



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

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Wisconsin DOC Launches Behavioral Motivation System at Juvenile Facilities

Count-appointed Monitor believes it will have positive impact

Madison, Wis. - The latest Monitor's Report for Lincoln Hills School/Copper Lake School discusses the new behavioral motivation system the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) has implemented at the schools to reinforce prosocial behavior among youth, just the latest example of the Evers Administration's commitment to upgrading conditions at the facility and improving outcomes for youth in the criminal justice system.

The behavioral motivation system is rooted in positive reinforcement, providing youth in DOC care the chance to earn rewards for good behavior. The youth earn behavior grades based on their prosocial and antisocial behaviors in a given week, with the grade determining the amount of rewards and privileges they earn the following week.

The [Monitor's Report](#), filed Tuesday, notes some youth are still struggling with the change.

"The youth also indicated they liked the old system because they could 'buy' the things they wanted versus now-- where they are required to earn the things that they wanted through following the rules/being on good behavior and exhibiting pro-social skills," the Monitor wrote, adding that she has seen similar systems used in other juvenile correctional jurisdictions and believes it "will have a positive impact on conditions of confinement for youth over time."

The 15th Report from the Monitor also looked at staffing, particularly safety staffing at the schools, which has been a point of concern for the Monitor and DOC this year. This latest Report notes that while staffing levels continued to pose problems intermittently during this reporting period (August – October), recent hires in the safety ranks have significantly boosted staffing levels.

Some days and times during the reporting period, vacant positions coupled with day-of call outs from safety staff required keeping youth in their rooms for longer than normal and providing education in the housing units instead of the school building.

"When there were adequate staffing levels, youth went to school, were outside, in music lab, in the recreation unit, and out of their rooms," the Report stated.

“Some days we could not meet our goal to have youth out of their rooms for at least 12 hours every day,” DOC Secretary Kevin Carr said. “While we appreciate the Monitor supporting our decision to modify operations to ensure the safe supervision of youth, this Administration will continue to seek every avenue to recruit new staff to Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake so we can safely meet the standards we have set.”

Some of those recruiting efforts are already paying off. DOC has seen an increased interest in youth counselor and youth counselor-advanced positions, with the Monitor’s Report stating the agency filled 21 of these safety positions during the reporting period. That includes 17 who graduated from the Division of Juvenile Corrections training academy in mid-November and are completing the on-the-job portion of their training.

“At the time of the site visit, (the) majority of the units had adequate direct-care staffing,” the Monitor wrote. “The significant hiring in the youth counselor classifications should provide for more available staff which will hopefully result in youth spending more time out of their room, off units, and in the school area.”

That statement proved to be prophetic in the weeks following the Monitor’s visit. Here is a look at the percentage of out-of-room time received during the week of Nov. 28 for youth in general population living units at Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake:

- Rogers Unit – 70.24 out of 84 scheduled hours (84%)
- Miller Unit – 68.57 out of 84 scheduled hours (82%)
- Hughes Unit – 74.58 out of scheduled 84 hours (89%)
- Roosevelt Unit – 84 out of 84 scheduled hours (100%)
- King Unit – 84 out of 84 scheduled hours (100%)

“We’re trending in the right direction,” said Division of Juvenile Corrections (DJC) Administrator Ron Hermes. “We’ve been able to meet our goal of at least 12 hours of out-of-room time for more youth, more often. The influx of new hires should help us keep moving in that direction and meet the standards this Administration has set.”

Other highlights from this reporting period include:

- Continued positive attitude of both youth and staff. The Monitor noted a positive body language and tone during her in-person visit, and wrote that random reviews of 50 videos from the housing units showed staff engaged with youth in multiple activities
- The education department at the facility has been evaluating recommendations from an education consultant and developing strategies to implement those suggestions
- DOC altered its staffing schedule. Staff prefer the new schedule, which also allowed the agency to reduce the amount of modified programming time when youth are in their rooms and cannot do their education work in the school building
- DOC is in “substantial compliance” with two more elements of the consent decree

The Monitor was appointed by the courts following a 2015 FBI investigation and a 2017 lawsuit against the Walker Administration related to conditions at Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake, resulting in financial settlements and a consent decree containing dozens of benchmarks for the DOC to meet. Conditions under the previous administration also led to the passage of 2017 Act 185. Among other things, the legislation called for closing Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake and building smaller state-run juvenile correctional facilities.

The DOC is currently working with the City of Milwaukee and area legislators to gather community input on a proposed site for a new juvenile facility in north Milwaukee. The agency recently hosted three informational sessions where subject-matter experts answered questions about the design and safety of the proposed facility, as well as programs offered to youth in DOC care. More meetings are scheduled before the City makes a final decision on approving the site. You can see artist renderings and learn more about DOC’s plans for juvenile corrections on the agency’s [New Juvenile Facility](#) page.

