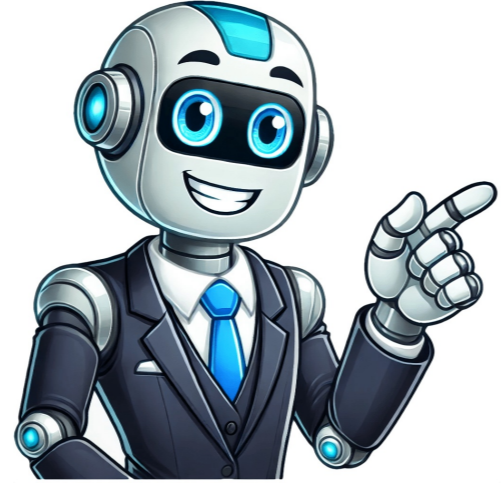


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Northern illinois academy

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In 2013 a Palm Beach County jury returned a \$5 million verdict against the Florida Department of Children... View Article Read Full Article more results & verdicts A residential school operated by Sequel Youth and Family Services is set to permanently shutdown its operations. Northern Illinois Academy (NIA), located in Aurora, Illinois, is an 87-bed facility that receives funding from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). Children suffering from mental illness, autism, mood disorders, and/or developmental delays were sent to the facility for treatment. According to a recent report based on an investigation conducted by Equip for Equality's Abuse Investigation Unit, NIA and its parent company, Sequel Youth and Family Services, are unwilling to provide sufficient resources to resolve the existing treatment and safety concerns. These identified problems include a lack of meaningful programming, unsafe restraint practices, problems with debriefing, failure to identify/report incidents of restraints and seclusion, inaccurate reporting of incidents, complaints regarding time youth spend in their rooms, restricting residents from communication devices, and significant program failures in the Blackhawk unit. To complete its investigation, Equip for Equality reviewed staff hours, conducted five on-site inspections, and interviewed youth, guardians, stakeholders, and staff. Interviews with the former three revealed incidents of staff slamming children to the floor, inadequate supervision leading to youth engaging in sexual activity with each other, and undisclosed use of restraints. One mother revealed that her child sustained injuries at the facility, and although the child complained of pain, the child did not see an orthopedist until the family repeatedly pushed for it. The orthopedist determined the child likely had a broken collar bone, but NIA did not comply with diagnostic recommendations. A guardian expressed concerns of a staff member assaulting an 18-year old resident after that resident had raped a 13-year old during a field trip. Another mother reported that her child had escaped NIA a couple times, once leading to the child being sex trafficked. When the mother raised concerns with NIA, a staff member told her they only follow children to the end of the property. Several parents reported that their children suffered physical abuse from staff and other residents that resulted in bruising and scarring. Some children would refuse to tell their parents about anything that happened at NIA. Other third parties and law enforcement were interviewed, stating that children from NIA would say they would rather go to the hospital or jail than return to NIA. An Illinois Screening Assessment and Support Services worker (SASS) reported that NIA had once been a reputable facility, it timely submitted paperwork, and was responsive to concerns. However, upon the departure of a director 12 to 18 months ago, there was significant decline in the institutions ability to carry out its functions. In a May 13, 2021 letter from IDHS, parents and guardians with youth in the facility were informed that the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has decided to place the facility on an "unapproved" status effective August 6, 2021, the conclusion of the summer school session. In response to Equip for Equality's report and ISBE's determination, IDHS, HFS, and DCFS are coordinating to ensure a phased and orderly transition of all youth currently residing at NIA to other placements. There are currently 51 students at NIA, 15 placed by DCFS, 17 placed by public school districts, 11 placed by HFS, and 8 placed by DHS. Read more here. For questions about Illinois child protection issues or Chicago child abuse, contact Justice for Kids at 844-4KIDLAW. Thousands of foster children, former foster children, developmentally disabled and medically fragile children are part of the Florida child care system. If you're currently or formerly a child in care, or an advocate for or parent of a child in the foster care system, the Justice for Kids team is here to help. Every year... View Article Read Full Article As reported by KTLA, a San Bernardino County couple and their adult daughter have been accused of allegedly torturing six foster children, whose ages ranged from 4 to 16. According to a press release from the district attorney's office, the trio allegedly subjected the children to "years of physical, emotional, and mental abuse," including "daily... 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Results may not be typical and reflect awards before deduction for attorneys' fees and expenses. It should not be assumed that your case will have as beneficial a result. In 2013 a Palm Beach County jury returned a \$5 million verdict against the Florida Department of Children... View Article Read Full Article more results & verdicts The Illinois State Board of Education will sever its relationship with a therapeutic day school in Aurora after an investigation revealed understaffing and mistreatment of students with disabilities. The state board of education announced in a press release on Friday that it will make school districts relocate students from Northern Illinois Academy, an 87-bed private youth residential program facility and therapeutic day school in Aurora, to another state-approved facility following a report by Equip for Equality, an advocacy organization for people with disabilities. This year, the state spent over \$152 million on therapeutic day schools for students with disabilities who were transferred from a public school district due to the complexity of their needs or the inability of school districts to serve them. Next year, the state plans to spend nearly \$174 million. Earlier this month, a report found that Northern Illinois Academy was understaffed, failed to report incidents of abuse or neglect, improperly used seclusion and isolated time-out, and lacked treatment goals to help transition students back to their districts. The conclusions were based on a mix of testimony from students and their family members, on-site monitoring throughout the review, and interviews with staff. State school's chief Carmen Ayala called the report "deeply troubling." The state will be revoking approval of the facility and help school districts transition their students to another state-approved facility. "All children deserve to be educated by qualified, trained, and compassionate adults with the individualized support they require," Ayala said. "Removing approval from this facility holds NIA accountable and ensures a better future for the children who have been in their care." After a ProPublica/Chicago Tribune joint investigation spotlighted the practice of seclusion and restraint, there has been more scrutiny of how schools treat children with disabilities in Illinois in recent years. State legislators have introduced a bill during this session to ban time-outs and restraints.Chicago Public Schools is currently under a state-appointed monitor after an investigation revealed systemic delays and denials of services for students with special needsCurrently 17 students from districts throughout the state are placed at the facility. Districts, which are responsible for assigning students to day schools, are required to find an alternative placement for those students in order to continue receiving state funds. As a result of the report findings, school districts will not be able to place students at Northern Illinois Academy for education services as of August 6. In January, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services terminated the facility's certification as a psychiatric residential treatment facility. The state board of education placed Northern Illinois Academy under probation in December 2020 and halted additional placements to the facility due to ongoing complaints. The state board of education developed a corrective action plan for the facility and conducted on-site monitoring. The board commissioned Equip for Equality to do a review after continuing to receive complaints during the ongoing corrective action. By PETER HANCOCK Capitol News Illinois phancock@capitolnewsillinois.comSPRINGFIELD - Officials from multiple state agencies said Friday that they are cutting ties with a residential school that serves children in state care with mental and developmental disabilities after an independent review documented reports of mistreatment of youth at the facility.Northern Illinois Academy, in Aurora, is an 87-bed private residential facility that serves children with co-occurring mental illnesses or autism, mood disorders and developmental delays. It is owned and operated by Sequel Youth and Family Services and receives funding from the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Healthcare and Family Services and the Department of Human Services.The students currently at Northern Illinois Academy will be moved to other facilities.The report, dated May 4 from the disability rights group Equip for Equality, found numerous problems with NIA's programming, training and services. Those include inadequate and overextended staffing; insufficient incident reporting, including cases of children running away from the facility; lack of meaningful programming and treatment planning; undocumented and improper use of physical restraint and seclusions; and insufficient adherence to COVID-19 health and safety requirements."The top priority of the Department of Children and Family Services is protecting vulnerable children by ensuring they receive the best available support and services," acting DCFS Director Marc Smith said in a statement. "It is unacceptable when any facility is not meeting the strict standards established by DCFS, and our team is taking steps to thoughtfully and carefully transition our youth in care to other facilities that can provide the nurturing, supportive environment our kids deserve."Pursuant to its contract with DCFS, Equip for Equality, the state-appointed protection and advocacy organization for people with disabilities, first conducted a review of NIA in November and December of 2019. At that time, EFE noted numerous concerns about NIA's lack of meaningful programming, unsafe restraint practices, restraining residents from communication devices and a host of other issues.Following that review, in January 2020, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services revoked NIA's certification as a psychiatric residential treatment facility, or PRTF. ADVERTISEMENTIn March 2020, however, DCFS found that NIA had made significant improvements, and the agency lifted a hold that had been in place on new admissions to the facility while continuing to conduct intensive monitoring.But Equip for Equality conducted another review in the fall and winter of 2020 and found that many of the same issues continued to exist, including unsafe and abusive restraint practices that at times resulted in physical injuries, inadequate discipline in response to staff abuse, and failure to report abuse to the hotline.Anthony Penn, executive director at NIA, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.The Illinois State Board of Education said it also conducted a review of the facility and announced Friday that, effective Aug. 6, it will assign a status of "non-approved" for NIA's education services. That means school districts will no longer be able to receive reimbursements for student placements there."The problems documented by Equip for Equality are deeply troubling," state Superintendent of Education Carmen Ayala said in a statement. "As a consequence and as a result of ISBE's regulatory review, we are revoking approval of the facility and helping school districts to transition their students to better learning environments ahead of the next school year."There are currently 51 Illinois students served at NIA, including 15 placed by DCFS, 17 placed by public school districts in Illinois, 11 placed by HFS and 8 placed by DHS, according to a spokesperson for ISBE.The agencies with responsibility for students at the facility said they will immediately begin the process of transitioning students to other settings, "on a phased and orderly basis."Editor's note: This story has been updated to reflect the correct number of students currently housed at the facility. A previous version reflected the number of students housed by DCFS, not the total number of students at the facility. Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service covering state government and distributed to more than 400 newspapers statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.