



Everything New Orleans

Juvenile detention rules changing at city's youth center

By **Katy Reckdahl, The Times-Picayune**

October 27, 2009, 8:31PM

Juveniles at the Youth Study Center will no longer be subject to long hours of confinement, sporadic schooling, spotty medical care and inadequate meals.

These improvements are spelled out in two proposed agreements involving the city, which runs the detention facility in Gentilly, and the Orleans Parish School Board, which is responsible for providing educational services to the detainees.

The **Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana**, which **filed a federal lawsuit** in December 2007 alleging unconstitutional conditions at the Youth Study Center, filed consent decrees in court on Monday after 22 months of negotiations with the city and the School Board.

Already, change is evident at the facility, said Carol Kolinchak, legal director for the Juvenile Justice Project.



Jennifer Zdon / The Times-Picayune

In June 2009, the former dining hall at the Youth Study Center in Gentilly was scheduled for demolition along with other sections in advance of planned renovations.

"When we started the lawsuit, kids weren't going to school. Now every kid is going," said Kolinchak, who also noted that the teacher currently working at the facility not only has previous experience working in a detention center but requested the job working with struggling teens.

In the lawsuit, plaintiffs complained about inhumane conditions at the center, which was damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The lawsuit alleged the center on Milton Street was moldy and vermin-infested and that young people were confined in cells for 20 hours a day without adequate schooling, medical care or food.

The proposed consent agreements must pass a roughly three-month ratification process that will start sometime next month with the preliminary approval of U.S. District Judge Ivan L. R. Lemelle.

Before Lemelle gives his final approval, the class action suit's plaintiffs and anyone who has been held in the Gentilly facility since the suit was filed must be notified and given sufficient time to

file objections.

Compliance with each issue will also be assessed and monitored three times a year for the next two years by conditions consultant Paul DeMuro, a New Jersey juvenile-justice consultant, and Carol Cramer Brooks, former head of the National Juvenile Detention Association's Center for Research and Professional Development in Michigan.

The consent decree spells out improvements in staff qualifications and training, fire and building safety, use of shackles, food, intake, medical exams, use of lockdown, and access to a secure, outdoor courtyard.

Other details include:

Facility staff will create a new policy and procedures manual, to replace the one that was lost after the facility flooded.

Administrators will move back into a to-be-rehabbed part of the damaged building so that they will be able to work from inside the secure facility instead of out of a trailer parked in front.

The city will add a social worker with a master's degree as clinical director and expand the recreational and medical services for the facility, which can hold up to 32 boys and four girls.

Some of the improvements hammered out in talks with the School Board have been in place since earlier this year. Tyrone Casby will continue to serve as principal, according to the agreement, which calls for students to be provided laptops and textbooks, special education and social services.

Because the Youth Study Center is used only to hold youth before trial, teenagers often rotate through the facility within a period of weeks.

The agreement with the School Board emphasizes quick assessments to determine a youth's needs and help transition to their next classroom at a local school or a state facility.

Katy Reckdahl can be reached at kreckdahl@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3396.

© 2009 NOLA.com. All rights reserved.