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Police investigate allegations of abuse at Western Avenue

BY ERIC CRUMP

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Flossmoor police and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office are continuing to investigate allegations of child sexual abuse by a member of the Western Avenue School staff that were reported last fall.

The victim's lawyer, Mark Brown, said the abuse took place at the school over a period of four years and reportedly ended about a decade ago. The child is now 17 years old.

Brown said the child has suffered for years from the trauma but the situation was not revealed to her family until she confided in her therapist in fall 2021.

"She had been living in silence all these years and was tortured by this," Brown said. He said her parents and family members noticed changes, "but they never knew what the root cause of this was until this came out."

Brown said, having represented sexual abuse victims knows victims, often live with the trauma in silence for long periods of time, believing they have no recourse.

Flossmoor police and the state's attorney's office were notified, and the staff member was put on paid leave when

the allegation was made and remains on leave, according to Flossmoor School District 161 Superintendent Dana Smith.

Flossmoor Police Chief Tod Kamleiter confirmed the investigation is still being conducted. The state's attorney's office also confirmed the investigation is ongoing, but declined to provide more details.

The family says the initial investigation began in October. A District 161 memo to parents states the investigation concluded late in the fall without charges being filed.

Brown said the state's attorney's office confirmed the investigation resumed on Dec. 20, but the district did not communicate that fact to the school community until Feb. 18, after news reports about the investigation were published.

In the Feb. 18 memo, Smith said the district was notified that day that the investigation had resumed, and he told the Chronicle he stands by the statement.

Brown said the family hopes the district will keep the community informed about any further developments in the case.

"The family is hopeful there will be charges eventually but they understand that the police detectives are working hard in their investigation and are trying not to disturb that," Brown said.

D153 lines up construction crews for summer work at three schools

BY MARILYN THOMAS

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The District 153 school board on March 21 approved six contracts totaling \$4.03 million for construction work this summer at Willow, Churchill and James Hart Schools in Homewood.

The board sold \$8.2 million in bonds to finance the work, and is using \$1.2 million in pandemic relief appropriated through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for improvements to school buildings.

The work will include updates to the HVAC systems in each of the schools; adding two classrooms at Churchill; adding a mobile unit at Willow with four classrooms and two offices; replacing the boilers at James Hart and Willow; installing new window coverings in all buildings for greater energy efficiency; roof repairs at the three schools; renovations to all school bathrooms.

The contracts are:

- \$1,034,275 contract to Chicago Heights Construction Co. for general trades work at the three schools.

- \$892,000 contract to Helm Mechanical for HVAC work at Churchill.

- \$1,272,460 contract to Quality Control Systems, Inc. for HVAC work at James Hart and Willow.

- \$495,000 contract to Interactive Building Solutions, LLC for temperature controls at Willow, Churchill and James Hart.

- \$336,700 contract to McWilliams Electric Co. for electrical work at the three schools.

- \$190,200 contract to McWilliams Electric Co. for the electrical service update at Churchill and a new boiler and pump electrical panel at Willow.

The board also awarded a \$29,762 contract to Hygieneering, Inc. for asbestos abatement. Because the schools were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, asbestos was used as an insulator. It has since been registered as a carcinogen. None of the asbestos is exposed to students or staff, but Superintendent Scott McAlister said he expects when construction begins that asbestos may be disturbed in the buildings. Hygieneering will assure that workers properly handle the removal of the asbestos.



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