

AGENCY:	John de la Howe School		
AGENCY CODE:	L12	SECTION:	7



## Fiscal Year 2014-15 Accountability Report

### SUBMISSION FORM

AGENCY MISSION

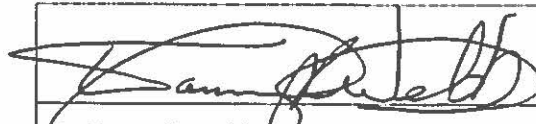
*John de la Howe School provides a safe haven for children to heal, grow and make lasting changes through counseling, education and a culture of care and personal development.*

Please identify your agency's preferred contacts for this year's accountability report.

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I have reviewed and approved the enclosed FY 2014-15 Accountability Report, which is complete and accurate to the extent of my knowledge.

AGENCY DIRECTOR  
(SIGN/DATE):

 9/15/15  
(TYPE/PRINT NAME): Dr. Danny R. Webb, President, John de la Howe School

BOARD/CMSN CHAIR  
(SIGN/DATE):

(TYPE/PRINT NAME):

 15 Sept., 2015  
Dan Shonka, Chair, John de la Howe School Board of Trustees



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**AGENCY’S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

**Executive Summary**

At-risk children from across South Carolina between the ages of 12 and 18 who are dealing with behavior, emotional or academic challenges, along with their families, seek hope and change at John de la Howe School. Residential care is offered on a campus situated on 1,200 acres in rural McCormick County near Lake Thurmond. The average student spends 9 to 18 months at the school. Students, along with their families, concentrate on positive ways to interact, build relationships and improve in the classroom.

John de la Howe School has adopted six goals to assist in this process. These are: (1) Improving the personal development and academic achievement levels of the youth; (2) Improving the achievement levels of youth completing the program; (3) Improving the cost effectiveness of services rendered; (4) Improving the efficiency of services; (5) Improving public awareness of the agency’s services and accomplishments; and (6) Strengthening the family interaction and support for these youth so that when they return to their homes they do not become entrapped in either the social welfare or penal systems. Investing in services targeted to help our state’s most vulnerable youth on the front end can provide results that will improve the quality of life for these students, their families and, in the end, lessen the burden for other South Carolinians.

**Mission**

John de la Howe School provides a safe haven for children to heal, grow and make lasting changes through counseling, education and a culture of care and personal development.

Now in its 218<sup>th</sup> year, John de la Howe School is the state’s oldest residential care facility and institution. From day one, the agency’s mission has always focused on the disadvantaged children of South Carolina. It has evolved into a state agency serving vulnerable, at-risk children, many of whom are facing major challenges in their homes, schools and communities. The goal is to prepare them to be productive citizens who can return home to make contributions to their families, communities and home school systems. As a Level II facility, the agency serves children and youth with moderate emotional and behavioral issues. Most placement requests (85%) are initiated by parents or guardians. Other placements come from state child welfare agencies. Youth in grades 6-12 are the target population for John de Howe School, which is the only school in the state that accepts students who have been expelled from their home school districts. This past year the agency served children from 21 of our state’s counties, and at some point children in each of the 46 counties have found refuge at John de la Howe School. A total of 122 students were served in the past year.

After a period of transition in leadership last year, achieving a level of stability was one of the major objectives of the 2014-15 fiscal year. With the addition of another new trustee in the winter, the board now stands at eight, its highest level in more than three years. The agency’s new President completed his first year on the job, and senior leadership experienced its lowest level of turnover in a number of years. This ensured some level of continuity in providing a higher quality of services and allowed staff more opportunity to focus on better outcomes for the children and families seeking our help. Progress is monitored through regular surveys designed to track the behaviors and family life of both current and past students.

The academic label of “over-age and under-credited” fits many of the students served at John de la Howe School. Approximately 85% of students have documented trauma such as the death of a close family member or



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friend, family separation, and/or emotional, physical and sexual abuse; 65% are prescribed some form of psychotropic drug; and 7% have been expelled from their home schools.

The agency operates with a mandated tuition requirement. However, at least 65% of the families served are unable to pay more than the minimum rate on a sliding scale according to net income. Even the minimal rate proves to be a challenge for many of our families living at or below the poverty line. The 2015 Kids Count Data Book bears this out, reporting 292,000 children in South Carolina live in poverty and that the state ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in child well-being.

Approximately two-thirds of the students served at John de la Howe School are African-American, with boys outnumbering girls two to one. This can be attributed to the fact that African-American students are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school, which often begins a downward spiral that sets them up for failure in other aspects of their lives.

Designated as a state special school, JDLHS serves as a supportive environment for at-risk students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. In addition to residential care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, JDLHS offers an array of 24-hour therapeutic care. "Think:Kids," a cognitive-behavioral therapeutic intervention recommended for treatment of at-risk youth, has been utilized since 2011. Staff took part in training and the agency has continued its implementation of this approach to behavioral issues in both residential and day students. Training in the "Mindset" system of preventing and managing aggressive behavior is also being implemented.

The Wilderness Program, which serves boys in grades 6-8, uses a modified Campbell-Loughmiller approach. This includes daily group goal setting and problem resolution. Both approaches result in positive behavior changes of students and assist them in their abilities to cope with frustrations and challenges, and they contribute to a climate of cohesive support and encouragement for youth on the JDLHS campus.

In 2013, the agency purchased BestNotes, a customer relationship management (CRM) software system that allows staff to enter statistical data on students. BestNotes replaced the KIDS system that was originally funded through the Duke Endowment. When grant funding for KIDS was lost in 2009, it was found to be too expensive to maintain. The agency entered data on Excel documents in the interim. BestNotes now allows the agency to track student progress in their Individual Plans of Care.

JDLHS also utilizes surveys to measure success in initiating behavioral change. Current students and their families are surveyed several times in the course of the school year, and former students and their families are surveyed annually. In the survey of current residential students and their families conducted during the 2014-15 school year, 100% of those responding said they would refer a friend or family member to JDLHS, while 80% rated their child's behavior from good to excellent since enrolling at the school. Other survey results for current students and families included:

- Academic performance:** Excellent-10%; Good-30%; Average-30%; Fair-20%
- Exposure to things to benefit student:** Good-40%; Average-60%
- Exposure to things to benefit family:** Good-50%; Average-40%; Poor-10%
- Improvement in our family life:** Good-50%; Average-40%; Fair-10%
- Family's ability to identify areas for growth:** Excellent-10%; Good-40%; Average-50%;
- Child's ability to get along with others:** Good-50%; Average 50%
- Hopes for my child's future:** Excellent-12.5%; Good-87.5%
- Overall JDLHS experience:** Excellent-12.5%; Good-75%; Average-12.5%;

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In the 2014-15 survey of Wilderness Program students and their families, 100% also agreed they would refer a friend or family member to JDLHS. Other results in the Wilderness survey included:

- Student behavior:** Excellent-28.6%; Good-57.1%; Average-14.3%;
- Improvement in our family life:** Excellent-21.4%; Good-64%; Average-14.3%
- Family's ability to identify areas for growth:** Excellent-43%; Good-50%; Average-7%
- Child's ability to get along with others:** Excellent-21.4%; Good-57%; Average-21.4%;
- Hopes for my child's future:** Excellent-71.5%; Good-28.5%
- Overall JDLHS experience:** Excellent-64%; Good-28.5%; Fair-17.5%

Academically, 93% of the Wilderness Program families strongly agreed or agreed their student was prepared for success in the next school year.

Measuring the success of former students is challenging due to the transient nature of many of the families the agency serves. Students become more difficult to locate with each passing year. The student aftercare surveys that were returned in the spring of 2015 indicate 83% of students one year removed from JDLHS are enrolled in school. Other results from the student aftercare survey include:

- Student behavior:** Good-33%; Average-33%; Fair-17%; Poor-17%;
- Academic performance:** Excellent-17%; Good-33%; Average-17%; Fair-17%; Poor-17%;
- Relationship with family:** Excellent-17%; Good-50%; Average-17%; Poor-17%;
- Discipline referrals:** Decreased-66%; Increased-17%; Unchanged-17%
- Referred to another agency:** No-80%; Yes-20%
- Involved with law enforcement:** No-66%; Yes-33%
- Would refer others to JDLHS:** Yes-83%; No-17%

**GOVERNANCE:**

With the appointment of a new President at the end of June 2014, the agency was able to achieve an improved level of stability in leadership over the past year. Gov. Haley appointed one new trustee to join the seven others already in place, bringing the board to within one position of being full. The administrative leadership team also moved toward much needed stability as there was only a 14% turnover rate in that area compared to a turnover rate of 50% a year ago.

**ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE:**

JDLHS is classified as a state special school, operating under enabling legislation which was adopted 97 years ago. This mandates that the business, property and affairs are to be under the control of a board of trustees comprised of nine members appointed by the Governor, subject to Senate confirmation. The board is responsible for electing the superintendent, who heads the agency as President. Approximately 85% of the 84-member staff are involved in direct care for youth, educational programs and facilities maintenance. This is an "administrative footprint that is slim for all the duties required," according to the Inspector General's report issued in early 2014. McCormick County is one of the smallest and poorest counties in the state, and the John de la Howe School has been anchor in the county for over two centuries. JDLHS contributes at least \$3.7 million per year to the local economy, according to the county's Economic Development Director.

JDLHS is licensed as a Level II congregate care facility by the SC Department of Social Services, DHEC and state Fire Marshall. The agency collaborates with the McCormick and Abbeville County School Districts, DSS, the Department of Mental Health, Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, court system and

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school districts statewide. Memberships are maintained and staff and board members participated in training sessions with the Western Piedmont Education Consortium, South Carolina School Boards Association, American Association of Children’s Residential Centers and Palmetto Association for Children and Families. The agency partnered with SC Works and the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) through GLEAMNS Human Resources Commission, Inc. to provide On-the-Job Training (OJT) opportunities for Adult and Dislocated Workers in the Upper Savannah Workforce Region, allowing the agency to provide meaningful work experiences while assisting in rebuilding the state’s workforce.

The agency took measures in the past year to ensure more safety on the JDLHS campus, adding a school resource officer on duty at L.S. Brice School to complement the McCormick County Sheriff’s Deputy already residing on campus. Measures were also taken to improve campus lighting. The agency applied for and was successful in receiving a grant for another Automatic External Defibrillator for placement in the school cafeteria.

**ACADEMICS**

Two schools provide the educational component of the agency’s overall mission. The L.S. Brice School provides educational services for at-risk youth ranging from grades 6-10. L.S. Brice also serves as the Alternative School for the Abbeville County School District, which buses in students daily. Students residing at John de la Howe School who are in grades 11 and 12 attend nearby McCormick High School. The academic performance data for students attending McCormick High are reported by the McCormick School District.

Serving at-risk youth at L.S. Brice School, the ACT Aspire State Middle School Assessment revealed a pass rate of 56% in English, 6% in Math, 6% in Writing, 6 in Reading and 0% in Science. Star Math was 2.115 on a score of 4 “At-Risk.” Star Reading was 2.192 on a score of 4 “At-Risk.” End-of-course (EOC) High School exams showed a pass rate of 100% for U.S. History, 50% for Algebra, 29% for Biology and 29% for English I. Two L.S. Brice students scored exemplary in S.C. Pass, while one L.S. Brice student scored a 98% on English I EOC.

In the past year, JDLHS implemented a number of education policies required for the agency to comply with accreditation standards. The Department of Education allowed time for new leadership to begin a strategic planning process and prepare a five-year plan, which was submitted by September 30, 2014. The agency invited more than 20 stakeholders to participate in formulation of the five-year plan, and this was accomplished in three separate stakeholders meetings conducted in the course of the past school year. This greatly aided the strategic planning process. The district/agency accreditation status is now “all clear.” The L.S. Brice school accreditation status was at risk because certified teachers were not available throughout the year in art, physical education, Spanish or music. This deficiency is being corrected through new contracts with the South Carolina Virtual School and EdMentum, clearing the way for an all clear status in the coming year.

**EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE**

To comply with Department of Social Services (DSS) regulations, the agency must maintain an 8:1 child to Residential Counselor ratio during the day and a 10:1 ratio at night. DSS requires a 16:1 ratio for Program Treatment Service Coordinators (PTSCs). These ratio mandates for congregate care facilities affect personnel costs and recruitment efforts. In order to increase enrollment, additional Residential Counselors and PTSCs are needed.

Last fall the agency introduced a new and improved website that is enhancing staff recruitment efforts as well as providing prospective students and their families with an array of information to assist with enrollment. The agency also reached out to school districts, solicitors’ offices, the Department of Juvenile Justice, DSS and others across the state in an effort to reach more at-risk children and their families. The agency also continues to pursue private placements by parents to increase enrollment and improve cost effectiveness.

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JDLHS continues to receive strong support from the local community, volunteers, churches and organizations. Construction volunteers made weekly visits to campus to construct and renovate buildings, and the JDLHS Foundation received strong support in raising funds for student enrichment. The JDLHS Alumni Association continued to hold annual fundraisers to support student activities, and alumni participate in campus beautification and activities promoting positive interactions with current youth in residence. Progress is recorded in the Best Notes software system that enables staff to track and measure progress. Academic progress is recorded in the PowerSchool system that tracks and measures progress.

**Strategic Plan**

The Strategic Plan focuses on goal areas in which the agency seeks to make progress. More than 20 stakeholder and community representatives participated in the planning process. The resulting plan includes performance measures that align with goals, strategies and objectives implemented throughout the agency. Progress is reviewed at regular meeting of the executive team. Short-term, mid-term and long-term outcomes track performance in the agency’s three service areas: residential, therapeutic and education.

*Improving Personal Development and Academic Achievement Levels of Youth*

Improving coping skills and demonstrating appropriate behaviors in various social circumstances are key aims for all youth served at JDLHS. Criteria for youth progress in meeting personal development and family-related goals are identified in the Individual Plan of Care that JDLHS establishes once a youth arrives on campus. Progress is recorded in the BestNotes software for tracking and measurement. Academic progress is recorded in the PowerSchool system that tracks and measures progress.

*Improving the Academic Levels of Exiting Youth*

Exiting youth are those who have completed the Individual Plan of Care and leave campus. Exiting youth will either return to a local school district or complete their secondary education and enter the workforce, military or higher education/additional training beyond high school. JDLHS provides educational services and will measure student growth so that exiting youth are empowered with the skills they need to continue advancing academically. High school completion rates and workforce, military or college entrance rates will also serve as outcome measures and will aid in determining value and cost effectiveness of JDLHS services to at-risk youth. Survey documents will be used to measure mid-term (18 months after placement) and long-term outcomes (entering adulthood).

*Improving the Cost Effectiveness of Services*

JDLHS is focused on improving cost effectiveness for the services it provides clients. The agency will measure improvements in cost effectiveness by cost per day per client served, according to a formula agreed upon by the Executive Budget Office and the agency. JDLHS will measure cost effectiveness in terms of overall averages as well as data separated into four divisions of clients: Residential youth receiving educational services at L.S. Brice School, Wilderness Program youth, Residential youth receiving services at McCormick High School, and Abbeville Day students.

*Improving the Efficiency of Back Office Administrative Services*

The agency will improve the efficiency of back office administration services. JDLHS will measure improvements by implementing certain key administrative functions with fidelity to sound management practices. This will also be improved by reducing the time to successfully complete certain tasks.

*Enhancing Public Awareness of Agency Services*



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JDLHS will improve public awareness of the range and quality of services provided for at-risk children and their families throughout the state. This will entail measuring and improving outcomes for partners, stakeholders and the agency's staff.

John de la Howe School remains committed to providing new hope and an opportunity for success for the most vulnerable youth of our state.

