

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER POPULATION PROJECTIONS: FISCAL YEAR 2024 TO FISCAL YEAR 2028

INTRODUCTION

North Carolina General Statutes §§ 164-40(b) and 164-42.1(b) direct the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission (Sentencing Commission) to develop a computerized simulation model to be used to prepare Youth Development Center (YDC) population¹ projections and to help assess North Carolina's long-term resource needs for juvenile dispositions. The projections are prepared in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP). The computer simulation model used to project the juvenile population relies on empirical information about how juveniles are processed through the juvenile justice system using data extracted from the North Carolina Juvenile Online Information Network (NC-JOIN), the DJJDP's juvenile management information system.

YDC POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND CAPACITY

The Sentencing Commission prepared YDC population projections for all juveniles adjudicated delinquent and disposed on or after July 1, 2023 (new population) and for all juveniles committed to a YDC as of June 30, 2023 (YDC stock population), the beginning of the current projection period. The combined projections account for the decline of the stock population and the changes in the new YDC population (new YDC commitments that occur through the imposition of a Level 3 disposition or because of a probation violation or a revocation of post-release supervision (PRS)).

Table 1 shows the projected YDC population and capacity over the five-year projection period. YDC capacity was provided by the DJJDP. The total YDC population is projected to be 180 for FY 2024 and 194 for FY 2028.² A comparison of the projections with YDC capacity indicates that the projected YDC population will be within available YDC capacity during all projection years. The YDC population was 172 on June 30, 2023, and 192 on November 15, 2023.³

¹ Throughout this document, any reference to the YDC population includes juveniles on-campus and off-campus (e.g., home visit, community commitment, hospitalization, escape).

² Separate housing units are required for male and female juveniles. Of the projected YDC beds needed for each year of the five-year projections, 90% are for males.

³ NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Committed Youth Report*.

Table 1
Youth Development Center (YDC) Population Projections and Capacity

Fiscal Year	YDC Population as of June 30 ⁴		YDC Capacity ^{5,6}	Difference between Projection and Capacity ⁷
	Previous Projection	Current Projection		
2024	188	180	184	4
2025	194	195	196	1
2026	191	194	196	2
2027	196	195	196	1
2028	N/A	194	196	2

Note: Prepared in conjunction with the Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

⁴ Juveniles on-campus and off-campus (e.g., home visit, community commitment, hospitalization, escape) are included in the projections.

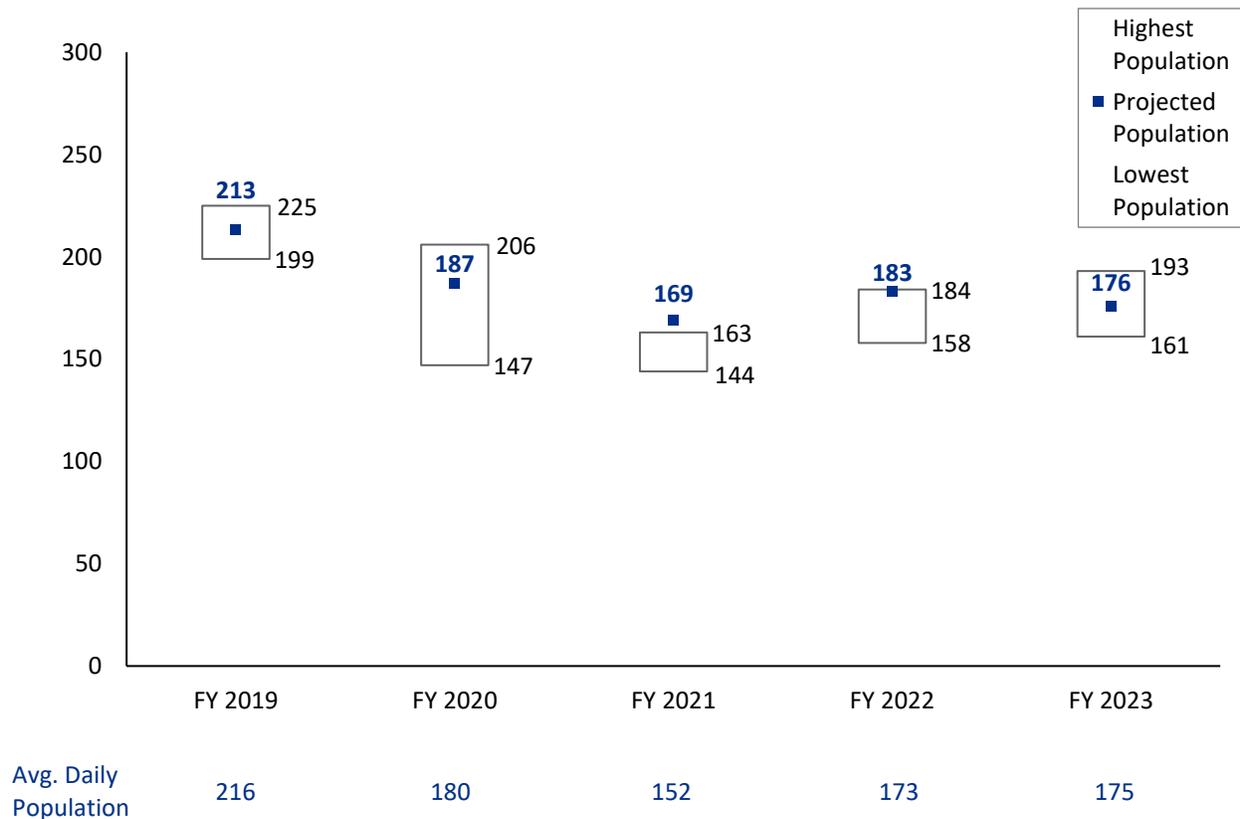
⁵ YDC capacity is contingent on staffing patterns to meet required ratios. It does not include community commitment placements or transition step-down beds, which are alternatives to YDC placement for some juveniles in this population, for all or part of commitment.

⁶ Per S.L. 2017-57, a new facility will be constructed (Section 36.2 (d)) and is expected to open in early 2024. This 60-bed facility is designed to allow for flexible use of housing units, either for detention or commitment purposes. It is expected that 12 of these beds will be used for YDC capacity in FY 2024. Beds at Lenoir and Cabarrus are currently being used as detention beds (12 and 32, correspondingly). It is anticipated that by June 30, 2024, all Lenoir beds will be converted back to YDC beds.

⁷ Positive numbers indicate that the current projected population is lower than capacity, while negative numbers indicate that the current projected population is higher than capacity.

Figure 1 illustrates the historical accuracy of the first year of the YDC projections for the previous five projections in relation to the actual minimum and maximum YDC populations for each fiscal year. Given the small population of juveniles in YDCs and the substantial fluctuations in the population over the course of the year, the accuracy of the juvenile projections is assessed by examining the projected population within the context of the lowest and highest YDC populations over the fiscal year. Ideally, the projection should be closer to the highest population of the fiscal year. Since FY 2019, the projected YDC population has typically been within the range of the lowest and highest YDC populations for any given fiscal year.

Figure 1
A Comparison of the Actual Minimum and Maximum Population with the Projected YDC Population
FY 2019 to FY 2023 Projections



Note: YDC population figures (projected and actual) include juveniles on-campus and off-campus (e.g., home visit, community commitment, hospitalization, escape).

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

ASSUMPTIONS

The projections are based on assumptions that were determined using empirical data from the most recent fiscal year (FY 2023) and assume no significant changes throughout the five-year projection (see Table 2). The growth rates were determined after reviewing census projections for North Carolina’s

youth population,⁸ juvenile justice indicators,⁹ and the continued adjustment of the juvenile justice system as it incorporates 16- and 17-year-olds (i.e., Raise the Age or RtA juveniles) under the Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Act (JJRA).¹⁰

Table 2
Assumptions for the FY 2024 to FY 2028 Projections

<p>Growth Rates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •1% in Year 1 and 5 •0% in Years 2-4
<p>YDC Admission Type</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •55% from a delinquent complaint •35% from a probation violation •10% from a revocation of PRS
<p>Lag-time to YDC Admission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •8 months for probation violations •4 months for revocation of PRS
<p>Level 3 Dispositions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •3%
<p>YDC Length of Stay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •13 months

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The five-year projections assume no changes in judicial or prosecutorial behavior. The projections do not incorporate any potential increases or decreases in the YDC population due to budgetary or policy-driven changes implemented by the DJJDP and/or other agencies that provide services for juveniles.

COMPONENTS OF YDC POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The Juvenile Disposition Chart (see Table 3), the empirical data from the latest available fiscal year, and the YDC stock population as of June 30, 2023, form the basis of the five-year projections and are detailed in the following sections.

⁸ Population growth for North Carolina’s youth aged 10-15 years is expected to increase over the projection period, with the exception of Year 2, while youth aged 16-17 years will experience a decline over the projection period, www.demog.state.nc.us (2023).

⁹ The rate of delinquent complaints was 23 per 1,000 juveniles in FY 2023 (DJJDP). Overall arrests for index crimes committed by juveniles under 18 increased 8% from FY 2021 to FY 2022. (*Crime in North Carolina – 2022*, State Bureau of Investigation, <http://crimereporting.ncsbi.gov>).

¹⁰ S.L. 2017-57, s. 16D.4, effective for offenses committed on or after December 1, 2019.

**Table 3
Juvenile Disposition Chart**

Offense Classification	Delinquency History Level		
	Low 0-1 Points	Medium 2-3 Points	High 4 or More Points
Violent Class A-E Felonies	Level 2 or 3	Level 3	Level 3
Serious Class F-I Felonies Class A1 Misdemeanors	Level 1 or 2	Level 2	Level 2 or 3
Minor Class 1, 2, 3 Misdemeanors	Level 1	Level 1 or 2	Level 2

FY 2023 Juvenile Delinquent Dispositions

This section highlights information on the 3,435 delinquent dispositions in FY 2023,¹¹ including offense classification, delinquency history level, and disposition level.¹² The court’s selection of dispositional alternatives is governed by statute through a graduated sanctions chart that classifies juvenile offenders according to the seriousness of their adjudicated offense (i.e., offense classification) and the degree and extent of their delinquent history (i.e., delinquency history level). A Level 1 or community disposition offers the court less restrictive dispositional alternatives (e.g., probation, community-based programs). A Level 2 or intermediate disposition is generally more restrictive than a Level 1 disposition and includes options such as intensive probation, group home placements (e.g., multipurpose group homes), regimented training programs, and house arrest. A Level 3 or commitment disposition provides the most restrictive sanction available to be imposed by a juvenile court judge – commitment to the DJJDP for placement in a YDC.

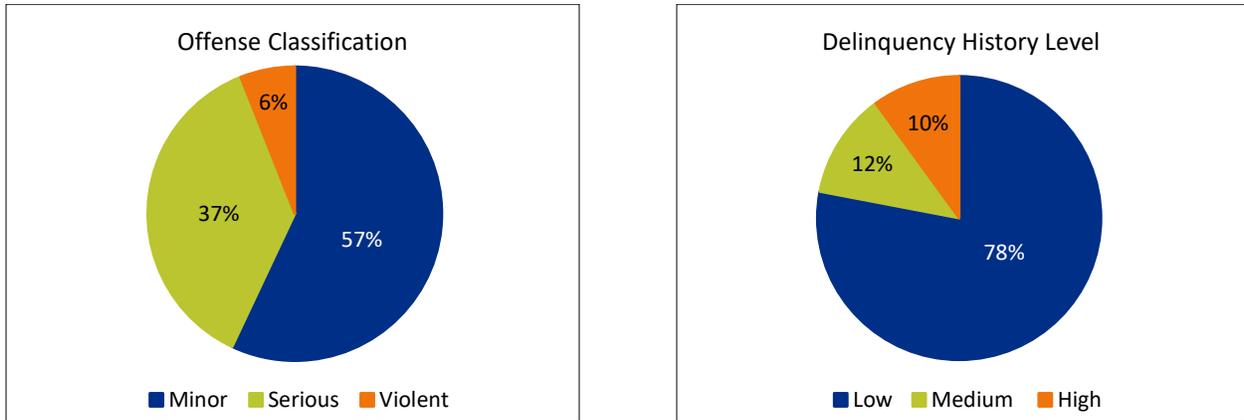
Figure 2 shows the distribution of the 3,435 delinquent dispositions by offense classification and delinquency history level. Of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent in FY 2023, 6% were adjudicated of a Violent offense, 37% of a Serious offense, and 57% of a Minor offense.¹³ The majority (78%) of dispositions involved a juvenile with a Low delinquency history level, 12% involved a juvenile with a Medium delinquency history level, and 10% involved a juvenile with a High delinquency history level.

¹¹ The 3,435 delinquent dispositions highlighted in this section include both non-RtA (2,140) and RtA (1,295) juveniles.

¹² A delinquent disposition is identified from NC-JOIN records as the disposition imposed for the most serious adjudicated offense for a given disposition hearing date during a fiscal year.

¹³ Overall, 66% (or 2,257) of the 3,435 dispositions were for misdemeanor offenses. Of the 1,272 adjudications for a Serious offense, 24% (or 307) were for Class A1 misdemeanor offenses. The remainder were for Class F-I felony offenses.

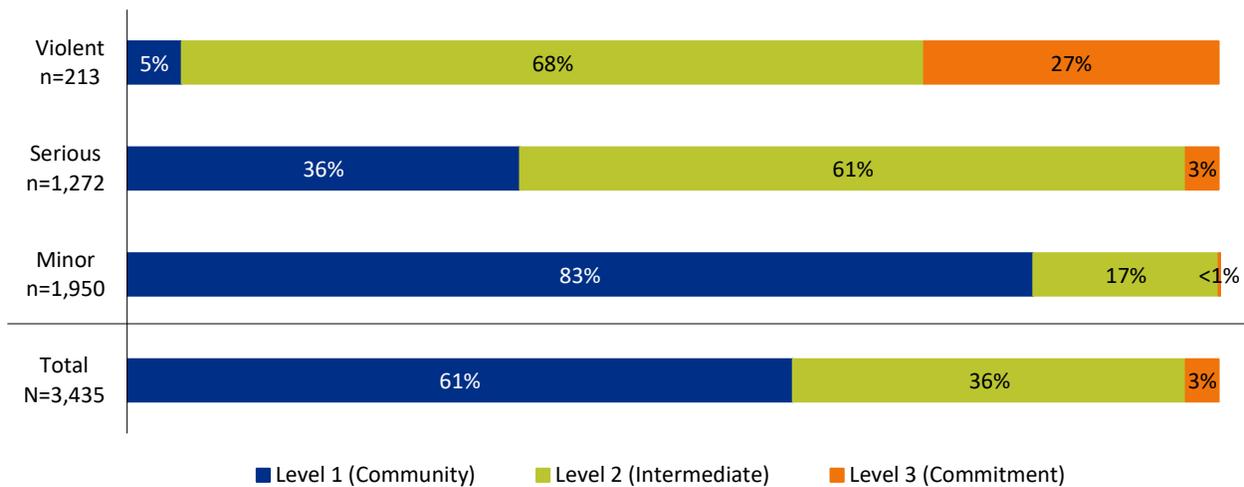
Figure 2
Dispositions by Offense Classification and Delinquency History Level
Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2023 Disposition Simulation Data

Figure 3 summarizes dispositions imposed in FY 2023 by offense classification and disposition level. Overall, the court ordered Level 1 dispositions for 61% of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent, Level 2 dispositions for 36% of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent, and Level 3 dispositions for 3% of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent. Juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense were most likely to receive a Level 1 disposition (83%). Juveniles adjudicated delinquent of a Violent or Serious offense were more likely to receive a Level 2 disposition (68% and 61% respectively). Of the 106 Level 3 dispositions in FY 2023, 58 (or 55%) were the result of an adjudication of a Violent offense, 43 (or 40%) of a Serious offense, and 5 (or 5%) of a Minor offense.

Figure 3
Dispositions by Offense Classification and Disposition Level
Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2023 Disposition Simulation Data

Table 4 shows how judges used dispositional resources given each combination of offense classification and delinquency history level. As indicated by the vertical “Total” column, the likelihood of the imposition of a Level 3 disposition increased as the seriousness of the offense classification increased (also see Figure 3). Similarly, the likelihood of the imposition of a Level 3 disposition increased as the delinquency history level increased. Dispositions for juveniles with Low delinquency history levels who were adjudicated of Minor offenses (Class 1-3 misdemeanors) comprised the largest group – 1,612 (or 47%) of the 3,435.

Table 4
Dispositions by the Dispositional Chart for Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent

Offense Classification	Delinquency History Level			Total
	Low 0-1 Point	Medium 2-3 Points	High 4+ Points	
Violent A-E Felonies	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 11 (7%) Level 2: 124 (76%) Level 3: 28 (17%) n = 163	Level 3 Level 2: 15 (56%) Level 3: 12 (44%) n = 27	Level 3 Level 2: 5 (22%) Level 3: 18 (78%) n = 23	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 11 (5%) Level 2: 144 (68%) Level 3: 58 (27%) n = 213 (6%)
Serious F-I Felonies A1 Misd.	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 444 (49%) Level 2: 469 (51%) Level 3: 1 (<1%) n = 914	Level 2 Level 1: 13 (7%) Level 2: 163 (93%) n = 176	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 2 (1%) Level 2: 138 (76%) Level 3: 42 (23%) n = 182	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 459 (36%) Level 2: 770 (61%) Level 3: 43 (3%) n = 1,272 (37%)
Minor 1-3 Misd.	Level 1 Level 1: 1,575 (98%) Level 2: 37 (2%) n = 1,612	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 39 (19%) Level 2: 163 (80%) Level 3: 1 (1%) n = 203	Level 2 Level 1: 3 (2%) Level 2: 128 (95%) Level 3: 4 (3%) n = 135	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 1,617 (83%) Level 2: 328 (17%) Level 3: 5 (<1%) n = 1,950 (57%)
Total	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 2,030 (76%) Level 2: 630 (23%) Level 3: 29 (1%) n = 2,689 (78%)	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 52 (13%) Level 2: 341 (84%) Level 3: 13 (3%) n = 406 (12%)	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 5 (1%) Level 2: 271 (80%) Level 3: 64 (19%) n = 340 (10%)	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 2,087 (61%) Level 2: 1,242 (36%) Level 3: 106 (3%) N = 3,435 (100%)

Note: In FY 2023, there were 92 dispositions (or 3%) with a disposition not specified by the dispositional chart. However, certain provisions of the juvenile code allow a judge to impose a disposition other than those specified by the chart. Under G.S. 7B-2508(e), judges may find “extraordinary needs” and impose a lower level disposition. Under G.S. 7B-2508(d), juveniles adjudicated delinquent for an offense with a previous Level 3 disposition may be committed to a YDC. Under G.S. 7B-2508(g), juveniles adjudicated delinquent for a Minor offense with four or more prior adjudications may be committed to a YDC. Finally, under G.S. 7B-2508(g1), juveniles adjudicated of an offense that the court finds beyond a reasonable doubt was committed as part of criminal gang activity as defined in G.S. 7B-2508.1 shall receive a disposition one level higher than would otherwise be provided for the class of offense and delinquency history level.¹⁴

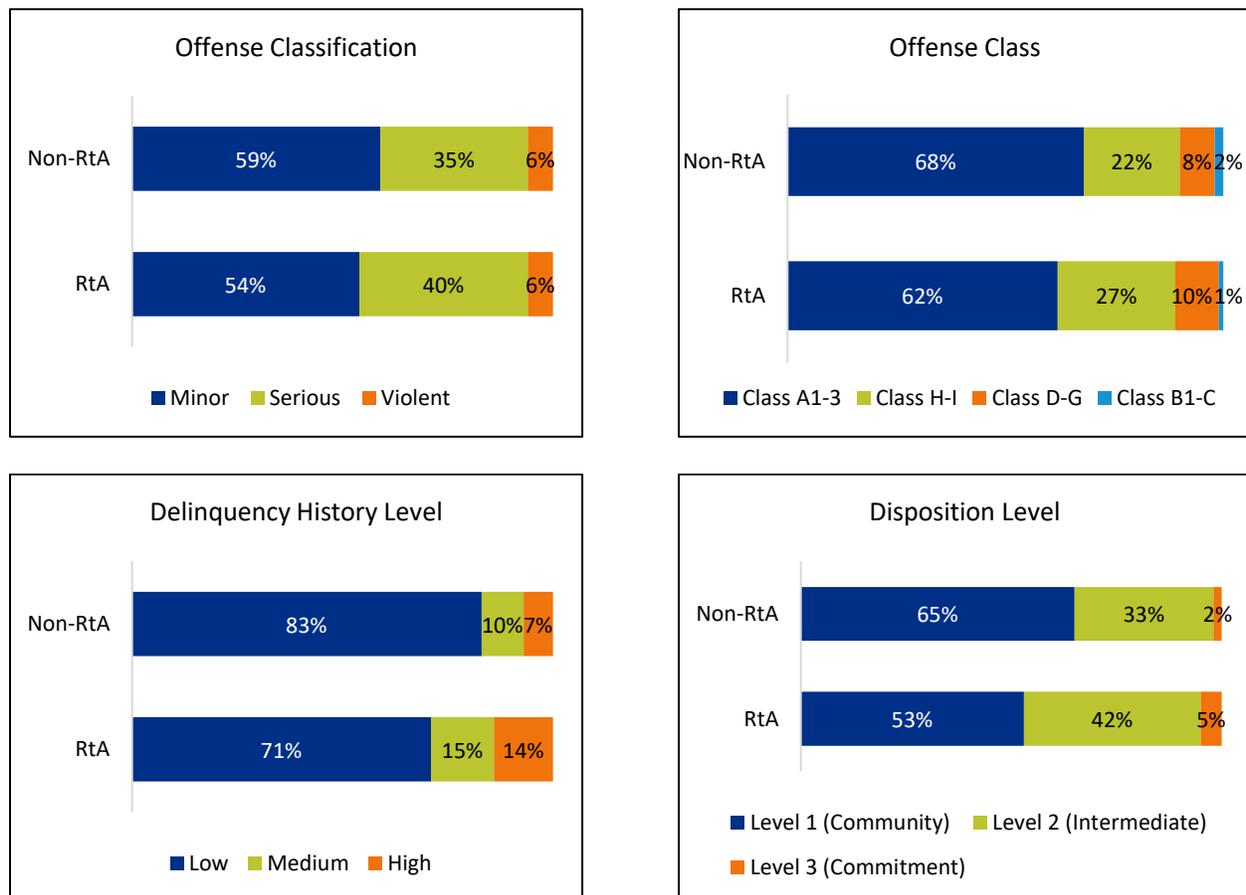
SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2023 Disposition Simulation Data

¹⁴ In FY 2023, no juveniles had their disposition level enhanced due to gang activity.

Comparison of Non-RtA and RtA Juveniles

FY 2023 was the third full year where empirical data for RtA juveniles adjudicated and disposed were available. Figure 4 examines the differences between non-RtA juveniles (those under age 16) and RtA juveniles (62% and 38% of the dispositions respectively). Overall, RtA juveniles were adjudicated of a higher percentage of offenses in the Serious classification, had more contact with the juvenile justice system (i.e., higher delinquency history levels), and had more serious dispositions imposed when compared to the younger, non-RtA juveniles.

Figure 4
Dispositions by Offense Classification and Class, Delinquency History, and Disposition Level:
A Comparison of Non-RtA (n=2,140) and RtA (n=1,295) Juveniles



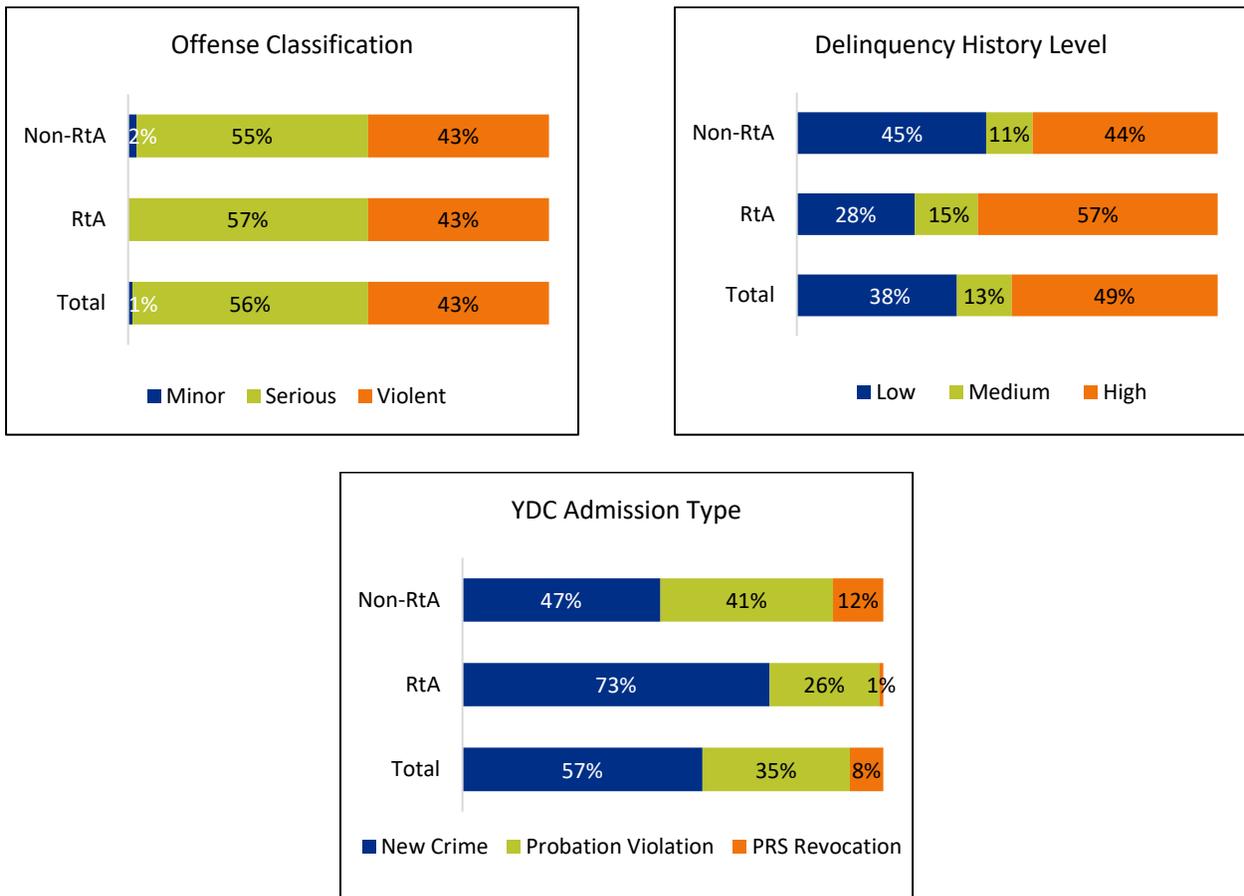
SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2023 Disposition Simulation Data

YDC Stock Population on June 30, 2023

The committed population or stock population is the number of juveniles committed to a YDC as of June 30, 2023, the beginning of the current projection period. Figure 5 shows the distribution of the 172 juveniles committed to a YDC on June 30, 2023, by offense classification and delinquency history level for the YDC population as a whole, as well as by age at offense (i.e., non-RtA and RtA). Thirty-nine percent (39% or 67) of the YDC population on June 30, 2023, were RtA juveniles. Most committed juveniles (95%) were adjudicated with a felony as their most serious offense; 43% were adjudicated of a

Violent offense, 56% of a Serious offense, and 1% of a Minor offense. The offense classification was similar between non-RtA and RtA juveniles, with Serious being the most common offense classification (55% for non-RtA and 57% for RtA). Almost half (49%) of juveniles had a High delinquency history level, 13% had a Medium delinquency history level, and 38% had a Low delinquency history level. RtA juveniles had a higher percentage with a High delinquency history level compared to non-RtA juveniles. Overall, 57% were committed to a YDC due to a new crime (i.e., new delinquent complaint), 35% for a probation violation, and 8% for a revocation of PRS. RtA juveniles had a much higher percentage entering a YDC due to a new crime compared to non-RtA juveniles.

Figure 5
YDC Stock Population



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2023 Disposition Simulation Data

Juvenile Justice Trends

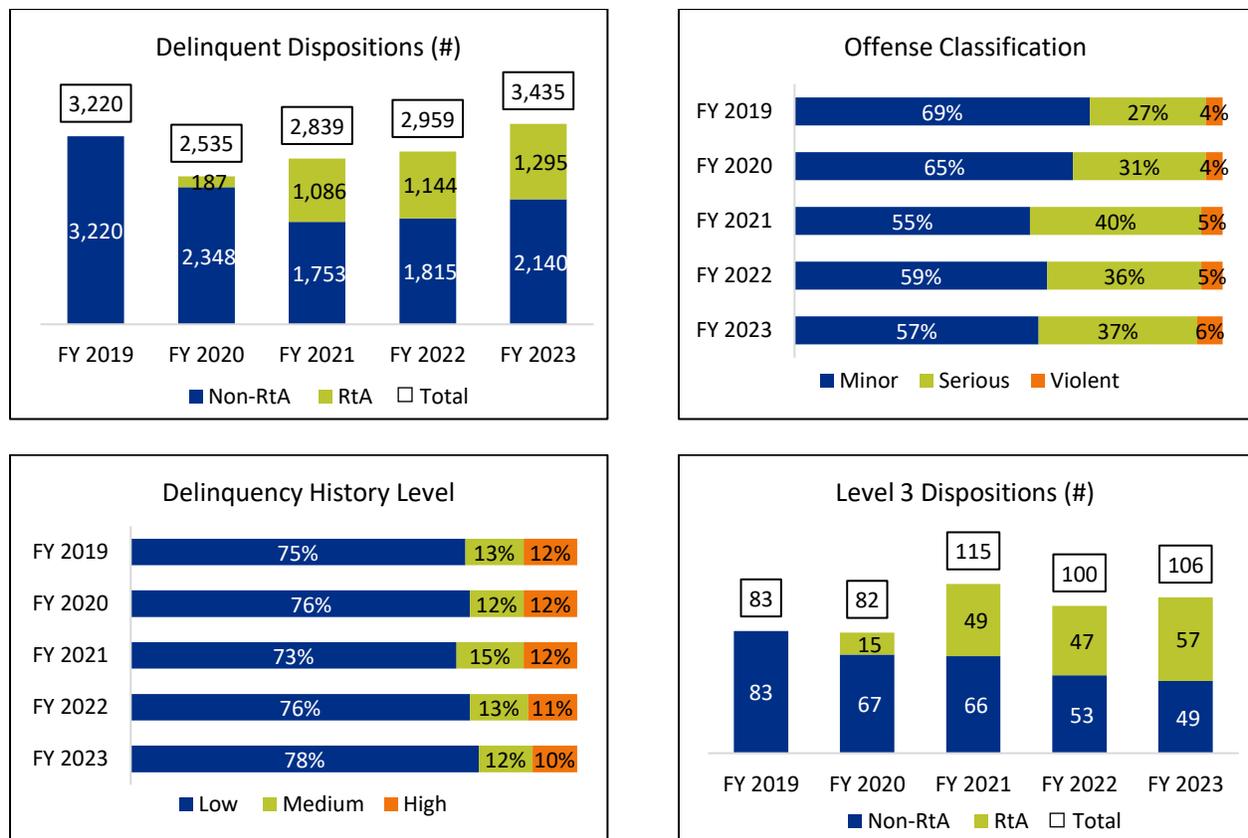
Changes in the juvenile justice system that affect the number of YDC admissions, the number of YDC releases, or the YDC length of stay (LOS) directly impact the accuracy of the projections. This section highlights juvenile justice statistics showing the year-to-year variations in key components used to produce the projections.

The 21% decrease from FY 2019 to FY 2020 in the number of delinquent dispositions can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic; dispositions gradually increased each year since FY 2020 (see Figure 6). Delinquent dispositions increased by 16% from FY 2022 to FY 2023, surpassing the number of dispositions in FY 2019 (prior to the RtA change), with increases for both groups (18% for non-RtA and 13% for RtA). RtA juveniles accounted for 38% of dispositions in FY 2023.

From FY 2019 to FY 2023, the distribution by offense classification shifted, with a higher percentage of juveniles adjudicated of a Serious offense and a lower percentage adjudicated of a Minor offense. These shifts occurred for both non-RtA and RtA juveniles. This trend may be reflective of policy changes (e.g., School Justice Partnership Program) and the impact of the pandemic, which may have resulted in the system focusing on the detection and resolution of more serious offenses as a priority. The percentage of Violent offenses increased slightly over this same time period.

Delinquency history trends have been stable; most juveniles had a Low delinquency history level (see Figure 6). In FY 2023, the delinquency history of RtA juveniles was 71% Low, 15% Medium, and 14% High compared to non-RtA juveniles at 83% Low, 10% Medium, and 7% High.

Figure 6
Juvenile Disposition Trends



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 - FY 2023 Disposition Simulation Data

The number of Level 3 dispositions fluctuated between a low of 82 in FY 2020 and a high of 115 in FY 2021, with a 6% increase in the number of Level 3 dispositions from FY 2022 to FY 2023 (see Figure 6). Level 3 dispositions decreased 8% for non-RtA juveniles and increased by 21% for RtA juveniles between FY 2022 and FY 2023.

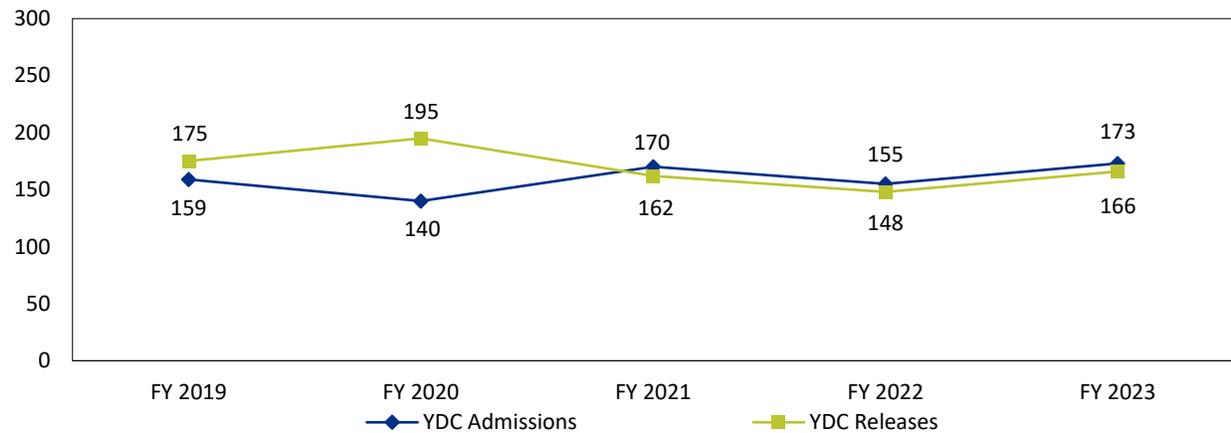
Over the past five years, YDC admissions and releases have fluctuated due to effects of the JJRA and the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 5 and Figure 7). In FY 2023, YDC admissions and releases increased by 12% each, close to FY 2021 numbers; the average number of YDC admissions and releases per month was 14.

Table 5
YDC Admissions and Releases

Fiscal Year	YDC Admissions			YDC Releases		
	Total Number	Percent Change	Average Number Per Month	Total Number	Percent Change	Average Number Per Month
2019	159	-22	13	175	7	15
2020	140	-12	12	195	11	16
2021	170	21	14	162	-17	14
2022	155	-9	13	148	-9	12
2023	173	12	14	166	12	14

SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Figure 7
YDC Admissions and Releases



SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The overall LOS for committed juveniles has remained fairly stable despite the declines in delinquent dispositions and the fluctuations in Level 3 dispositions, YDC admissions, and YDC releases. In FY 2023, the overall average LOS was 13 months, a slight increase compared to the previous year (see Table 6). The average LOS for juveniles adjudicated of a Violent offense was 14 months, the average LOS for juveniles adjudicated of a Serious offense was 12 months, and the average LOS for juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense was 6 months.

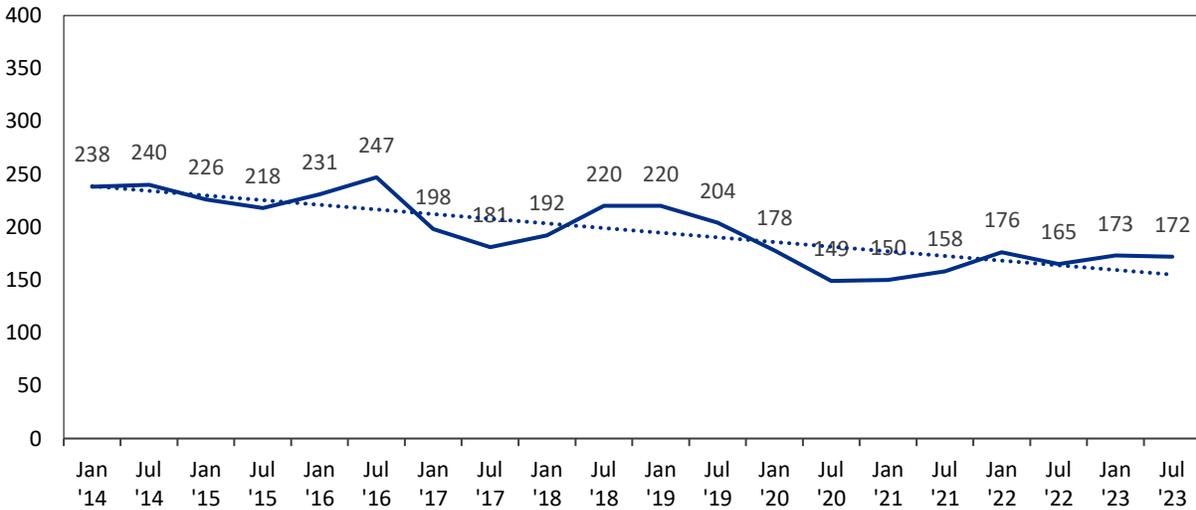
Table 6
Average Length of Stay for YDC Releases

Offense Classification	Length of Stay (in months) by Fiscal Year					% Change	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	FY 2022 to FY 2023	FY 2019 to FY 2023
Violent Offense	16	17	14	13	14	8	-13
Serious Offense	12	14	12	11	12	9	0
Minor Offense	7	9	9	5	6	20	-14
Overall	14	14	13	12	13	8	-7

SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Figure 8 provides an examination of the YDC population on the first day of each month over the past ten years. Overall, the YDC population has decreased 28%. The highest population was in July 2016 at 247 juveniles and the lowest population was during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020) at 149 juveniles. Since 2020, the YDC population has been increasing as courts have resumed to normal operations.

Figure 8
YDC Population Trends: January 2014 to July 2023



SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Committed Youth Report*