



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

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August 1 Incident at Lincoln Hills Prompts Operational Changes

New Behavior Management Tool Seen as Key to Preventing Future Incidents

Madison -- The Wisconsin Department of Corrections has instituted additional operational changes following a thorough review of an incident at Lincoln Hills School/Copper Lake School in which youth caused around \$3,300 in damage to the facility.

On August 1, a group of youth ran from their escorts while walking back to their housing unit. Some in the group then broke exterior windows to other housing units, allowing more youth into the yard. In all, 15 windows were broken.

The changes made following this incident include:

- Adjusting recreation times so multiple units are not outside at the same time
- Creating a practice of securing recreation equipment (students used basketballs to break windows during the incident)
- Increasing frequency of ground searches to pick up debris that can be utilized to break windows
- Installing safety screens on windows of the living units

The safety screens are a temporary safety measure until a previously-planned project to install security glass windows is completed in 2021.

“The windows we will be installing next year cannot be easily broken,” noted DOC Division of Juvenile Corrections Administrator Ron Hermes. “This will keep any future situations from growing, as this one did, when windows were broken to allow more youth outside.”

In addition to the attack glass, a separate project likely to begin this fall should reduce the ability of youth to access roofs as some did during the August 1 incident. Staff are also making procedural adjustments to better control the entrance and exit of youth through the main doors of housing units.

Details of the Incident

Eight youths started the incident around 10:45 a.m. by breaking away from their escort following a recreation period. The number of youth involved fluctuated over a period of hours as some were returned to their units and others escaped through the broken windows. A review of staff reports found the number rose from 8 to 17, then was brought back down

to 8 before rising as high as 24 before the incident ended just after 5:00 p.m. No youth attempted to leave the property and they all were quickly returned to their rooms after local law enforcement arrived.

Staff did use force on several occasions to subdue youth before taking them back to their housing units. Through much of the incident, however, staff monitored and verbally engaged with the youth in an effort to avoid escalating the situation. Multiple staff members reported hearing youth make verbal threats toward them over the course of the event.

One staff member was struck by a youth trying to run from a unit while a door was briefly opened. The DOC has forwarded information about this youth's actions to local authorities for potential charges.

Six other staff members suffered minor injuries, from being injured by broken glass to rolling an ankle. Fourteen youth suffered minor injuries, primarily small cuts from glass, and one was taken to a nearby medical facility after suffering a severe cut on the arm as the result of breaking a window.

Staff interviewed all the youth involved and did not find a single motivation for their actions. Reasons given included boredom, inability to live in a different unit and personality conflicts with certain staff members. Those interviews indicate there was some planning to cause a disturbance, but some youth conceded afterward that it got out of hand and went further than intended.

“While there were up to 24 youth involved at one point, we only know of nine involved in the property damage and smashing of windows that escalated the situation,” said Lincoln Hills School/Copper Lake School Superintendent Klint Trevino.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy Could be a Game-Changer

“We’re confident the Dialectical Behavior Therapy we are instituting facility-wide will, in the future, help us avoid and resolve situations like the one on August 1st,” said Hermes. “It’s the next step in transforming the schools from a traditional incarceration setting to a facility focused on rehabilitation and treatment.”

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is an evidenced-based treatment that promotes self-regulation and pro-social interpersonal skills as a way to help youth understand the cues that trigger their emotions. Training of facility staff in DBT started in August in preparation for making it part of the standard behavioral motivation programming for all youth.

“The goal is to continue to grow the level of engagement, and to reduce the amount of physical interventions and overall rates of incidents involving the youth in our care,” Hermes explained.

DBT was originally used as a therapy for individuals with suicidal behaviors and borderline personality disorders. Over time, it has proven to be a very effective cognitive behavioral therapy for youth experiencing significant trouble managing their emotions, thoughts and behaviors. The states of Massachusetts, Washington and Utah have implemented DBT in their youth correction facilities.