



## WASHINGTON SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW 2023-2024



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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## Background

State law requires the Department of Children, Youth and Families to complete a Comprehensive Review inspection per RCW 72.40.280 every three years. The purpose is to evaluate the extent to which Washington State School for the Deaf (WSD) is fulfilling its child protection responsibilities in accordance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Public Law 93-247) and efforts to enhance child safety, health, and well-being. Further, DCYF has committed to sending these reports to the Governor, the Legislature, the Superintendent, and the school's board of trustees via Washington Administrative Code 110-150-0060.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Family (DCYF) Licensing Division began the 2024 Comprehensive review for Washington School for the Deaf for the 2023-2024 school year via email contact with Rick Whitney on Nov. 2, 2023. Collaboratively we planned for exchange of information regarding school policy, staff training, student training, staff clearances, and behavioral logs needed for review. Mr. Whitney and his staff were able to send this information in the following months culminating in an in-person inspection on April 11, 2024.

## Policies and Procedures

The comprehensive review and assessment of WSD policy and procedures was completed. WSD did not add any new policies to the previously reviewed policies. The WSD policies extensively cover but are not limited to admission, expulsion, transportation, standards of residential care to guide their practice, and training for staff and students surrounding safety. WSD policies were found to be meeting or exceeding all requirements per WAC 110-150-0070.

## Program Effectiveness

The comprehensive review and assessment of evaluation of program effectiveness included an evaluation of staff background checks for appropriate clearances for all employees and volunteers. All staff had clearance. There have been no new staff hired since the last review. WSD background checks were found to be meeting requirements per WAC 110-150- 0080 (g). The school reported one staff member who had been hired and terminated within the last year. The school reported no safety concerns surrounding the staff's conduct and the situation was handled with appropriate care.

## Reporting Documentation

To evaluate the reporting responsibilities an assessment of incident log reporting documentation was reviewed. WSD provided electronic files of school incident logs with a detailed, organized spreadsheet detailing infractions of level two and three covering the timeframe of the current school year.

This behavioral tracking log details the date, description of incident category, follow up by staff, perceived motivation of youth, parental notification if required, and follow up if needed. The incident log documents concerns detailing which students were involved, the date and time of the incident, description of what occurred, names of any witnesses and the action taken by WSD staff, including notification of the child's parents.

WSD maintains adequate documentation of all abuse or neglect incidents and appears to be following their policies for protecting students from abuse and or neglect. Documentation included when parents were notified. Staff enter concerning information to log and staff it with the Dean. The residential staff meets with the administrative team twice a week. The log showed reports from small infractions to larger concerns. Overall, the review of incident reporting documentation indicates that WSD is meeting requirements and meeting the child safety standards.

## Residential Facilities

The comprehensive review and assessment of the residential program facilities was completed at WSD on April 11, 2024. Joining this writer, Melanie Morris, on this inspection were Shaina Dynes, LD-CPS supervisor for the Vancouver area, and Jeremy Streck, Regional Licenser assigned to the school. For the school, Dean of Residential Services Rick Whitney met with, and gave DCYF staff a guided tour of the facilities with two interpreters to facilitate communication. Shaina Dynes was able to complete two interviews with students and rejoin the group for the inspection as it continued.

The students are separated by gender with the students themselves having the opportunity to have a say in which dorms meet their gender identity. Students range in age from 5 to 18+. The school has a policy that students can only share a room with another student that is within two years of their age. Having the mixed ages all within the same dorms has reportedly drastically cut down on behavioral incidences within the dorms since implementation. Mr. Whitney explained that having the cottages set up as a family instead of an institutional setting helps the students feel safe and comfortable.

An inspection of the school and cottages was conducted by the fire marshal on Feb. 21, 2024, with some conditions that would need to be corrected before approval. These included fire extinguishers needing servicing, space heaters plugged into surge protectors, exit signs not illuminated or with no backup power, and an alarm panel in the cafeteria was “in trouble” per the WSD Fire Marshal Code correction notice. After correcting the above code violations, the fire marshal passed the school on April 9, 2024. When DCYF staff did the tour of the cottages, it was confirmed through our inspection that the extinguishers had been serviced and were not expired.

The residential program is accredited by the Accreditation of Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD). Fire inspection certificate from the Vancouver Fire Department Fire Marshal’s office was completed on April 9, 2024. Department of Health (DOH) completed an inspection on the school’s cafeteria on March 18, 2024. DOH is changing their practice and is not completing the inspection of the cottages or nursing areas in the same inspection. The inspections did show that staff had their current food handlers’ permits and the cafeteria was in good condition except for a few minor issues that they were able to fix.

The safety inspection of cottages included assessing fire safety features including fire suppression system, posted fire exit signs, fire emergency lights, fire extinguishers. Also assessed was the safety and cleanliness of the dorms including storage of hazardous materials, food, and medication and ventilation in the kitchens and bathrooms.

The cottages have ADA approved bathrooms that would be able to accommodate students with special needs. At the time of the inspection there was food within the kitchens for the residents as well as a separate

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refrigerator for more than three days of emergency food if needed. Residential students are provided a meal service within the cafeteria for all meals and the kitchens within the dorms are for extras such as snacks or life skills development meals. All food was correctly labeled and no food was expired.

All cottages have a fire suppression system in place that has passed a 2024 inspection through the fire marshal in Vancouver. The laundry facilities were sufficient to meet the needs of the students and are located within each dorm cottage. Some bottles of cleaning supplies were left out within the laundry areas; however, the hazardous cleaners appear to be locked.

## **Staffing, Offices and Health Center**

The staff office was inspected. These offices are the hub of the cottage and centrally located in the central area of all cottages. Staff logbooks including fire drills, behavioral logs, staff logs, and shift notes are all kept in the staff office. It is evident that confidentiality of children's files and information is managed well as there is no identifying information of children. Supervision from this vantage point with windows in the office makes for improved supervision coordination of services. There is a combo communication TV that when students are in cottage can give emergency updates and updates throughout campus. Emergency exits were clearly marked. The school has ongoing plans for improvement for supervision within the cottages that may need future construction.

The staffing ratios are 1:7 during the day and evening. The staffing ratios for the overnight shift is 1:14 with a roving supervisor on campus to respond to an emergency if needed. WSD has not reported any concerns due to staffing ratios within the last three-year period which appears to show that this level of supervision is successful for the safety of the children in residence.

WSD Student Health Center is open six days a week to diagnose minor medical concerns and prescribe medication as needed. Policies and procedures are in place for medication management and disbursement. There is a medical space for treating up to six children. The medication is tracked by computer and disbursed by licensed medical providers. If staff are required to distribute medication off site, then the staff are required to receive additional medication management training. The staff also have access to and training in emergency medical supplies such as an epi pen and NARCAN if needed. There are no concerns noted within inspection of the medical facility.

## **Cafeteria**

Washington State School for the Deaf's cafeteria is a professional kitchen preparing food for the students. This is a fully commercial kitchen. The food that is provided is nutritious and meets nutritional guidelines. This cafeteria meets all requirements for health standards and is approved by the Department of Health. They have continuously tracked temperatures monitoring correct operation of equipment. The school is following DOH's cleanliness standards and safe practices for all students and staff, practicing rigorous screening protocols. WSD's highest priority is the health and safety of their students.

## Staff Interviews

Students are also receiving training in self-protection as outlined by the RCW. As an example, on the day of inspection, a training was occurring that was teaching the students about domestic violence and signs of bad relationships and how to advocate for themselves.

Interviews with residential staff, teachers, students, school administrators were conducted both during the site inspection (school administrator and students) as well as via virtual technology (staff and teachers) at a later date.

Licensing supervisor Amber Messick conducted two interviews of staff. Both interviews used assistive technology for translation. From the information gathered, the staff had no concerns about the facility, safety of the students or current practice of the school. Staff verified yearly trainings on behavior management, safety, and mandatory reporting. The staff also verified weekly team meetings to discuss any concerns or needs of the program and good communication with parents. Staff felt that they were safe in the school and had no feedback for improvement.

## Student Interviews

Licensing Supervisor Shaina Dynes conducted interviews with two current students in person during the physical inspection. Both students were 17 years old. Both students described a comfortable and safe living environment. Both students state they do get training on personal and body safety. Both shared they can speak to their parents whenever they wish and had no concerns for their treatment at the school. Ms. Dynes did not share concerns after these interviews.

Shayna Dynes also spoke to a community resource: Southwest Washington Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The agency provides advocacy, career resources, IEP assistance, higher education resources, and mentorship. SWCDHH advocates provide lectures to students on campus and work independently with the students/families to expose and educate about opportunities after graduating high school (e.g. college, trade school, career opportunities). Advocates also work with staff at the school who may not understand different languages that are being signed by students (e.g. Spanish) and assist in training/interpreting as needed. The collaboration with the school is said to be positive for staff, students, and families.

Ms. Daynes also attempted contact with a parent of students within the school for an interview. The parents' contact information was supplied by Mr. Whitney. After numerous voicemail attempts, the parent was unresponsive to attempts for interview.

## Summary

Overall, WSD is meeting or exceeding facility inspection standards. There are no concerns or problems with the residential facilities meeting the child safety standards. Washington State School for the Deaf provides excellent care of their students. This evaluation shows that WSD is fulfilling its child protection responsibilities in accordance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Public Law 93-247).