paths to increased responsibility become more obvious; job satisfaction and organizational commitment have been demonstrated to increase staff retention in youth detention facilities..⁵ Additionally, the committee should consider including a "Deputy Director" or "Chief of Staff" role, which oversees all residential operations: youth specialists staff, team leaders, and residential service staff who work in dining and facilities. The education and clinician services would report directly to the Director of Operations. Figure 2 outlines a new organizational model for consideration.

Figure 2 - Future State Organizational Chart Draft



⁵ Matz, A. K., Wells, J. B., Minor, K. I., & Angel, E. (2012). Predictors of turnover intention among staff in juvenile correctional facilities. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 11(2), 115–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204012460873>

Hire personnel with advanced qualifications.

In this new residential model, the facility should hire (and attract) Youth Specialists who have a college degree or are on a pathway to achieving one to both improve staff retention and improve the quality of care for youth.

All staff involved with youth should have a background and some training in fields such as education, social work, clinical psychology, and / or youth services. In the past, SYSC (like many other youth correctional facilities) hired staff who had experience in the larger, adult correctional space; however, the new facility should refrain from continuing this practice and work to attract professionals with training in youth education, behavior, or social work. It should be noted that these changes may require adjusting the current pay scale to secure highly qualified professionals.

Define new roles and responsibilities.

The Bureau of Human Resources worked with members of the workgroup to develop new titles and job descriptions for several roles. These are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: New Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Key Responsibilities	Preferred Qualifications and Experience
Chief of Staff / Deputy Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversees planning, development and administration of residential operations and rehabilitative programming. Directly supervises non-clinical/medical/spiritual staff in residential services (including maintenance and kitchen staff); and monitors day-to-day performance and operations. Upholds the vision and mission of the agency through utilizing the Practice Model theories, beliefs and principles. Responsible for personnel actions for subordinate employees. Manages and oversees the Master schedule and leads regular evaluations of the staffing plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's and 6 years of related experience or Bachelor's and 7 years of experience
Clinical/Medical Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directs, manages and evaluates the facility clinical, medical and spiritual programs including evaluation, treatment planning, clinical care, family therapy and behavioral supports. Ensures provision of services which emphasize evidence-based, promising, and emerging best practices that safely support residents' emotional, behavioral and medical needs. Ensures re-entry plan includes necessary therapeutic, clinical and medical supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's and 4 years of related experience or Bachelor's and 6 years of experience
Supervisor of Residential Services and Social Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for initial assessment and re-entry plan. Responsible for communicating with alternative placement homes that may serve youth who may excel in a less restrictive environment. Communicates with Probation Officer and Social Worker regarding youth's background, experiences, handicapping conditions, and health/behavioral/therapeutic needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's and 6 years of related experience or Bachelor's and 6 years of experience
Lead Teacher / Education Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directs and manages educational programming. Ensures academic schedules are well coordinated and integrated with other treatments and practices. Responsible for the establishment of standards and growth metrics to measure youth's short-term and long-term progress. Communicates directly with local LEAs to ensure coordination upon entry and assists with re-entry plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's and 4 years of related experience or Bachelor's and 6 years of experience

Role	Key Responsibilities	Preferred Qualifications and Experience
Lead Youth Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads a smaller team of Youth Specialists and is responsible for coordinating with other leads to ensure consistent, positive programming between shifts Coordinates and engages youth in daily activities and treatment programming. Promotes positive youth development by teaching, modeling and reinforcing positive behaviors. Leads pre-shift briefings and conducts post-shift wrap-ups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor's and 4 years of related experience
Youth Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides safety, support, and treatment in a secure environment. Coordinates and engages youth in daily activities and treatment programming. Engages as part of a team to support trauma informed care and promotes an individualized, treatment-focused collaborative philosophy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor's preferred Minimum of Associates degree or 60 credits from a college and at least 6 months related experience

Establish a career ladder for junior roles and additional pathways to higher education.

A career ladder will incentivize continuity among staff and help junior team members grow into more senior roles. New Hampshire DHHS should consider establishing partnerships with state universities in order to (1) support the design of training programs for social workers and (2) grow their talent pipeline. Front-line workers such as Youth Specialists should be able to see a career path either within the facility or outside of it in another state organization and should be able to access state education intuitions to receive additional, necessary credits.

Create a “Team of Teams” culture.

Regardless of the final organizational structure adopted, the concept of a designated team that consistently work together on the same shift will be critical. In the proposed structure, each rotating group of Youth Specialists would work as a team (of 5-7 individuals) and would be on the same shift to help promote consistency, cooperation, and foster a sense of healthy competition with other teams.

The alternative, when staff are just “available resources” assigned to different youth groups and teams depending on the day, will (and has) led to lack communication and understanding between staff. The Director should work diligently to match personality and management types on teams. Everyone on the staff—from youth specialists to kitchen staff—should play a role in the supervision and treatment of the youth. This team atmosphere will mean that all levels of management (including youth programming and treatment) are aware of each youth’s plan for education, health, recreation, and ultimately, re-entry.

When there are problems that arise, having a team model will allow the director to quickly diagnose staffing challenges and make necessary adjustments. In this model, the Youth Specialist Team Leads, along with the Supervisor of Residential Services and Social Work, are responsible for ensuring consistency in youth expectation and experience, regardless of the staff on duty.

It is also recommended that the leadership team consider establishing at least three leadership meetings together a week: (1) Early Monday morning to establish weekly plan for the population as a whole and each individual youth; (2) Wednesday morning to make any adjustments and to

gauge how effective plans are; and (3) on Friday afternoon to establish weekend schedules and goals.

Explore opportunities for contracting.

Outsourcing personnel positions such as tutors and / or clinicians could minimize staffing costs and help secure more qualified professionals. While it is preferred that education and treatment staff work directly within the facility, contracting for these services may be the direction that New Hampshire ultimately takes. It should be noted that contracting has the potential to lead to unanticipated consequences, but if the contract is written carefully and the selection process is based on quality and cost, there is potential for success.

Develop effective and purposeful communication pathways.

The facility will need to outline channels, methods, and periods of time for clear communication both internal to the facility and external to stakeholders such as social workers, probation officers, school district officials, and families members. Below are some considerations the Director of the new facility should consider:

1. Should each teacher have direct contact with each youth's home school district and its personnel, or should this communication be reserved for the lead teacher?
2. Should educational plans be consistent with the youth's district school curriculum to enhance re-entry success?
3. Should treatment staff consult with prior treatment practitioners of the youth to provide consistency and fidelity to prior treatment efforts or should a new treatment plan be created based on prior and current information about the youth's treatment needs?
4. How should a youth's security needs be determined? Can an in-facility risk assessment be created to assist the staff in determining each youth's security needs?
5. How frequently should the Deputy Director conduct coordination and information sharing meetings with the Lead Youth Specialists who supervise the unit teams?
6. Should the Director be charged with all external policy decisions involving off-site entities important to the youth's stay at the facility and their ultimate re-entry?
7. Should the Director of Operations communicate with support staff about how they should and review and how they are performing in contributing to the therapeutic environment of each youth?

These questions should be thoroughly discussed as their answers will determine the efficacy of facility-wide communications related to individual residents and facility operations.

Behavioral Programming

Current State

To understand behavioral programming at SYSC, it is critical to evaluate both programs used in treatment and the training staff receive for day-to-day behavior and trauma management.

Core Treatment Programming

The 2021 Audit conducted by the Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant identified several problems with the current behavior programming at the facility. The report notes that “although the SYSC treatment programs used evidence-based practices, the programs themselves have not been proven effective. Furthermore, the evidence-based practices used were not periodically assessed for their fidelity to the model practice.”⁶

Currently, every youth has a watch assessment upon entry to the facility within 24 hours of admission, which includes a safety assessment and suicide/depression screen. If a youth is committed, they are administered several screens by a clinician (trauma screen, substance use screen, mental health assessment), and this information is presented, along with other departmental assessments (education, medical, permanency, spirituality) at intake within two weeks of commitment. As a group, SYSC’s clinician team discusses the proper unit and treatment programming for each youth.

Youth are then deemed appropriate for a specific group: Behavioral Health, Honest Mind, Substance use, or other Intermediate programs of care. Their focal treatment plan goals reflect the program they are in. Detained youth are placed on a unit with an open bed, and if they remain for longer than 30 days, SYSC create an abbreviated long term detained treatment plan which does not address offending behavior, but more stress management goals.

Below are four core group behavior programs that youth attend once per week. Recently, SYSC changed the groups so that the first three are run by clinicians and the last one, “Life Skills” is led by the Permanency Department, which supports in transitioning youth into their home environment and is also under the provision of the NH Division for Children, Youth and Families.
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1. **Honest Mind Program:** This program, focused on conduct disorder “contains elements of evidence-based practices such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy”⁷ it has never been evaluated from an efficacy standpoint with juvenile offenders.

⁶ Kane, M., Shea, C., & Smith, S. (2021). *State of New Hampshire Sununu Youth Services Center: Performance Audit March 2021* (pp. 28). Concord, New Hampshire: Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant.

⁷ Kane, M., Shea, C., & Smith, S. (2021). *State of New Hampshire Sununu Youth Services Center: Performance Audit March 2021* (pp. 27). Concord, New Hampshire: Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant.

2. **Substance Awareness Program:** The audit found this program to consist of “a compilation of worksheets and information that appeared to have come from different sources and was not bound together by any empirically-based program.”⁸
3. **Anger Management Program:** Because the program is designed for adults, it is unclear if it is effective with the youth detention population. The program was also designed to be administered by master level clinicians; however, at SYSC youth counselors were responsible for administering.
4. **Life Skills Program:** The Permanency Department, which supports re-entry, currently teaches the NH Teen Responsibility and Independent Living Skills (NH TRIALS) Program that has three main sections: 1) Personal and Social Growth; 2) Daily Living Skills, 3) Education and Vocational Training and a segment focused on Pregnancy and Parenting. Each section contains a combination of guidance, resources, and activities to support the learning and practicing of life skills.

Since March 2021, SYSC’s clinical team has begun in-depth research on several replacement programs that are evidence-based and compliment their trauma-informed behavior and treatment processes. Barriers to implementing new programs continue to be (1) cost of program materials and (2) cost and time to train staff and (3) staff ability to absorb complex and / or new models.

Evidence-Based Milieu and Clinical Programming

After the March 2021 Audit, the SYSC Child Psychologist reviewed and researched evidence-based, trauma-informed clinical and milieu programming to train both clinicians and direct care staff. One such program that was developed for use in juvenile detention is *Trauma Affect Regulation (TARGET)*.⁹ TARGET is a trauma-informed approach that has been successfully implemented into various juvenile detention centers across the country. Research has demonstrated reduced recidivism rates for detained youth receiving the intervention for even just two weeks.

Evidence-based Behavioral Management Programming

SYSC’s clinical team has also done significant work this summer to vet and prepare to implement a new behavior management approach called PBIS – Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. This program would complement TARGET and reinforce the residential (vs. correctional) environment the State of New Hampshire is moving toward.

PBIS is an evidence-based treatment program and behavioral management technique that promotes positive reinforcement and proactively preventing challenging behaviors. PBIS puts the emphasis on *what juveniles do right*, rather than focusing on only what they do wrong.

⁸ Kane, M., Shea, C., & Smith, S. (2021). *State of New Hampshire Sununu Youth Services Center: Performance Audit March 2021* (pp. 27). Concord, New Hampshire: Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant.

⁹ Advanced Trauma Solutions Professionals. (n.d.). *Advanced trauma Solutions Professionals: Target: Ats Pro: United States*. ATSPRO.org. Retrieved August 20, 2021, from <http://www.advancedtrauma.com/Services.html>.

The goal of PBIS in juvenile justice settings is to establish a multi-tiered system of increasingly intensive supports to effectively meet the needs of all youth in a facility. PBIS, is a large “shift in philosophy and practice as facilities move away from more restrictive, reactive, and punitive programming toward an emphasis on preventing challenging behaviors, increasing positive behaviors, and providing more intensive supports for youth with the greatest...needs.”¹⁰ This management program has been used in school settings and in juvenile group homes across the country with success. It is a shift to focusing on teaching positive behavior, staff role modeling, and reinforcing positively worded expectations.

Key Considerations

Non-Negotiables

The workgroup discussed the following non-negotiables for introducing additional and / or different behavior programming to the new residential treatment program model:

- 1) The facility should implement a trauma-informed treatment model that incorporate the individual therapeutic needs of each youth.
- 2) Programs should be fully integrated into the daily schedule of each youth.
- 3) Programs should be flexible in that they are appropriate for both detained and committed youth.
- 4) The model that is adopted for crisis management, de-escalation, and restraint (whether that is TARGET or something else) should be in line the facility’s purpose, mission, vision and values.
- 5) Ensure staff have the time to be effectively trained in new, evidence-based programming.

Funding

Many of these new programs have costly upfront expenses including materials and mandatory training. Additionally, the decreasing length of stay at the facility will mean that it is imperative these programs are included in their re-entry plans upon exit of the facility so each youth can experience these programs to their fullest extent.

Future State – Emerging Principals

The clinical staff at SYSC are proposing that the Legislative committee charged with budgeting and planning for the new facility should consider the following new programs as replacements for the core programs described above.

¹⁰ *Juvenile justice*. Center on PBIS. (n.d.). Retrieved August 20, 2021, from <https://www.pbis.org/topics/juvenile-justice>.

Table 5: Replacement Programing

Program Type	Description
Substance Awareness:	“Mindfulness-Based Substance Abuse Treatment for Adolescents” is a 12-session curriculum that addresses youth with substance abuse tendencies or history. If adopted, this would take the place of the current substance awareness program.
Life Skills Replacement:	The ARISE ¹¹ life skills program is evidence-based and designed to help youth deal with the events and challenges of everyday life. Life skills groups assist youth to acquire a sense of well-being, engage in learning and become motivated to make a positive change.
Anger Management Replacement:	The ARISE Anger Management Program is an evidence-based program that helps teens and young adults learn behavioral skills that help them recognize: the physical signs that indicate anger is rising, the emotional signs their anger level is going up, and the stressors that trigger anger.
Honest Minds Replacement:	The SYSC psychologist is still researching an alternative option for Honest Minds, although limited feedback from the youth interviews suggested it may be effective from their point of view. The only option found so far is Aggression Replacement Training (ART), which was suggested by the auditors.

Additional recommendations regarding the behavior programming are outlined below:

Adopt Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a behavior management training program.

The work done by the clinical team at SYSC in response to the audit suggests that this holistic resident management program would help the facility transition from engaging in historically reactive and punitive practices to adopting a more supportive, therapeutic, and positive environment. Staff have already begun training for the program, so adoption of this model may prove less difficult than initially expected.

Adopt Trauma Affect Regulation (TARGET), a milieu and clinical behavior training program.

Many youth come to SYSC with intense trauma history, and it is critical for the staff to be trained in how to support youths’ social, emotional, behavioral, and health needs. While the cost of TARGET is high, the committee should consider funding both TARGET and PBIS and all staff in the new facility should receive training to ensure consistency and efficacy.

Evaluate the facility’s initial intake assessment procedures.

In the new model, the intake and assessment of youth will be critical in determining their treatment plan and assessing the specific programming that will be most beneficial. While this is indirectly related to behavior programming, it is a critical step in diagnosing the problem. NH DHHS should assess whether additional steps should be taken to support youth’s therapeutic

¹¹ *Evidence based results.* ARISE Life Skills and Staff Training. (n.d.). Retrieved September 20, 2021, from <https://at-riskyouth.org/pages/evidence-based-results>.

program after youth undergo the evidence-based Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment.

Consider adopting an additional behavior program focused on re-entry.

The workgroup discussed the importance of establishing a behavior and re-entry team that works together to support each youth's re-entry process. This team may consist of the youth's probation officer, their assigned clinician, their lead teacher, their social worker, and any family members and/or designating staff who know youth well. This team should work to overcome resistance between social workers, probation officers, and facility staff so that they can work collaboratively and participate in teams to prevent the predictable behavior cycles of returning to the same behavioral cycles that lead to their initial commitments. This may require a structured, written report to the judiciary that will inform the resident's release decision-making.

Educational Programming

Current State

One of the most important decisions New Hampshire will make in designing a new residential facility, will be the nature of the educational programming. Creating an effective educational model may also be the most challenging aspect of the design as it will require creating a positive climate, fostering academic engagement, establishing highly effective classroom practices, and coordinating transition.¹² The current academic program has several problems.

Daily Schedule

Monday through Friday youth attend academic classes from 8:30 AM to 2:40 PM. Youth change classes following a school bell schedule. See Appendix III for sample weekday schedule. All youth attend lunch in the cafeteria daily. The teaching staff are subject oriented, each teacher is certified in their specific academic areas. Teachers provide individualized instruction to youth, in a class setting, geared towards each respective youth's grade levels. Youth are grouped into three cohorts consisting of approximately 4-5 students. These small cohorts rotate throughout the morning through three academic classrooms, followed by a lunch period, a study period, then two periods consisting of physical education, arts, and life skills. Since units are based on treatment programming and goals, instructors provide differentiated learning specifically tailored to meet each youth's academic grade levels. A teacher may have student's in seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth grade, all in the same period, all of whom have different academic and behavioral needs. With the youth census down, teachers, have one prep period a day and a lunch period with youth. This schedule also means that youth sometimes interact with more than five different instructors in a single day.

Staff

Prior to budget cuts, SYSC employed eleven full-time teachers and one principal. Following budget cuts, and effective in October 2021, there will only be five employed teachers and no full-time school administrator. Each of these teachers is directly employed by the facility and specializes in a subject area. Teachers typically work Monday through Friday, while some have worked overtime on unit floors to ensure proper staffing ratios.

Curriculum and Rigor

As stated above, because students in each class period are on different academic levels, teachers are rarely able to teach group lessons, and are often only providing practice work sheets and monitoring completion of tasks. This model makes creating rigorous, interesting, and / or relevant lessons, tailored to each individual student's needs, more challenging.

Additionally, because youth are from school districts across the state and are often at the facility for a short period of time, communicating with teachers from their home districts can be difficult. Most school districts have a designated contact person that SYSC staff reach out to, usually a

¹² Benner, Gregory et. al. *Strengthening Education in Short-term Juvenile Detention Centers: Quality Assurance Tool (QAT)* Office of Justice Programs' National Criminal Justice Reference Service. September 2017. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/251120.pdf>

Special Education Coordinator or Local Education Agency (LEA) representative. However, creating relevant material for detained youth, who are often at the facility for the shortest period of time, is the greatest challenge. Youth whose school districts have not made contact with SYSC or supplied academic work, are provided educational materials to promote learning, albeit this material may not align with the subject matter they were previously working on prior to coming to SYSC.

Growth Measurement

The short period of time that most detained youth are at the facility, coupled with a lack of benchmarking tools used, makes measuring progress extremely difficult. Currently, academic tracking only includes the use of report cards for longer stays. If youths' stay at SYSC is short, SYSC teachers compile the grades on what the youth achieved while attending school at SYSC and share with the local LEA. For youth that are coded with a disability, teachers are required to track measurable academic and behavior goals as part of their individualized education plan (IEPs). Upon return to their home district, SYSC staff provide data for those areas. Acknowledging that grades can be helpful indicators, establishing a more precise growth measurement tool will be an important step in the design of the new education model.

Key Considerations

The workgroup discussed the following considerations in regard to a new and more effective education program:

- Youth in the facility have significant social, emotional, and behavioral needs; teachers need to be able to meet each youth at their current educational level and have strong classroom management.
- With a low census, there is little economy of scale with teachers.
- The facility should not overwhelm residents with too many educational voices, as this may result in having less meaningful relationships between youth and teaching staff.
- An important aspect of incarcerated youth education is to establish or re-establish a feeling of competency and confidence in future learning opportunities.
- There will have to be different education plans for detained youth and committed youth, as their length of stay will vary greatly.
- The same youth are often released and then re-detained or re-committed with some regularity. The educational program should be designed to support youth that are in and out of the facility more frequently.
- Efforts should be made to maintain the curriculum that has been taught to the youth in their home school, as this will reduce struggle upon re-entry and increase the opportunity for academic success.

Future State – Emerging Principals

Designing an innovative educational model is critical to the success of the overall program as a whole. The workgroup recommends several important considerations for the new model, which are outlined below:

Academics and behavioral programming should be seamlessly integrated.

Unlike the current schedule, the new facility should integrate behavioral and clinical treatment intermixed between classes during the school day. All staff, including educators, should be trained in PBIS and Target. Many of the youth at the facility struggle academically, not because of any learning deficiencies, but simply because they wrestle to regulate their behavior and / or their emotions. If behavioral and clinical treatment programs are purposefully juxtaposed with academic classes, youth may be more easily able to recall (and, in turn, use) coping strategies during class.

It should be noted that this schedule adjustment should not come at the cost of maintaining predictable structure in each youth's schedule. Structure and predictability for juveniles make surprises, which often cause behavior problems, less frequent.

Create meaningful, one-on-one teacher and youth pairings.

The new model should ideally pair each youth with an individual teacher, who would be responsible for their education plan in addition to understanding their clinical and behavior needs. This one-on-one model would support the establishment of more meaningful and effective teacher-student relationships and allow academic instructors to more deeply understand each student's strengths and weaknesses. Because youth may be in and out of the facility on some regularity, having one assigned teacher that stays with each youth would give the youth some reassurance, familiarity, and consistency. Additionally, this pairing would allow teachers to act more as tutors, supporting youth with individualized academic plans and tailoring their work to the subjects they struggle with most.

In this model, each teacher may have 5-8 students for whom they are responsible at a given time. Eight students are consistent with a workload standard for a special education teacher.

Include regular experiential learning into academic programming.

Redesigning the education model creates a unique opportunity to incorporate more experiential learning, where students "learn by doing" on a regular basis. While it should be encouraged that teachers utilize experiential learning in their daily planning, there should also be a consistent cadence of whole-group experiential learning.

For many of youth, their stay at the facility may be an opportunity to open their eyes to experiences, potential hobbies and / or career paths that they would not otherwise be exposed to in their regular school environment. The facility leadership should purposefully schedule weekly group activities, which bring together youth to learn about something new through action – whether this is learning math through cooking class, learning politics through writing letters to current legislators, or understanding biology through interacting with wildlife outside. Incorporating these non-traditional academic experiences have the potential to inspire youth to engage in something upon re-entry that they may have otherwise not thought was a possibility.

Incorporate and standardize academic benchmarking.

Utilizing growth metrics through benchmarking tools has become an expectation in academic institutions, and this should be no different in the new facility. While it may be harder to measure progress in certain subjects (Ex: World History or Geography), there are a wide variety of online

tools to measure growth in the core subjects of reading and math. Tools like i-Ready¹³ and MAP¹⁴ are widely used assessment tools that take less than an hour for students to complete. These assessments should also be familiar to youth as they are widely used across the State.

Growth should be celebrated and tracked in the facility, motivating youth to engage in their academic programming and modeling for them how focus and hard-work can pay off. This can only occur, though, if clear protocols for entrance and exit assessments are established in the initial implementation phase of these growth tools.

Although it may be hard for youth to be measured if they are only in the facility for a few days, t youth's academic progress should be tracked if they are at the facility for a month or longer. The facility's lead educator should assess which benchmarking tool would best fit the needs of the youth and begin to implement these tools upon the opening of the new facility.

Growth and performance metrics from a youth's time at the facility should also be shared with each home district, so that district teachers can make informed decisions about previously detained or committed youths' academic course-load upon re-entry. Falling behind in school can often lead to recidivism, as youth can become frustrated that they are not understanding material or are not on the same level with their peers.

It should be noted that incorporating benchmarking tools does not mean that youth in the new facility will spend significantly more time "testing." Benchmarking should be incorporated upon intake and should take a short time to complete. Benchmarking tools, unlike state testing, will not incentivize teachers at the facility to "teach to a test" because there is no way to study for a benchmark assessment. Instead, it will encourage instructors to celebrate organic growth and push them to include rigor and grade-level curriculum into daily lessons.

Ensure clear standards and processes for communication with LEAs.

New Hampshire's DHHS should work with the Department of Education to establish clear protocols with checks to make sure guidelines for communication with school districts are being followed; as this has historically been difficult to ensure.¹⁵ It is recommended that each school district continue to have one point person responsible for coordinating with SYSC staff. This person would be responsible for quickly connecting each youth's teachers with the educators at SYSC to share information about the student's needs. Perhaps a designated form could be filled out for teachers in the student's home-district to quickly fill out that can update detention teachers on how to keep that student current with existing educational requirements for a designated period of time (i.e. one month). Additionally, lessons learned from remote-instruction

¹³ *Assessments that drive instruction*. Assessments That Drive Instruction | Curriculum Associates. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2021, from <https://www.curriculumassociates.com/products/i-ready/i-ready-assessment>.

¹⁴ *Map growth*. NWEA. (n.d.). Retrieved September 11, 2021, from <https://www.nwea.org/resource-center/resource/map-growth/>.

¹⁵ Koyama, P. R. (2012). *The Status of Education in Pre-Trial Juvenile Detention*. *Journal of Correctional Education* (1974-), 63(1), 35–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26507621>

during the pandemic should be explored as ways to connect youth to their home district classrooms or other educational opportunities across the country.

The facility will need to decide whether individual teachers at SYSC should communicate with local districts or if this should be a responsibility assigned to a sole individual such as the lead education teacher.

It is important to note that in this new model the facility would still be responsible for sharing information with the local school district about the youth's performance and progress on assignments. Teachers at the local district may also be responsible for sharing materials and / or lesson plans so that youth can re-enter their local school with little disruption. Continuing communication with the home school will be helpful in reinforcing the school's importance in re-integrating a student back into the community. Continuing communication with home school is the best approach to optimize successful re-entry.

Hire three full-time teachers and consider utilizing tutors to supplement needs.

In the one-on-one teacher-student model, it will be critical to have dedicated staff who are with you for a significant portion of the day and who become deeply familiar with each student's different academic needs. If the facility leadership deems it necessary, they may also want to create a system in which tutors can be brought on in an ad hoc basis depending on the census and various student needs. This may be an appropriate use for contracting individually with local public school teachers.

Continue to offer High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) training program.

Because committed youth can be at the facility for a long period of time, their education and treatment may be more geared toward establishing adult independence versus focusing on successful re-entry into a school system. Therefore, creating and / or maintaining a robust HiSET program, which can be utilized most often for committed youth and in some cases for detained youth should be considered.

Recreational Programming

Current State

Engaging youth in the choice of activities (both individually and as a group) is critical to committed and detained youth learning and becoming comfortable with healthy prioritization of leisure activities and regular decision-making. Currently, youth at SYSC have approximately three hours of recreation time each day. Additionally, youth that have earned either campus or community trust, when planned for and staffing can support it, can experience activities outside of the SYSC facility.

These three hours of recreation time include one hour of big muscle movement that typically involves recreation in the indoor gym, outdoor recreational basketball courts attached to each housing unit, or in the center courtyard of the facility. Gym time is the only recreation activity that occurs during the actual academic school day; However, on school enrichment days, other physical activities may take place (e.g., staff-youth basketball games, etc.). Youth recreation also includes up to two hours of non-physical activity within the youth units or in common spaces. This time can include playing cards, journaling, watching TV, arts, spending time outdoors, reading, interacting with peers, making personal phone calls with their families, board games, religious activities or participating with a planned event, etc. Youth may also have free time built into the activity schedule, which allows them to choose an activity as a unit, which can include additional opportunities for physical activity. Youth typically should have less than an hour of TV/video time a day and are limited in what they can watch. Youth also have limited access to music of any kind.

Limitations

SYSC's current leadership noted that there are several factors that may limit a youth's daily recreation time. First, adequate staffing can limit the amount of choices youth are able to have in their activities, particularly external SYSC activities for those youth who have earned trust status. The pandemic significantly impacted youth's choices for external recreation opportunities. Additionally, during the height of the pandemic, all youth were placed in cohorts to prevent potential facility-wide virus transmission and this limited youth's ability to come together with peers during recreation opportunities.

Visitations occur during activity time, so youth may miss out on structured or unstructured recreation if they have a family member who has come to visit with them that day. Specialized clinical groups have typically occurred after school four days per week and activity/recreational time is scheduled around these groups. Lastly, adequate staffing often limits youths' ability to have more choices – typically there should be at least two staff present at each structured (or unstructured) activity.

Key Considerations

After evaluating the current recreation model, the workgroup noted the following considerations:

- What are potential alternatives to this activity allotment?
- How could this time be used differently?

- What are the youth missing in recreation time that may help them reach behavioral, social, or emotional goals?
- Giving youth options is important to teach cooperation and decision-making. Should the new facility engage youth in planning for recreation time in the new model?

Future State – Emerging Principals

Continue to integrate recreation activities into the academic school day.

The facility leadership should continue to prioritize including recreation activities for 1-2 periods a day intermixed with academic classes. This is critical to keep youth alert and engaged and give them a mental break from typical academic classes. Teachers should also be encouraged to incorporate movement and physical activity into their classes.

Appropriately staff facility to ensure youth make meaningful choices regarding their recreation activity.

If youth are given a choice of two options by a Youth Counselor (e.g. “You can choose basketball or lifting weights.”), they are not provided with the opportunity to engage in any multi-dimensional thinking. However, if youth are given three choices (e.g. “You can choose basketball, lifting weights, *or* four-square), they are forced to engage in a more critical and higher-order evaluative thinking process. It should be noted that too many choices should also be avoided. Psychology studies have shown that giving humans too many options may actually increase anxiety and dissatisfaction with someone’s ultimate choice.¹⁶

Incorporate more music (both listening and creating) into recreation time.

Multiple studies have linked music-making to supporting the development of incarcerated youth’s self-esteem and behavior regulation.¹⁷ Several of the youth at the current facility noted in interviews that they would like more opportunities to listen to music of their choice and make music. The new model should work to incorporate more of these opportunities for youth on a daily, or at minimum, weekly, basis.

Exposing youth to non-traditional recreation activities.

Youth should have structured and unstructured activities on a daily basis, which should include exposure to novel recreation. Showing youth new muscle movements, hobbies, and / or past-times may introduce them to a talent or passion they would not have been exposed to otherwise—something that could be critical to a successful re-entry process.

Consistently incorporate group decision-making for shared activities.

Incorporating group-decision making into each unit’s schedule on a weekly basis will give committed and detained youth new confidence in negotiation, cooperation, and comprise – all critical skills for re-entry and something that they may find challenging. Youth Specialists should

¹⁶ Iyengar, S. S., & Lepper, M. R. (2000). When choice is demotivating: Can one Desire too much of a good thing? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(6), 995–1006. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.6.995>

¹⁷ Daykin N, de Viggiani N, Pilkington P, Moriarty Y. Music making for health, well-being and behavior change in youth justice settings: a systematic review. *Health Promot Int*. 2013 Jun;28(2):197-210. doi: 10.1093/heapro/das005. Epub 2012 Mar 13. PMID: 22415559.

work to lead their unit through decision-making exercises and teach the group strategies for talking through disagreements and getting to a group consensus.

Community Engagement

Current State

While the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented youth at SYSC from engaging in their typical level of community engagement, prior to the pandemic, the SYSC team has worked to create meaningful and productive community relationships with local organizations (universities, non-profits, etc.), which have allowed detained and committed youth to interact with a number of individuals outside the facility walls.

Earning Campus and Community “Trust”

To leave the SYSC facility and interact with various community programs (e.g., visiting a college campus or going to a local community center for tutoring), youth at the facility have to present to their peers and their youth counselors why they deserve to earn community trust. To venture off-campus, youth also need to meet certain behavioral goals set forth by their treatment team. Some youth earn what is called “campus” trust, which simply means that they have certain freedoms within the facility walls or on the grounds of the facility outside. If community and / or campus trust is earned, activities can include hiking off campus, equestrian therapy, Frisbee golf, golfing driving range, and riding bikes on the campus, etc.

Limitations:

- Rules and stipulations regarding an individual’s legal situation may limit participation in events off campus.
- Adequate staffing levels can limit a youth’s ability to go into the community.
- Various risk levels exist for different activities; forethought and planning are critical.
- Some community partners lost touch during the pandemic as in-person activities became riskier and were discontinued by either SYSC or the program provider.

Key Considerations

The workgroup and the legislative committee should consider the following questions:

- What are the most effective forms of community engagement for detained and/or committed youth?
- Is the process for earning “trust” fair? If not, what improvements could be made?
- What kinds of partnerships have been most (and least) effective?
- What are limitations to engaging with local community organizations that may exist in the new facility?

Future State – Emerging Principals

Establish and nurture partnership programs with local non-profits that have a vested interest in supporting detained and committed youth.

In the new facility, it will be important to both nurture existing relationships with local organizations who have worked with SYSC in the past and identify new programs that may be able to provide unique experiences for the youth. Youth Specialists and Teachers should be expected to arrange or provide activities with organizations they are personally connected to, and therefore have a vested interest in maintaining and growing the relationship. Facility staff can either arrange for or provide activities that are recreational, educational, and / or therapeutic and are often the best sources to make connections in the local community.

Community service should be a normal and positive experience for youth.

Identify a few key community service activities that will provide an opportunity for youth to interact with people in the community. Whether it is meeting with the elderly or writing letters to young children in the local hospital, the activities should be meaningful for the youth and teach them how “giving back” is both rewarding and important.

Alter the “Trust” behavior structure so that youth can interact with the community on a more regular basis.

The leadership in the facility should consider a structure where instead of starting at the bottom of a leveled behavior monitoring system upon admission, youth enter at a mid-level of privilege. While the facility staff should not *assume* that youth are capable of mature, positive behavior (i.e.: leaving the facility the first day they arrive), earning that privilege should not be out of the ordinary.

Requiring youth to give a presentation prior to interacting with the outside community may make community interaction less achievable for certain youth, and interacting with the community outside the facility should occur on a regular basis for most of the youth population. Each youth should be assessed based on their level of comfort with presenting, and alternative means of earning this trust should be considered (written, verbal, poetry, song) to allow for rehearsal in a safe environment.

Family visitations should not be limited.

Family visits should be flexible and solely based on the family and / or attorney’s needs. If parents want to come see youth, it should be allowed, and the visitation experience should be one that is comfortable and reduces anxiety for both the juvenile and the visitor. Scheduling visitations during times that are less stressful for families will allow for more stress-free, positive interactions. When appropriate, staff should make time to greet and have casual communication with residents’ family members as well as scheduled therapeutic activity.

Focus on re-entry programming and wrap-around care.

As part of a re-entry plan SYSC should work to provide a wraparound care arrangement, which is multi-faced, involves various individualized interventions, and likely requires coordination from different agencies. A wraparound re-entry program should be both family-driven and youth-guided, and should provide necessary interventions (such as in-home therapy, substance-abuse

prevention programs, foster-care, etc.) in addition to any other assistance for youth to navigate a successful return to the community.¹⁸

The wraparound plan should not simply be checking boxes (e.g. “youth did not get in any fights.”), but, instead, it should be thoughtfully mapped out by a team of individuals deeply familiar with the youth’s unique needs. The plan should work to address previous pitfalls the youth experienced but also emphasize strengths gained at SYSC. It is recognized that re-entry will be a more comprehensive process for committed youth.

¹⁸ Development Services Group, Inc. 2014. “Wraparound Process.” Literature review. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Wraparound_Process.pdf
Prepared by Development Services Group, Inc., under cooperative agreement number 2013–JF–FX–K002.

Stakeholder Interviews

Objective:

The A&M team surveyed current and former youth and family members to understand their unique perspectives and share their experiences with the workgroup.

Approach and Key Takeaways:

The A&M team conducted seven 30-minute to 1-hour interviews both in person and over the phone with a mix of current and former youth and families. See Appendix IV for a sample interview guide.

The outreach was designed to help the workgroup quickly gain a small sampling of perspective from some youth and families who were readily willing to participate. Most of the youth and families that agreed to speak shared positive experiences in the facility. While we stress that the series of interviews should not be viewed as a comprehensive study, we have provided examples of that feedback below.

Table 6: Stakeholder Interviews

Topic	Key Takeaways
Facility	No major complaints about the facility. In the new facility, youth suggested prioritizing multi-purpose rooms, gym, and more outside movement space.
Staff	Experience with staff ranged from “nurturing and kind” to “just there for a paycheck.” Youth Counselors and some teachers seemed to have the most positive influence on the youth.
Education Program	Acknowledging the difficulty of teaching youth at varied levels of intellectual ability, the academic program could challenge and engage students more. The individual attention provided has been beneficial. Youth discussed how some teachers’ engagement and commitment varied.
Safety	Overall, the seven youth and parents interviewed felt SYSC was a safe place for youth to live.
Culture and Environment	Although all the parents commented on the facility as providing increased structure for their children, youth reflected that programming could benefit more from increased consistency in rules and processes and more daily structure.

Appendix

Appendix I: Workgroup Members

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services

- Commissioner Lori Shibinette, Commissioner, New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
- Deputy Commissioner Lori Weaver, Deputy Commissioner, New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
- Joseph Ribsam, Director, New Hampshire Department of CYF
- Rhonda Chasse, Director of Operations, SYSC
- Erica Ungarelli, Director, New Hampshire Children's Behavioral Health, DHHS

Government Stakeholders

- Senator Becky Whitley
- Senator Bob Guida
- Lisa English, Director of Policy, Governor's Office

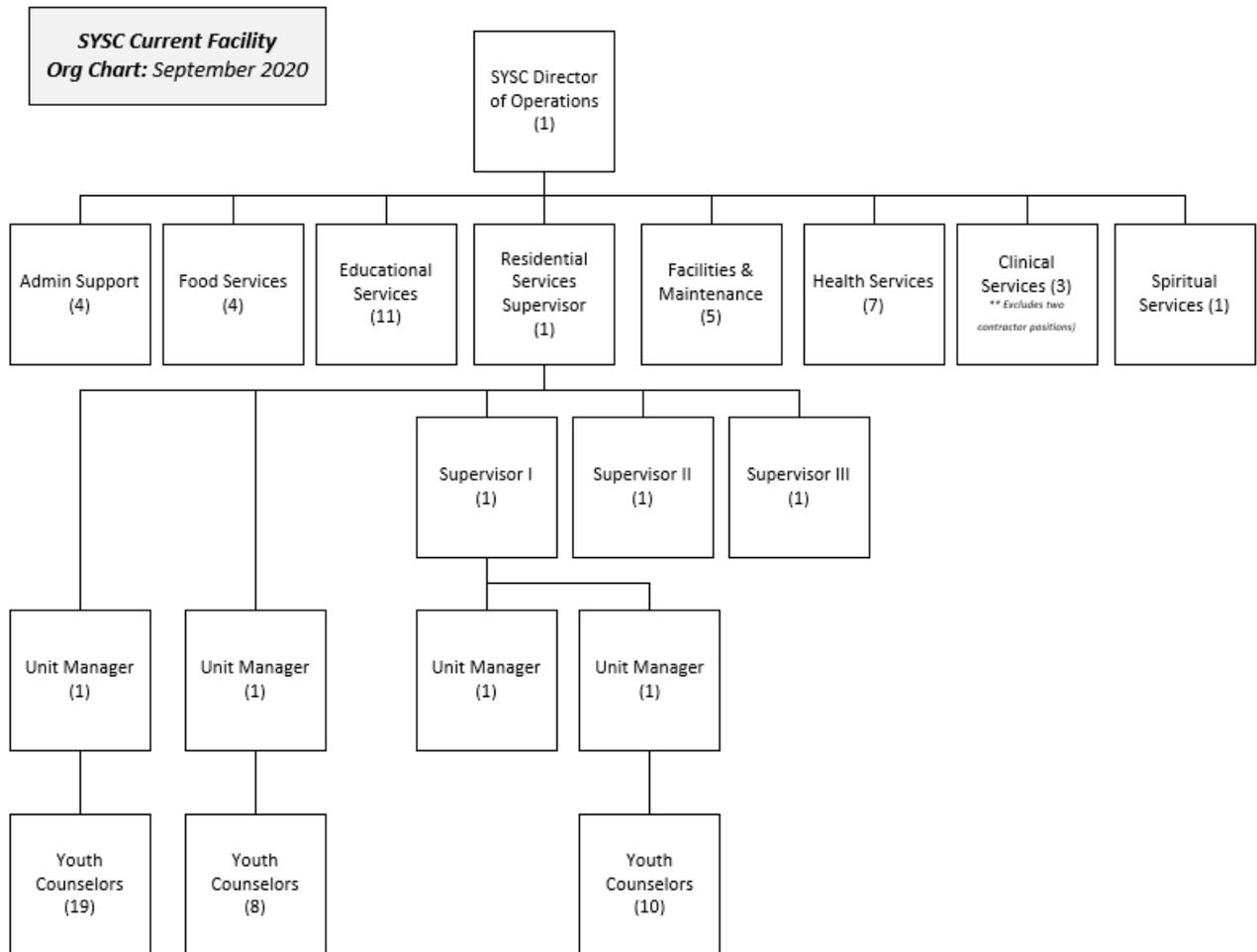
Advocacy Group Stakeholders

- Mike Skibbie, Policy Director, New Hampshire Disability Rights Center
- Moira O'Neill – Director, Office of New Hampshire Child Advocate

Alvarez and Marsal Team

- Former Virginia Juvenile Justice Director, David Marsden
- Brendan Stallard, Senior Director
- Abigail Snyder, Manager

Appendix II: Organizational Chart from September 2020



Appendix III: Sample Weekday Schedule

6:00-7:55	Wake-up, Hygiene, Clean Room, Med/Sick Call
8:00-8:20	Breakfast
8:20-8:30	Classroom Connection*
8:30-3:00	School (11:50-12:20 Lunch)
3:00-3:30	Substance Awareness w/JP (Chapel)
3:30-4:00	Free Time
4:00-5:00	Rec Time (off-unit)
5:00-5:30	Dinner
5:30-6:00	Chores
6:00-7:00	Activity Time (on-unit)/Visit Night
7:00-8:00	TV/Video Game Time/Med/Sick Call/Night Hygiene
8:00-9:00	Bedtime Routine: Level 1 (8:00pm) and 2 (8:30pm)/Quiet Time** for Levels 3 and 4 (activity/board games/cards)
9:00-9:30	Bedtime Routine for Level 3 (9:00pm) and 4 (9:30pm)

*Classroom Connection= morning meeting, set goals for the day.

**TV may be used after 8:00pm at the SOD/UM/Charge Staff discretion

*Schedule is subject to change at the SOD's discretion

*Rec Time is off the Unit (Gym, Pen, Courtyard, etc.)

*Activity Time is electronics-free, on-unit activities

*Free Time activities are at discretion of SOD/Charge staff

*Mixing units/Socials must be approved by the SOD

Staff may request youth to have Transition Time at their discretion

Appendix IV: Interview Guide

Topics and Questions
<p>Physical Environment</p>
<p><i>In your opinion, did/do the units have enough space for the number of youth in the room? What did you like about your room and/or unit at SYSC? What did you dislike? What kind of youth were/are on your unit?</i></p>
<p>Education</p>
<p><i>Where were you in school before you were at/ came to SYSC? What grade? What's the school like at SYSC? How is it different than school on the outside? What did/do you wish you were doing in school at SYSC that you were not doing/are not doing? What was/is your experience like attending school at SYSC? When you left/leave did/do you feel like you were able to integrate easily back into your previous school?</i></p>
<p>Treatment</p>
<p><i>Did/do you feel that you received the right type of treatment during your stay at SYSC? (what was helpful/not helpful?) If you felt that you did/do not receive the right type of treatment services, why do you think that was?</i></p>
<p>Contact with the Community</p>
<p><i>How often did/do you have visits? How long did/do they typically last? (Parent) Did/do you feel like there were good arrangements that were in place to facilitate successfully reintegration of the youth in to the community after finishing the detention term?</i></p>
<p>Recreation and Exercise</p>
<p><i>What recreation activities did/do you enjoy at SYSC?</i></p>
<p>Staff</p>
<p><i>Tell me about the Youth Counselors you interacted with? Do they help you? Who did/do most youth turn to when you need help? Teachers, Youth Counselors, Clinicians?</i></p>
<p>Personal Safety</p>
<p><i>Did you feel safe around staff? Did you experience any intimidation or harm by other youth/staff? Did staff protect you from other youth that intimidated you? If you were to feel unsafe, was there a standard or a process for reporting an issue? What was it and was it widely understood?</i></p>
<p>Overall Experience at SYSC</p>
<p><i>What was most helpful during your stay at SYSC? What was least helpful during your stay at SYSC? What could have made SYSC better for you? What are your recommendations for improving the SYSC facility?</i></p>