



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 9, 2022

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Staff, Youth Positive Despite Staffing Situation at Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake

Recent and upcoming hires will bolster workforce at the juvenile facilities

Madison – A steadily increasing population continues to create challenges at Lincoln Hills School/Copper Lake School, according to the latest report from a court appointee assigned to monitor conditions at the schools. However, the latest report from the Monitor reflects improved youth attitudes, a positive and engaged staff, and an increase in hires that led to August data showing significantly reduced use of operational room confinement, increased recreation time and more education activities taking place in the school building.

The [14th Report from the Monitor](#), like the previous one three months ago, underscores that an increasing population at the schools, coupled with a staffing shortage, has had a negative impact at the state juvenile correctional facilities, at times leading to education being held in the housing units instead of the school building, more room confinement and more idle time for youth.

“It has certainly been difficult on the youth in our care and a challenge for our staff,” said Department of Corrections (DOC) Secretary Kevin Carr. “Thankfully, we’ve been able to ease the burden a bit with recent hires and we have more staff reinforcements on the way.”

The Monitor’s report notes the hiring of five new teachers. In addition, three new youth counselors recently joined the safety staff at the facilities, and 7 more graduated from the Division of Juvenile Corrections (DJC) Academy last week. DJC also has a large number of potential youth counselor hires going through the application process, mirroring the increase in applications DOC has seen since the start of the summer for security positions in its adult facilities.

The Evers Administration approved a series of salary add-ons earlier this year, adding up to an \$11/hour pay increase for safety staff at some DOC institutions, including Lincoln Hills School/Copper Lake School. In addition, DOC has further expanded its advertising and recruiting efforts.

“We’re excited about the new staff who will be joining the team at the schools,” said DJC Administrator Ron Hermes. “The added staff will help us increase programming, and reduce idle time and room confinement like we and the Monitor want.”

The report, filed with the court Friday, details that the DOC remains in substantial or partial compliance with every aspect of the consent decree on which the Monitor is there to report. It also states youth were “much more

positive” during her mid-August visit than they were during her previous visit in April and had fewer complaints. However, the report notes some complaints from youth about being bored, being confined to their rooms too often and wanting more recreation time.

The Monitor also points out staff attitudes were more positive than expected given the day-to-day staffing challenges.

“The Monitor reviewed video during the reporting period to view day room activities and in every instance (45 video reviews) staff were engaged with youth when they were out of their rooms doing a variety of things such as eating, arts and crafts, groups, helping with school work, recreation, Grandparent program visits, and conversing,” the report stated.

The report also shared a specific example of positive staff engagement with youth observed during her recent visit, stating, “The staff member was overheard asking the youth to uncover his window. The youth asked why, and the staff member replied stating, ‘because I care about you and I want to make sure you are safe.’ The youth uncovered his window and said thank you.”

Other highlights from the latest reporting period:

- School leadership is actively implementing a behavioral motivation system the Monitor believes will have a positive impact on youth, and that staff believe will help them more effectively motivate youth behaviors.
- Youth were in good spirits and engaged when she toured the living units.
- Construction of an outdoor visitation area for youth and their families has been completed.
- New water bottle refilling units have been ordered and should be installed by the end of summer.
- Overall youth incidents decreased during the April 22 data collection cycle.
- The facilities have still had zero usage of chemical agents since the October 2019 data collection cycle.