
Facility Report



Monitoring Visit to Illinois Youth Center – Warrenville 2021

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Key Observations

1. The demographics of Warrenville's population have changed substantially since prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In early 2020, before the pandemic, Warrenville primarily housed female and younger male youth. As of October 2021, half of Warrenville's population were male youth aged 17 and older.
2. Many older youth at Warrenville reported to JHA during the visit that they felt like they were being treated like children because of differences in rules and policies between Warrenville and other IDJJ facilities where they had previously been incarcerated.
3. Most educational and vocational opportunities for high school graduates had been suspended, leaving youth who had transferred to Warrenville to participate in them without classes.
4. Warrenville administrators reported the staff was dedicated to fostering a "culture of engagement" with mental health through policies that encouraged a high level of interaction between youth and the mental health team.
5. Youth were able to maintain contact with and continue treatment with the mental health staff they worked with in IDJJ facilities after release as long as they remained on IDJJ Aftercare, which is a new practice within IDJJ since JHA's 2018 visit to Warrenville.
6. Warrenville's limits for what youth could spend on snacks, which are low compared to other IDJJ facilities, were a source of frustration for youth.

Recommendations

1. Standardize rules and policies across IDJJ facilities to the extent practicable.
2. Establish some structured programming for youth on quarantine who are unable to participate in indoor programming outside their living unit.
3. Prioritize restarting the DuPage College program and the barbering/cosmetology program to provide youth graduates at Warrenville with some higher educational/vocational opportunity.
4. Increase wages for youth to approximate what they would be able to expect at similar jobs in the community.
5. Allow youth to expand their community support structure beyond their family.
6. Adopt a policy throughout IDJJ of assigning youth to mental health professionals (MHPs) based on individualized criteria.
7. Offer continued treatment with IDJJ MHPs after release to all youth released from IDJJ facilities, not just those released on Aftercare.
8. Ensure that discipline is uniform through IDJJ and both relevant and appropriately calibrated to the action for which the youth is being disciplined.
9. Include the use of building restrictions as punishment in monthly public reporting.
10. Standardize commissary spending limits across facilities.
11. Put in place a similar minimal state pay scheme, as exists in adult corrections in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), to ensure that all youth have money in their trust funds.
12. Loosen restrictions for phone calls and visitation with people outside of youths' family, regardless of behavioral level, and always allow phone calls and visitation for any person with whom the youth has a child absent a compelling reason, such as an order or protection.

Introduction

Illinois Youth Center – Warrenville (Warrenville) is a mixed security-level coed facility for the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ). Warrenville is IDJJ's only facility that houses a female population. It is located in Naperville, Illinois, about fifty minutes west of Chicago.

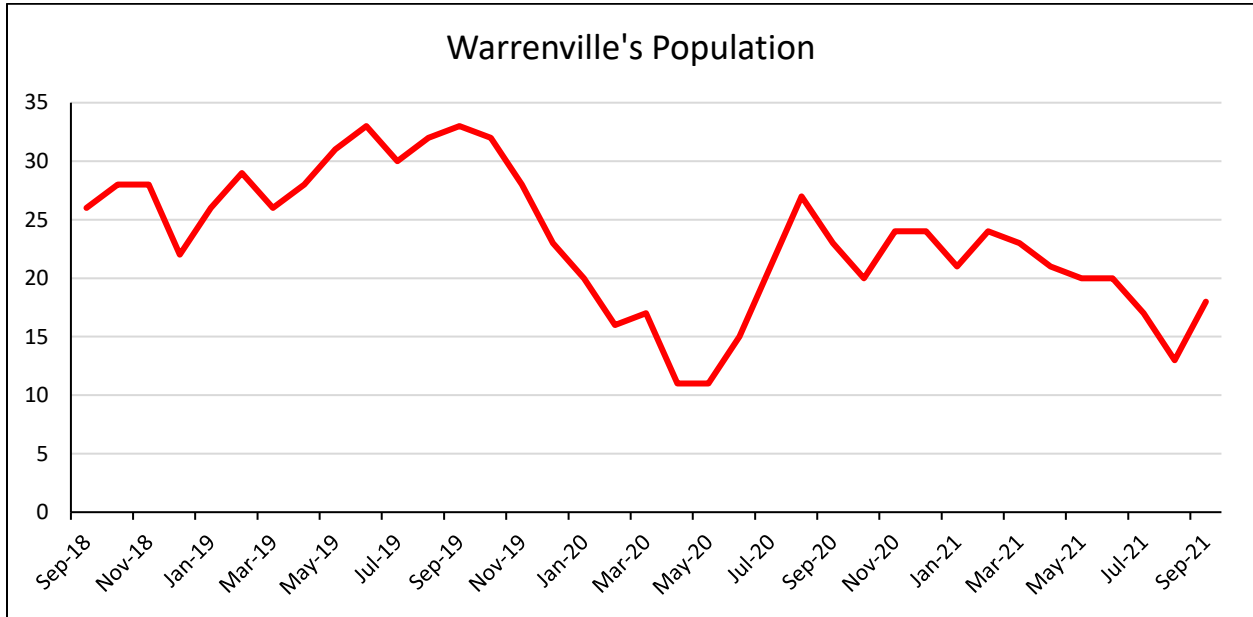
Warrenville serves as the reception and classification center for all female youth and for male youth ages thirteen and fourteen. The John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA) visited Warrenville on October 21, 2021. This was JHA's first visit to Warrenville since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the date of the visit, 24 youth were incarcerated at Warrenville. IDJJ's monthly reports show that as of [September 2021](#), there were an average of 111 youth in IDJJ.



Population

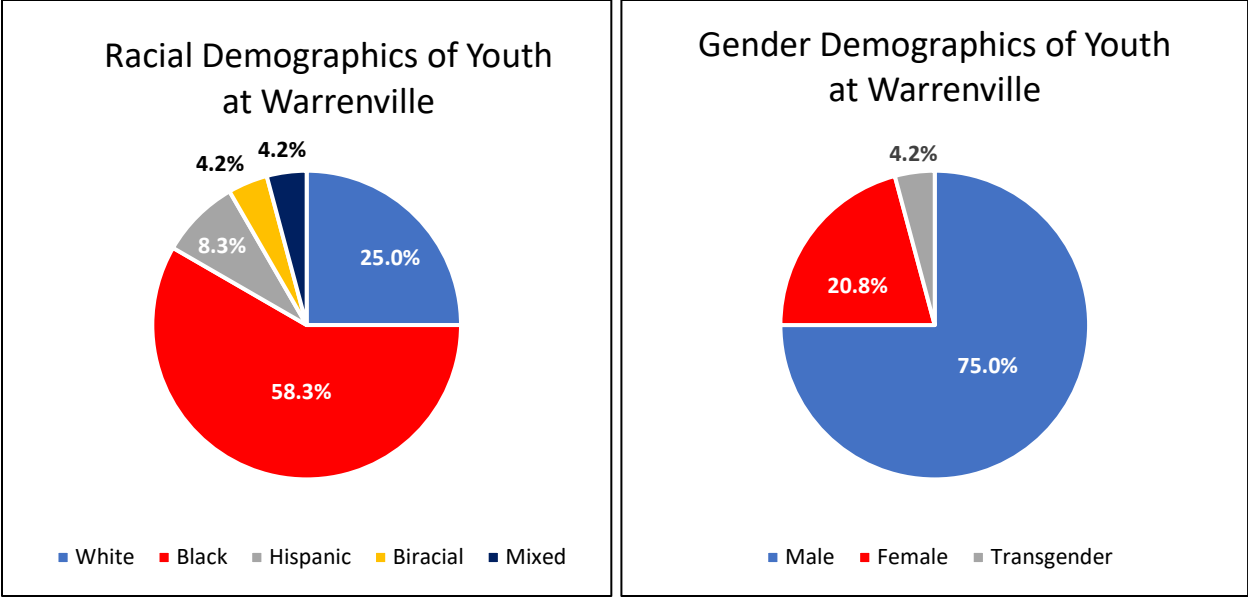
At the time of JHA's 2021 visit, the facility had a population of 24 youth. According to the IDJJ's [September 2021 monthly report](#), Warrenville's average population from January 2021 to September 2021 was 19.5, compared to an average population of 19 in 2020 and 29 in 2019. In February 2020, immediately pre-COVID, IDJJ's [monthly report](#) indicated that Warrenville's

average population was 18, meaning that unlike other IDJJ facilities, Warrenville's population had not shown a sustained drop over the course of the pandemic. The population of 24 put Warrenville at 34% of its reported capacity of 70.

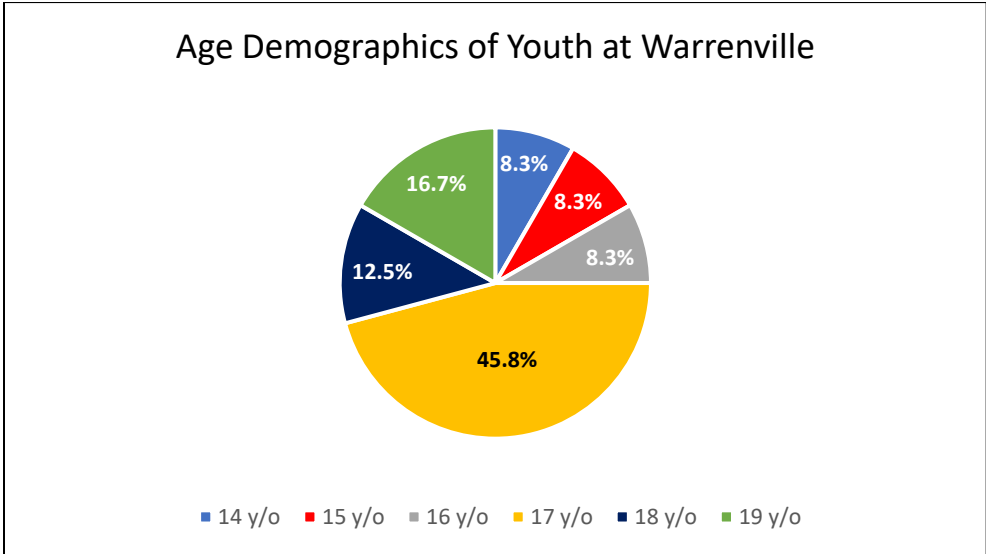


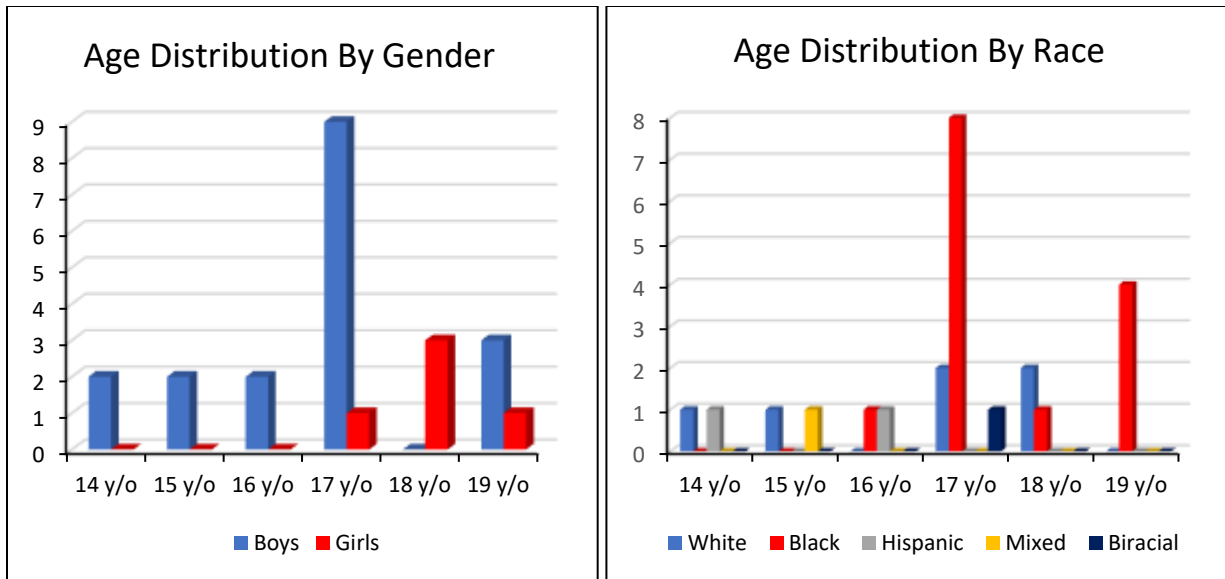
Data given to JHA by administrators indicated that 25% (6) of youth were White, 58% (14) were Black, 8% (2) were Hispanic, 4% (1) were mixed, and 4% (1) were biracial.¹ 75% (18) were male and 21% (5) were female. One youth had their gender recorded as transgender, but it was unclear from IDJJ's data provided to JHA how the youth identified or where they were housed. 60% (3) of the five female youth were White compared to 40% (2) who were Black, while of 18 male youth, 61% (11) were Black, 17% (3) were White, 11% (2) were Hispanic, one youth was bi-racial and one was mixed. The transgender youth was Black.

¹ Racial categories reflect those used by IDJJ in the data provided to JHA.



According to administrators, the average age of youth at Warrentville was 17, which was older than it had been prior to the pandemic and was the same as the average age across IDJJ. Data provided by IDJJ indicated that 75% of youth at Warrentville were 17 years old or older. Female youth were concentrated at the older end of the spectrum, with the youngest of the five being 17. Black youth likewise tended to be older, with the youngest youth whose race was identified as Black being 16 years old. In comparison, the youngest White youth and the youngest Hispanic youth at Warrentville were both 14 years old, and the youngest youth whose race was identified as mixed was 15 years old.

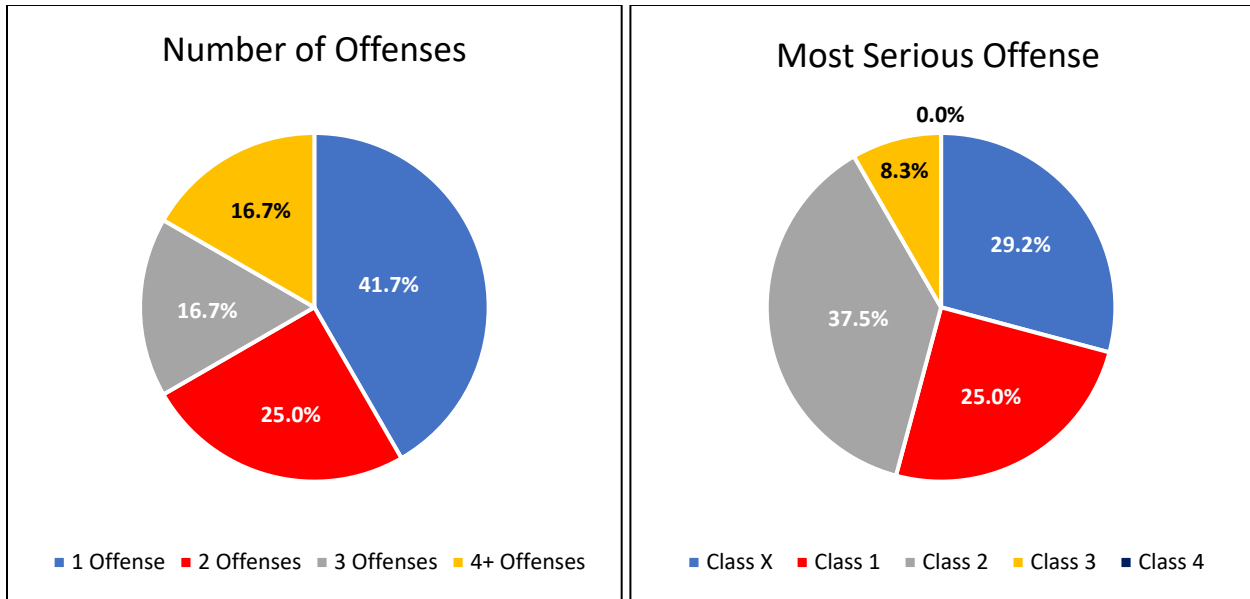




Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, Warrentville has seen a significant shift in the demographics of the youth housed there. Prior to COVID-19, Warrentville housed female and younger male youth. At the time of our visit, however, 50% of the population was comprised of males aged 17 and older. Administrators told us that five youth, four boys and one girl—more than 20% of the population—were high school graduates.

42% of youth at Warrentville had only been convicted of or adjudicated on one offense, 25% had been convicted of or adjudicated on two offenses, 17% on three offenses, and 17% on four or more offenses. The most serious offense of which a youth had been convicted or adjudicated was a Class X offense for 29% of youth, a Class 1 offense for 25% of youth, a Class 2 offense for 38% of youth, and a Class 3 offense for 8% of youth. 37.5% of the youth at Warrentville had been convicted of felonies in adult court. Of those nine youth, eight were Black and one was Hispanic.

Administrators told JHA visitors that four youth at Warrentville had had their adult sentences commuted to juvenile terms through the clemency program formed in partnership with Northwestern Law School. Reportedly, staff continued to identify youth who could potentially benefit from the program as they arrived.



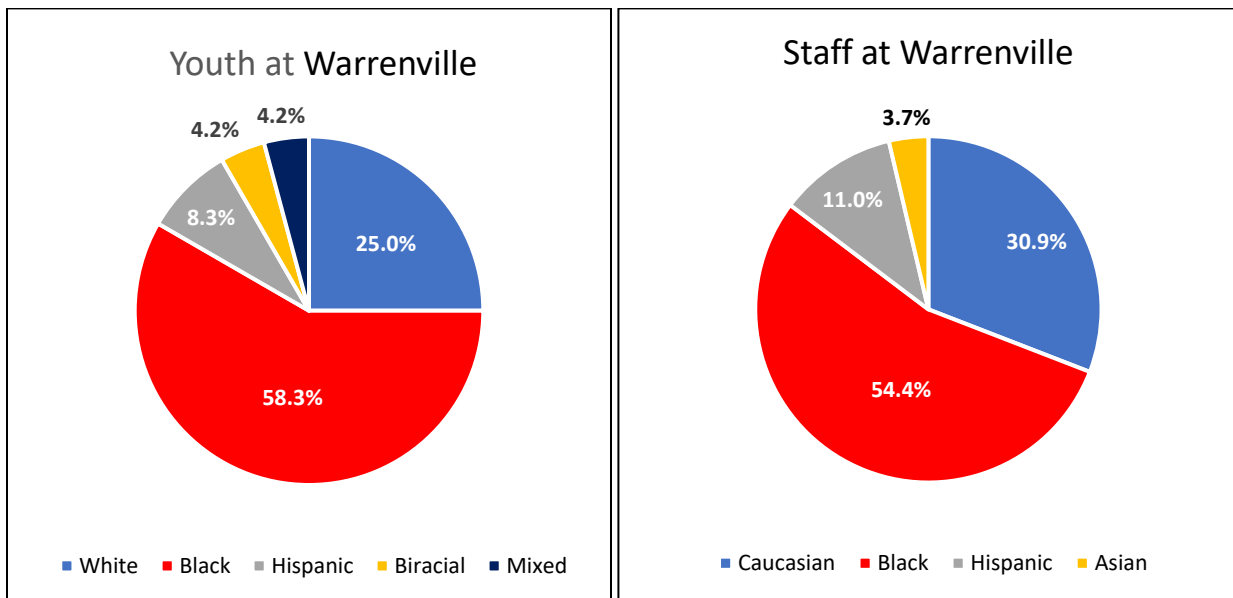
According to administrators, Warrenville does intake every two weeks and is the primary intake facility for male youth aged 13-15 and all female youth. Three female youth were reportedly on a reception and classification unit at the time of our visit. Administrators reported during JHA's visit that Warrenville's population had increased in the month prior to JHA's October 21, 2021 visit, but that this was mostly due to transfers from other Illinois Youth Centers (IYCs) and not due to an increase of IDJJ intake from county juvenile detention centers.

Administrators explained that male youth are often assigned to an IYC based on the location of their family and their programming interests. Additionally, youth who enter IDJJ through either St. Charles or Harrisburg may be transferred to Warrenville if they are young. Male youth who enter IDJJ through Warrenville may be transferred to another facility based on a need for programming not offered at Warrenville, such as substance abuse treatment, or if a higher security environment is deemed necessary. Additionally, male youth who have been adjudicated as guilty of sex offenses reportedly do not stay at Warrenville because of the presence of female youth, and because the formal IDJJ sex offender treatment program is only offered at Harrisburg. All female youth who enter the IDJJ facility system are incarcerated at Warrenville.

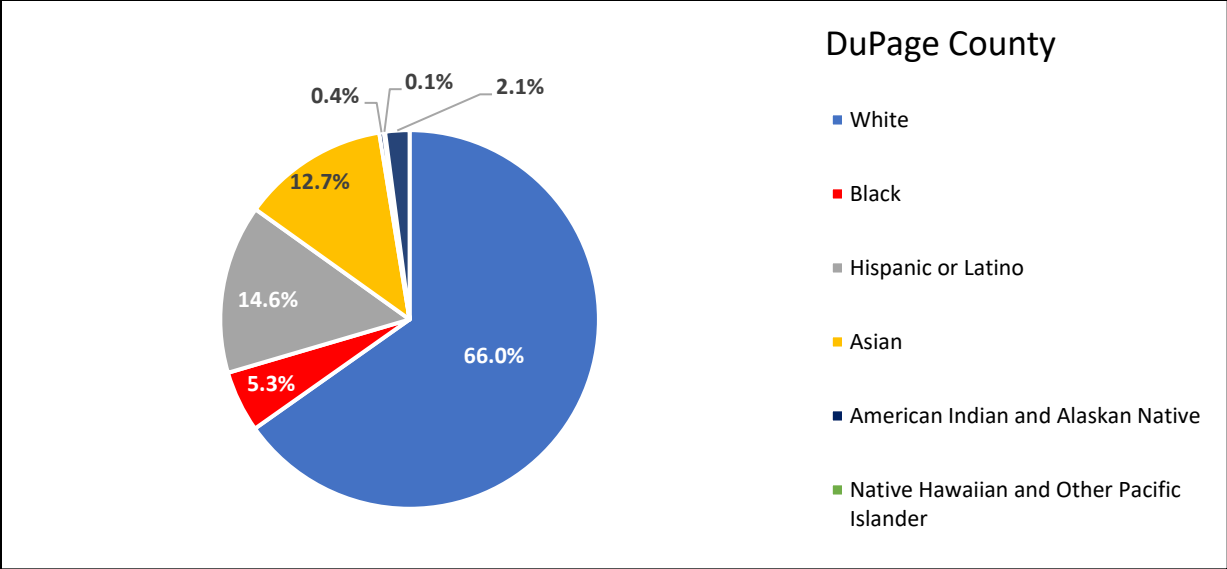
Staff

Administrators reported that Warrenville was fully staffed in all major departments, such as security, mental health, and direct care. However, there were sixteen staff on long term leaves. Warrenville administrators also reported that while both of their allotted Leisure Time Associate (LTA) positions were filled, they could use a third LTA.

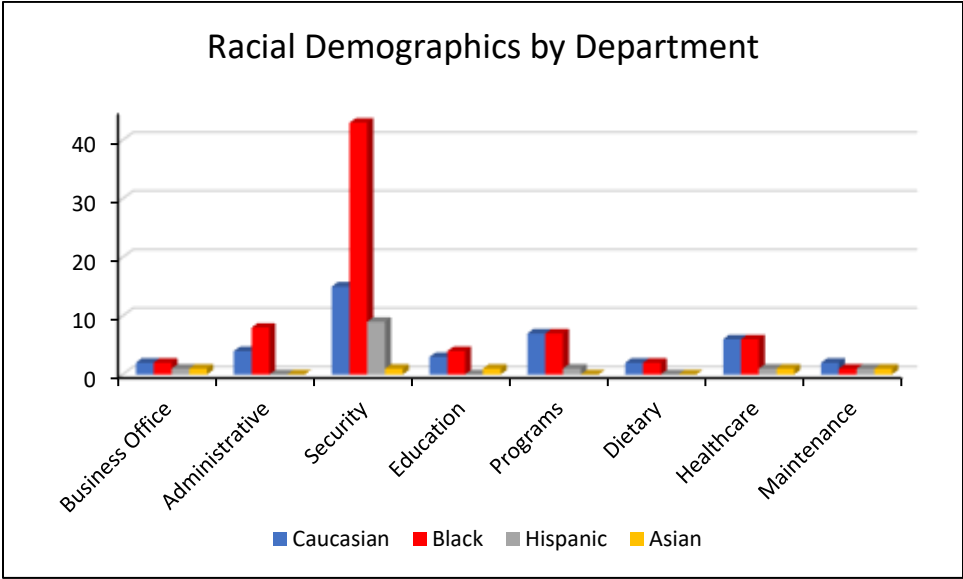
According to data provided to JHA by Warrenville, 59% (80) of IDJJ staff at the facility were women and 41% (52) were men. 31% (42) of staff were Caucasian, 54% (74) were Black, 11% (15) were Hispanic, and 4% (5) were Asian.² The largest demographic of staff at Warrenville was Black women, followed by Black men, and then White women. The racial demographics of the staff at Warrenville reflected the demographics of the youth at Warrenville more closely than those of [DuPage County](#), which is 66% White. When staff and incarcerated people are divided along racial lines, it can lead to additional tension in the facility, so JHA was pleased to see that Warrenville had successfully been able to recruit a staff that reflected the makeup of their population.



² Racial categories reflect those in the used in the data IDJJ provided to JHA.



While 68 of the 132 total IDJJ staff at Warrenville were in the security department, Black and Hispanic staff were much more likely to be in security than White and Asian staff, who were more evenly distributed across departments. 59% of Black staff (43 of 73) and 69% of Hispanic staff (9 of 13) were security staff, compared to 37% of White staff (15 of 41) and 20% of Asian staff (1 of 5).



Staff Conduct

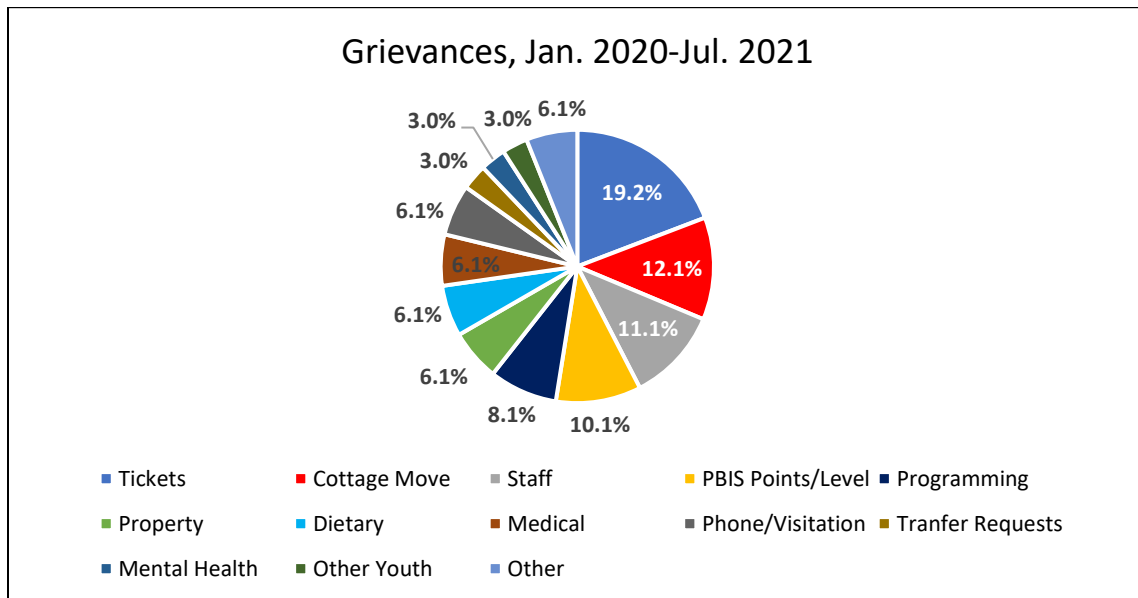
During the visit, youth's comments to JHA about Warrenville staff were mixed. Some shared positive views, such as a youth JHA spoke with at the facility who stated that they felt staff were respectful and that they liked Warrenville overall. Another youth told JHA visitors that he did not feel staff at Warrenville were racist, as he felt they had been at another IDJJ facility where he had been incarcerated. However, he also reported that staff took advantage of youth who did not know how they should be treated, and felt that he had been retaliated against for speaking up on behalf of himself and other youth and for contacting the [Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson \(OIJO\)](#). He reported that staff waited for him to act out so they could make an example of him. He also recalled that he had reported a member of staff for misconduct but did not know the status of the investigation because he had not been kept *"in the loop."* He felt that staff misconduct was swept under the rug.

Concerningly, another youth reported that there were a lot of shakedowns and strip searches without real cause. IDJJ administrators told JHA that IDJJ policy allows youth to be strip searched when they are received at intake, when they go on an off-grounds trip, after a visit, and when there is reasonable suspicion that they possess major contraband. IDJJ administrators reported that strip searches had occurred at Warrenville between January and October 2021 under those circumstances and that there had been one situation where major contraband was suspected on a living unit, but they did not have a record of the number of strip searches that had taken place. IDJJ's strip search policy was reportedly under review as of late January 2022.

Some youth also expressed feeling like the staff at Warrenville was not equipped to manage older youth. JHA spoke to two youth who said that they felt like they were treated like children because some rules at Warrenville were stricter than at other IDJJ facility. Youth mentioned, for example, lower commissary spending caps and stricter rules about what they were allowed to have in their cells at Warrenville compared to at other IDJJ facilities. **JHA recommends that IDJJ standardize rules for youth across IYCs, e.g., for commissary spending.**

According to data provided to JHA by Warrenville, grievances about staff made up 11% (11) of 99 grievances filed in 2020 and the first half of 2021 and were the third most common type of

grievance behind grievances about disciplinary tickets and requests to change housing units—referred to as “cottages” at Warrenville.



COVID-19

JHA visitors were asked for proof of vaccination before entering the facility, and one JHA visitor who had forgotten their vaccine card was given a COVID-19 rapid test by Warrenville medical staff. This was the first time JHA visitors had been tested or asked to produce proof of vaccination before entering a prison, and we were impressed with how the staff at Warrenville adhered to the COVID-19 protocols and testing procedures.

Around the time of JHA’s October 21, 2021 visit, DuPage County (where Warrenville is located) was reporting an average of 158.6 new cases daily and 17 positives per 100,000 people. At the time, DuPage County had seen a total of 108,979 cases of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. About 11.7% of the DuPage County population had tested positive for COVID-19 at some point. IDJJ’s [COVID-19 information page](#) reflected that as of January 5, 2022, eight youth and 36 staff at Warrenville had tested positive for COVID-19 at some point during the pandemic. However, IDJJ’s COVID-19 information page does not specify whether there are current positive cases at any of the IYCs. JHA is in the process of following up with IDJJ on this issue.

Masking and Sanitation

Administrators reported that the biggest challenge they were dealing with at the time of the October 2021 JHA visit relating to COVID-19 was getting youth to wear masks. Although observed masking compliance among youth was better at Warrenville than at some of the other IDJJ facilities JHA has visited since the beginning of the pandemic, JHA visitors witnessed many youth wearing masks on their chins and also noticed some staff wearing masks below their noses. JHA notes that [CDC guidance](#) indicates masks should be worn so that they completely cover the nose and mouth. A youth who spoke with JHA during our visit said that he felt staff needed to better comply with masking to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak in the facility.

A staff member in dietary explained that since the beginning of the COVID pandemic they had focused on sanitizing tables between uses and doorknobs in the dietary area. Reportedly, youth were required to sanitize their hands before eating, and each youth and staff member ate at their own table. JHA was in dietary during lunchtimes and witnessed tables being cleaned in between groups. IDJJ provided COVID-19 information sheets to JHA that had reportedly been distributed to youth, which explained how to socially distance and wear a mask correctly. A youth who had contracted COVID-19 at Warrenville told JHA visitors that though he thought COVID-19 protocols were pretty good at first, he no longer felt that way after an outbreak in the facility. He felt that more staff should be working remotely.

Quarantine Procedures

Administrators told JHA that youth were quarantined on their housing unit for seven days after arriving at Warrenville and were then released from quarantine after passing a screening. While quarantined, youth reportedly have daily contact with mental health staff. JHA visitors spoke to a youth who had just come off of quarantine the day before our visit. She reported that she had had outdoor recreation but had not attended school during the quarantine period, and that she had played a lot of cards in the dayroom. **JHA recommends that Warrenville establish some structured programming for youth on quarantine who are unable to participate in indoor programming outside their living unit.** IDJJ administrators reported that youth transferring from other youth centers are not required to quarantine on arrival because they must test negative prior to transfer.

IDJJ administrators stated that while all unvaccinated youth who are identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 are quarantined in their cells, vaccinated youth who are asymptomatic are not required to quarantine. Symptomatic youth were reportedly subject to the same quarantine procedures regardless of vaccination status.

Vaccination

Administrators reported that a total of 34 youth had been vaccinated at Warrenville. Of the 24 youth at Warrenville at the time of the visit, 15 had been fully vaccinated and two were waiting for a second dose. Reportedly, two of the vaccinated youth were already vaccinated when they entered the facility. 99 of the 130 staff at Warrenville were reported to be fully vaccinated, with three awaiting a second dose. This amounts to a vaccination rate of 63% for youth and 76% for staff. The staff vaccination rate was in line with the [vaccination rate](#) in DuPage county overall. JHA believes that there is no publicly available information about youth and staff vaccination rates across IDJJ. IDJJ administrators reported in January 2022 that COVID-19 boosters were available to youth, and that how often they were available depended on “availability of the vaccine, availability of eligible youth and potentially staff to be able to utilize the vial of the vaccine with limited waste.”

Administrators reported that there had been a recent influx of staff vaccinations after the state [vaccination mandate](#) was first announced on August 4, 2021. The mandate initially required those who worked in congregate care settings, such as prisons, to receive a single-dose vaccine or a two-dose series by October 4, 2021. The deadline was [extended](#) several times before being [upheld in arbitration](#) with a new deadline of January 31, 2022. Administrators also stated at the time of the October visit that they were planning to start requiring proof of vaccination from volunteers and employees of vendors that operate inside the facility. As of late January 2022, IDJJ administrators reported that volunteers and contractors were required to be vaccinated or to have an approved exemption.

According to administrators, youth must be vaccinated to participate in field trips and intramural basketball. While they prefer that staff attending the field trips be vaccinated, it is reportedly not a requirement. A youth who spoke with JHA during our visit said that he felt the vaccination

requirements for youth unfairly blamed youth for the possibility of COVID-19 entering the facility when the biggest risk was from staff. He did not understand why staff were not required to be vaccinated. Another youth likewise said that he thought staff needed to get vaccinated because they lived in the community and were the most likely to bring COVID-19 into the facility.

Physical Plant

At the time of JHA's October 2021 visit, administrators at Warrenville identified several physical plant areas that they had plans to improve. However, most of these repairs did not have scheduled start dates. Administrators told us that repairs to the external parking lot had been approved. After the external parking lot repairs had been made, there were plans to repair the pavement inside the facility as well. Administrators outlined their plans for an addition to the school and a new gym and multipurpose space, which they hoped would allow them to get rid of the mobile trailer units where mental health and vocational services were housed. We were also told about a plan to replace bathrooms on the living units and to equip units with phone and internet connections so that counselor offices could be moved onto youth housing units. Administrators stated that these renovations were not expected to raise Warrenville's capacity. They also highlighted the floor in dietary, the water softener in the administrative building, and the roof of one of the living units as being in need of replacement.

Reportedly, Warrenville's air conditioner had recently been replaced, and JHA visitors also noticed that the gym floor appeared to have been replaced since [our visit in 2018](#), when we noted that the number of tiles missing had rendered it unusable for sports. JHA acknowledges the need for repair and renovations and the benefits of the new spaces described, but also emphasizes the importance of using limited resources effectively. Investing in old physical structures as opposed to community-based services and supports for youth does not seem to be consistent with the IDJJ transformation plan laid out in 2020. However, as plans for larger system change are implemented, it is still critical that state-run facilities that house youth be maintained to ensure youth safety and well-being.

Programming

Administrators told JHA visitors that programming continued throughout the COVID pandemic with programming staff rotating between coming in to work and working from home on a weekly basis. At the time of our visit, programming staff was back to working in the facility daily, and volunteers were also back onsite. Reportedly, programs were being held in larger spaces to allow for social distancing. Administrators stated that they had offered additional mental health, education, and recreational programming during the pandemic when they were unable to take youth on field trips, discussed further below in the Education and PBIS sections.

Education

According to administrators, teachers were able to access Connexus (IDJJ's online school program) remotely, so teachers working remotely on a rotating basis did not result in a major disruption in school. IDJJ's [monthly reports](#) show that one full day of school was cancelled during the period when programming staff was working partially remotely, in October 2020. However, IDJJ monthly reporting also reflects that seven full days of school were apparently cancelled in April 2021; sixteen full days of school (100% of school days) were cancelled in May 2021; and eight days of school were cancelled in June 2021 after teachers had returned to fulltime onsite work. In draft review IDJJ administrators told JHA that actually, six school days had been cancelled in April, sixteen had been cancelled in May, and none had been cancelled in June. This confirms both a substantial number of full school day cancellations at Warrenville in spring 2021 and inaccuracies in IDJJ's monthly reporting.

Administrators reported that Warrenville employed three teachers and that classes consisted of five or six students. IDJJ's [September 2021 monthly report](#) indicated that there were ten students enrolled in school at Warrenville, and seven students had graduated from high school since January 2021. The student-to-teacher ratio was reported as two students per teacher, slightly above IDJJ's average of 1.6 students per teacher. As part of the [remedial plan](#) under *R.J. v. Muller*, IDJJ facilities are required to have a student-to-teacher ratio of 10 or less and a special education student-to-teacher ratio of six or less. According to the September 2021 monthly report, 40% of students at Warrenville required special education services, and the student-to-special education teacher ratio was also two students per teacher.

JHA visited the library during our tour. The selection of books was relatively small but appeared to include a mix of titles ranging from middle grade to adult-level books and several complete series of books. A box of puzzles was out in the library, and youth were working on puzzles individually and in pairs at tables. Most of the available puzzles were 500 pieces or less, and a member of staff explained that they offer smaller puzzles intentionally, so that youth can complete them in one sitting.

Before the pandemic, Warrenville partnered with the College of DuPage to offer on-campus college classes three days a week to youth who had graduated from high school or earned their GED. 21% of the population were high school graduates at the time of our visit. Administrators told JHA that many youth had transferred from other facilities to participate in the program, and that this was largely responsible for the increasing age of Warrenville's population. According to Warrenville administrators, the program was placed on hold during the pandemic because the facility was unable to accommodate online classes, and it had not resumed. IDJJ administrators stated that online classes had previously been offered as part of the DuPage partnership but had been put on hold by the College of DuPage until they were able to offer the classes in person. IDJJ's September 2021 monthly report indicated that no youth were participating in continuing education at Warrenville, including post-secondary and collegiate education.

Multiple youth who spoke with JHA visitors said that they had transferred to Warrenville because of the College of DuPage program and were frustrated that they had not been able to participate. One youth stated that he felt like he had been lied to about the programming options at Warrenville before he decided to transfer; while another recalled that he had transferred after being told the education at Warrenville was better, but those educational opportunities were now gone. Administrators were aware of these concerns but pointed to a juvenile justice class they had offered in partnership with Northwestern University. Reportedly, participants had gone on a field trip to Northwestern to sit in on a class and "meet some people." A youth who had taken the class reported that he had enjoyed it, but another youth pointed out that it was the only thing for graduates to do. **JHA hopes to see the partnership with Northwestern grow and recommends that Warrenville prioritize restarting the College of DuPage program or securing other educational programming for graduates.**

Vocational Programming

Prior to the COVID pandemic, Warrenville hosted a barbering and cosmetology vocational program. However, administrators reported that the program had been without a teacher since February or March 2021. Reportedly, administrators had identified a qualified teacher who could provide vocational training, but because he was not affiliated with the program Warrenville had contracted with to provide training, administrators were not sure they would be able to partner with him. Given the importance of having such an instructor, JHA is hopeful a work around to the contract impediment can be negotiated; licensure, qualifications and experience should be more relevant than program affiliation.

Several youth at Warrenville told JHA visitors that they had transferred to participate in the barbering program and were frustrated that the program was not currently being offered. One youth reported that without the barbering program and College of DuPage partnership, the only thing for graduates to do was work in dietary. Two youth working in dietary also commented that the pay was too low. Both were making less than \$0.75 an hour, and one of the two was making under \$0.50 an hour. **JHA recommends that IDJJ increase wages for youth to approximate what they would be able to expect at similar jobs in the community.**

JHA was disappointed to hear that Warrenville was not offering any vocational programming and **recommends that it prioritize setting up vocational programs for high school graduates.**

Other Programming Opportunities

JHA visited the gym during our tour. The gym was equipped with basketball hoops, a volleyball net, and a pull-up bar, and there was music playing. Warrenville also offers [Project FLEX](#), a health and wellness program through Northern Illinois University. However, some older youth stated that they wished Warrenville had a weight room like the IYCs they had transferred from. IDJJ administrators reported that each housing unit had scheduled recreation every day and generally rotated between the gym and the “canteen area” every other day.

One of Warrenville’s most prominent programs is the Pawsitive Futures Dog Program, which started in April 2017 and is run in partnership with the Naperville Humane Society. Staff explained that the program involves bringing a dog from the Humane Society to live on a housing unit—at the time of our visit, this was a male unit that housed mostly graduates. Youth must not have a history of animal abuse to live on the “dog unit,” and those under 18 must have parental consent. Youth housetrain the dog and teach it basic commands. According to staff, the program’s goal was for dogs to be adopted directly out of the facility rather than going back to the Humane Society after being trained, and this happened in most cases.

Staff showed JHA visitors a wall in the mental health mobile unit where pictures of dogs that had completed the program were posted with information about their adoptions. Many dogs appeared to have been adopted by staff, and one dog was apparently adopted by a youth after release. According to staff, during the time after a dog finishes the program and before a new dog has arrived, they bring in a therapy dog. On the day of our visit, a therapy dog belonging to a member of the mental health staff was at the facility.

Like other IYCs, Warrenville also hosts the [Storycatchers Theatre](#) program. The Storycatchers website states that the program helps youth “tell their stories through musical theatre.” Youth who participate in Storycatchers [write scripts](#) based on their own experiences, which are then acted out by other youth for an audience that, during non-pandemic times, includes community members. JHA visitors spoke to a youth who had been involved in Storycatchers and said that she liked to act and sing and thought the program was “*lovely*.”

Mental Health

Administrators and staff were proud of the facility’s focus on mental health. IDJJ designates youth as mental health Level 0 through 4 based on the presence and severity of mental health symptoms. Youth at Level 0 are assessed as not having any present or historical mental health symptoms, while youth at Level 4 demonstrate severe mental health symptoms and require psychiatric hospitalization. IDJJ’s [monthly report](#) shows that as of September 2021, 94% of the 114 youth in IDJJ custody were at mental health level 1 or 2, corresponding to mild or moderate mental health symptoms.

In contrast to other IYCs where youth at Level 0 may not have regularly scheduled individual appointments with a mental health professional (MHP) and youth at Level 1 may only have monthly individual appointments, staff reported that all youth at Warrenville met individually with a MHP at least once a week, regardless of their assessed mental health needs or the size of the population. In their October 26, 2020 report, the mental health monitors for the [R.J. v. Mueller](#)³ (R.J.) consent decree found that Warrenville was the only IDJJ facility where 100% of youth were receiving individual therapy. Reportedly, most youth also attended a group session at least once a week. Additionally, each youth reportedly met with a psychiatrist every three to four weeks.

Staff explained that this “culture of engagement” encouraged youth who may not have engaged with mental health services at other facilities to seek them out at Warrenville. One MHP recalled that a youth met with her more times during his first week at Warrenville than he had met with a MHP in the months he spent at the facility from which he had transferred.

Staff reported that although youth were still sometimes sent to Warrenville because of behavioral issues exhibited at other IYCs, they housed fewer youth with serious mental health needs than in the past. Reportedly, the largest demographic change was an increase in the number of boys incarcerated at Warrenville, which housed mostly girls as recently as 2018. Mental health staff at Warrenville now had a wide range of patients, from 13 and 14-year-old boys to young men, to a variety of girls, and including youth with and without special needs. Staff described the wide range of youth needs as the biggest challenge they had at the facility. JHA notes that because Warrenville is the only co-ed IYC, mental health staff at Warrenville manage the needs of the widest variety of patients.

Reportedly, mental health staff were onsite from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM on weekdays, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Saturdays, and from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Sundays. Staff reported that the most common mental health issues youth experienced by youth at Warrenville were PTSD, ADHD, anxiety, and mood disorders such as depression. Reportedly, the most frequent

³ The R.J. v. Mueller consent decree arose out of a class action lawsuit filed in 2012 challenging conditions in IDJJ facilities. The consent decree governs access to and quality of education, mental health care, and safety and security at IDJJ facilities.

medications prescribed were clonidine, Prozac, Abilify, and premarin. As of September 2021, [IDJJ's monthly report](#) indicated that 78.3% of youth at Warrenville took psychotropic medication, compared to an average of 63.3% across all IDJJ facilities. Warrenville had the second highest rate of prescriptions in IDJJ after Chicago. This may be accounted for by youth with greater mental health needs being transferred to Warrenville because of its focus on mental health.

Staff told JHA visitors that they use the Vanderbilt Assessment Scales to diagnose ADHD, even for youth that already have a diagnosis when they enter Warrenville, reportedly to avoid overmedicating youth. JHA notes that according to the [National Institute for Children's Health Quality](#), the organization that developed the assessment, it is used to diagnose ADHD in children between the ages of six and 12 years old. Youth must be at least 13 years old to enter IDJJ custody. While JHA was pleased to hear that staff at Warrenville share our concerns about youth in IDJJ custody being overmedicated, the use of this instrument raises the question of whether Warrenville should utilize an age-appropriate assessment to diagnose ADHD.

Staff told JHA visitors that at the time of our visit in October 2021, family therapy conducted via Webex was being used more frequently than it ever had been before. In October 2020, the *R.J.* monitors⁴ determined that 71% of male youth and 66% of female youth at Warrenville were receiving family therapy, an overall number higher than any other IDJJ facility. Reportedly, the reception to family therapy from families had been mixed. According to Warrenville staff, some families were very open and willing to talk about issues while others were more defensive. Staff also noted that some families were unable to participate in family therapy because of work schedules, time constraints, or lack of reliable access to a phone.

Staff reported that IDJJ had expanded the definition of "family" to include siblings and extended family, and that this was particularly important for older youth who may not be planning to return to their parents but would still benefit from being in touch with other family members. However, one older youth pointed out that Warrenville's new definition of family still only included relatives. He felt that the inability to engage in family therapy with support people who were not related to him was isolating. **JHA recommends that IDJJ allow youth to expand their**

⁴ *R.J. v. Mueller*, Mental Health Issues, Oct. 26, 2020

community support structure beyond their family for purposes of therapy, communication, and preparation for release.

According to staff, if a youth wanted to speak with a MHP, they would file a mental health “sick call” slip. Reportedly, IDJJ policy requires the youth to be seen by a MHP within five days, but Warrenville’s policy was that a MHP should see the youth before the end of the current shift. If a youth filed a slip overnight, they were reportedly given a choice between speaking with a member of the crisis team immediately or speaking with a MHP the next day. For emergencies, the Head of Clinical Services was on call overnight.

Mental health staff told us that they conducted mediations between youth after fights and between youth and staff after conflicts. A mediation involving four youth took place during JHA’s visit, and although we were unable to sit in, JHA visitors noted that many staff members appeared to be participating. Mental health staff reportedly also spoke with youth coming off of behavioral holds, which are used as a time out and cooldown period when a youth misbehaves and, under the [*R.J. v. Mueller remedial plan*](#), cannot last longer than four hours. During a behavioral hold, a youth is removed from an activity and may be placed in their cell. IDJJ is required to document the amount of time a youth is on a behavioral hold to the minute. IDJJ’s September 2021 Monthly Report indicates that an average of 26 behavioral holds took place at Warrenville per month from January to September 2021. Warrenville had the highest rate of behavioral holds per youth in IDJJ every month during that time period. The average length of behavioral holds between January and September 2021 was 80 minutes at Warrenville, compared to 78 minutes at Pere Marquette, 118 minutes at Harrisburg, and 159 minutes at St. Charles.

Staff reported that the general mental health needs at the facility had not changed during the COVID pandemic. Reportedly, the most common reasons for a youth to seek a meeting with mental health staff were wanting to be treated more like an adult and, for male youth, wanting to transfer to another IDJJ facility. Youth at Warrenville reported that they felt like they had enough access to the mental health staff and that they were able to speak with a MHP when they needed to.

A youth who spoke to JHA during our visit stated that mental health staff *“really try to help you be successful when you get out.”*

Staff told JHA visitors that youth were assigned to a MHP based on who had the most openings and which mental health staff member would work best for the youth. Reportedly, if a youth who has previously been at Warrenville returned, they were usually seen by the MHP who had previously worked with them unless that person had a full caseload. According to staff, if a youth had a personality conflict with their assigned MHP and was unable to work it out with them, they could be transferred to another. Staff reported that transfers between MHPs were rare and that there had only been two or three in the past year. JHA notes that this seemed like a marked improvement from the system used by some other IDJJ facilities, where youth are assigned to a MHP based on their housing unit and **recommends that all IDJJ facilities adopt a similar policy for MHP assignments.**

OIJO recommends that the MHP who is working with a youth be the primary point of contact if an issue with that youth arises. However, despite Warrenville's commitment to prioritizing mental health, the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson states that mental health staff could be listened to more. When it comes to addressing problematic behavior, the opinions of security and operations staff too often seem to take precedence over the opinions of mental health staff. A youth also reported recent restrictions on the types of activities MHPs were allowed to do with youth that seemed to reflect a lack of trust towards mental health staff. For example, the youth told a JHA visitor that he used to go to the mental health mobile unit for help with researching his post-release options online, but that MHPs were now required to print out every webpage they looked at with a youth on the internet during the session, which made him feel like seeking the help was no longer worth the effort.

Mental Health on Aftercare

Staff told JHA that youth are now able to continue treatment with their MHP at the IDJJ facility from which they were released as long as they are on IDJJ Aftercare. The policy reportedly went into effect in September 2020. This was a positive development since our last visit. Staff reported that it can sometimes be difficult to get youth into mental health services in the community because of lack of availability in some areas of the state, lengthy waitlists, and lack of motivation. This option offers youth the ability to receive treatment continuously with a MHP they are familiar with during their transition back into the community.

Staff stated that because a youth's Aftercare specialist might change frequently, this setup offers youth a sense of stability that, reportedly, is often not provided by the Aftercare specialist because a youth may cycle through several different specialists while on Aftercare. Mental health staff spoke of being able to mediate disagreements between a youth and an Aftercare specialist, which may result in youth taking fuller advantage of the services offered to them while they are on Aftercare. JHA was happy to hear that Warrenville MHPs were available to advocate for youth after they left the facility. While MHPs are generally restricted to offering care to youth who remain in Illinois unless they are licensed in another state, one MHP reported that she was able to get an emergency allowance to continue treatment with a youth who went to Indiana after release.

However, this transitional care is only offered to youth who are released on IDJJ Aftercare. It is not offered to youth convicted of felonies, who are released into the adult parole system, or youth who "age out" of IDJJ at 21. These youth are able to maintain contact with a Warrenville MHP, but the MHP cannot provide therapy. Staff identified this as a major hole in the system because youth in these two populations have often been incarcerated for a long time and may face more difficult transitions back into the community than other youth. Staff expressed that they had the capacity to offer these transitional services to all youth being released from IDJJ facilities. **JHA recommends that IDJJ offer these transitional services to all youth released from its custody.**

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports

IDJJ uses the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system to address misbehavior. The PBIS system is a positive reinforcement tool that allows youth to earn points based on good behavior. Youth who earn enough points over a period of time can move up a level, where they have access to additional privileges, such as higher commissary limits, the ability to stay up later at night, eligibility for jobs and field trips, and, at the highest level, the ability to have visitors outside their family—discussed in a later section.

According to the Warrenville youth handbook provided by administrators on the day of JHA's visit, youth must earn 21 points a day for a week to move from C Level to B Level, 25 points a day for two weeks to move from B Level to A Level, and can apply for Star Level after being on A Level for four weeks. While youth on C Level could spend \$25 on hygiene products at commissary, were eligible for daily recreation and one religious service a week, and could not have any friends on their phone or visitation lists, youth on Star Level could spend \$100 at commissary and could shop from an extended list of products, could participate in all field trips and LTA activities that they were otherwise eligible for, and could have up to 20 friends on their phone list and 3 friends on their visitation list.

Staff told JHA visitors that field trips had resumed in August 2021. Reportedly, the facility usually offered two field trips per week and that youth had to be vaccinated to participate. An administrator told us that youth were able to select street clothes from a communal closet to wear on field trips in order to prevent embarrassment from having to wear an IDJJ uniform in the community. Youth on Star Level were reportedly able to keep three of their own outfits in their cells. According to staff, youth on A and B Levels were also eligible for field trips, while youth on C Level were evaluated for field trips on a case-by-case basis. This policy was an improvement over strictly limiting field trips to youth on A Level and above.

A youth who spoke to JHA said that he had been involved in a volunteer-run program where he was learning how to play the cello, but he had been removed from the program after unrelated misbehavior resulted in him losing a level. He felt it was unfair that a single mistake that resulted in a level reduction could get youth pulled out of programming. JHA hopes to see IDJJ continue to expand programming opportunities for youth on lower levels, as keeping youth engaged in programming and limiting idle time is key to preventing misbehavior.

Another youth told JHA visitors that consequences for the same misbehavior often differed depending on which youth had misbehaved, and that this resulted in uncertainty about what the consequences for certain actions were actually supposed to be. He also felt that common consequences, such as building and recreation restrictions, were not constructive because they prevent youth from engaging in activities that helped them calm down and stay healthy. He said that youth on building and recreational restrictions often continued to act out, resulting in being on restriction for longer and longer periods of time. IDJJ stated that youth could be put on a restriction for up to three days by the Adjustment Committee or one day as an immediate

consequence for each instance of misbehavior and can have the same restriction applied as an immediate consequence for one additional consecutive day if the youth acts out again. **JHA recommends that discipline be uniform through IDJJ and both relevant and appropriately calibrated to the action for which the youth is being disciplined and believes that the use of such sanctions should be publicly reported.**

Commissary and PBIS Store

Youth at Warrenville have two options for shopping. They can either shop through commissary using money from their trust fund accounts twice per month, or they can shop at the PBIS store using “BE Bucks,” which an administrator told us were awarded for good behavior. According to staff, youth preferred the PBIS store to commissary because there were more name-brand products and more variety in the brands available. JHA visitors were shown the PBIS store, which had a variety of hygiene products and snacks from recognizable brands and were different from what was available through commissary. Administrators reported that they had not had any real supply issues in stocking the commissary or PBIS store, in contrast to IDOC, which had been experiencing a [months-long commissary disruption](#) at the time of our visit.

The necessity for an alternative shopping option that does not require money is apparent for youth in IDJJ because youth do not receive any money from the state while incarcerated. It should be noted that adults in IDOC receive \$10 monthly state pay while they are in state custody, which provides indigent individuals the opportunity to procure food, hygiene items and other necessities from commissary. When combined with the low payrates for youth with jobs, youth who do not have anyone in the community able or willing to put money in their trust fund accounts are unable to shop through commissary at all. JHA does not see any rationale for this and **recommends that IDJJ look into adopting a similar state pay scheme to IDOC to ensure that all youth have money in their trust funds.**

Several youth told JHA visitors that Warrenville’s commissary spending limits were more restrictive than what they were used to at other IDJJ facilities. JHA compared the commissary spending limits per visit outlined in Warrenville’s youth handbook to those in Harrisburg, St. Charles, and Chicago’s youth handbooks received by JHA during 2021 visits:

	Warrenville	Harrisburg	St. Charles	Chicago
C Level	\$25 – only hygiene items	No commissary	\$25 – only hygiene items	\$25 – only hygiene items
B Level	\$40 – maximum of \$12 on snack items	\$30	\$50	\$50 on food, \$25 on hygiene items
A Level	\$50 – maximum of \$20 on snack items	\$50	\$75	\$75 on food, \$25 on hygiene items, plus electronics
Star Level / Honors	\$100 – maximum of \$50 on snack items	\$90	\$100	Unspecified

A youth at Warrenville would, for example, need to be Star Level to spend the same amount of money on snacks that a youth on B Level at Chicago or St. Charles or a youth on A Level at Harrisburg could buy. Warrenville also has lower overall spending limits for youth on B and A Levels than either St. Charles or Chicago. Multiple youth at Warrenville stated that the low spending limits on snack items made them feel like they were being treated like children, and one youth said that this issue made him want to transfer to a different IYC. OIJO’s [2018 annual report](#) highlighted this issue, and added that these limitations restrict youths’ ability to supplement their meals from dietary with additional food, which can lead to some youth going to bed hungry. **JHA recommends that IDJJ standardize commissary spending limits across its facilities.** Youth should not be incentivized to seek transfer to a facility that might be farther from their families, have a higher security level, or have less appropriate programming options for them because of higher commissary spending limits.

Visitation and Phone Calls

IDJJ initially suspended in-person visitation on [March 18, 2020](#) to limit the possibility of COVID-19 transmission into its facilities. Visits resumed in [June 2020](#) but were suspended again on [November 18, 2020](#) due to a spike in cases in the community. However, as of the October 21, 2021 JHA visit, administrators reported that in-person visits had been running since December

25, 2020. IDJJ administrators stated that in-person visits had again been suspended due to a rise in COVID-19 positivity rates on December 28, 2021 and had not resumed as of January 20, 2022. Reportedly, visits are offered every day, and this minimizes the number of people in the visitation room at once. Additionally, according to administrators, video visits are now commonplace. JHA has been pleased to hear about the successful integration of video visitation at the IDJJ facilities and hopes it continues to offer youth additional opportunities to see and speak with their loved ones in the community. A youth at Warrenville said that they could get video visits if they wanted them. Another youth said they had visits every day.

Although Warrenville's handbook outlines the number of phone calls a youth can make per week based on their level, Warrenville suspended level-based restrictions on the number of phone calls a youth can make during the COVID pandemic and has not reinstated them. JHA hopes that restrictions on when and how youth can communicate with their loved ones in the community will not be reimplemented. At the time of the visit, youth were reportedly able to make an unlimited number of paid phone calls through the Securus system and can make one free call a week through Youth and Family Services. A youth told JHA visitors that it takes 30 days to add a person to a youth's phone list and that this was a problem for him. A grievance log provided by Warrenville noted that a youth had made a grievance in June 2021 over long wait times for numbers on his phone list to be approved. This grievance was apparently substantiated, and it was determined that the delay had been caused by staff in the intel department being on vacation. A youth also reported that the rule against three-way calls seemed arbitrary to him and that Tier 2 tickets, which can result in a youth losing a level, were given for three-way calls, which he thought was an overreaction. JHA notes that based on Warrenville's grievance logs, several grievances were filed over having receipt of a Tier 2 ticket for making a three-way call between January of 2020 and JHA's visit in October 2021. It is likely that many of these prohibited calls and resulting sanctions are a consequence of restrictions on non-relative outside contacts and supports.

A youth at Warrenville told a JHA visitor that the restrictions of contact with friends outside the family was isolating. He gave the example that a youth who had come to IDJJ from foster care, who was not in contact with their parents and did not have any siblings would not be able to receive any phone calls or visits from potential support people in the community unless they were on a high enough behavioral level. JHA is also aware of complaints from youth who are unmarried with children that they are unable to call or visit with their child's other parent.

Grievance logs received from Warrenville indicate that a youth was disciplined in May 2020 for talking with the mother of his child via a three-way call.

While JHA understands that allowing youth to have calls extended to a third party who may be unapproved poses some security concerns and that offering the ability to call and visit with friends may serve as an attractive incentive for some youth, we are concerned about the impact this has on youth who rely on those outside their family for support and that IDJJ restrictions may pose obstacles for youth who are trying to foster a strong relationship with their child and co-parent. **JHA recommends that IDJJ loosen restrictions for phone calls and visitation with those outside their family regardless of behavioral level, and that IDJJ always allow phone calls and visitation for any person with whom the youth has a child.**

Dietary

Staff told JHA visitors that Warrenville followed meal standards set by the Illinois Board of Education and used “real” meat, Prairie Farms milk, and 100% juice. A staff member reported that dietary staff often altered the meal menu and recipes sent out by IDJJ because they had found that the youth did not like those meals. JHA visitors noticed that youth were being served chicken stir-fry for lunch during our visit, and staff identified pizza puffs, cheeseburgers, and chicken quesadillas as particular favorites. Some youth reported that the food from dietary was “fine,” but one youth said he did not think it was very nutritious and another reported not liking it. Staff told JHA visitors that Warrenville serves alternatives for all pork meals for youth with religious dietary restrictions and will also alter a youth’s menu if they have medical dietary restrictions, such as for food allergies.

According to staff, there were two vacancies posted in the dietary department, and the department had been short-staffed for two years. Staff believed the hold-up in filling these vacancies was at the state level rather than at Warrenville. Inability to promptly fill vacancies has been a longtime issue within IDJJ. Reportedly, two or three youth also work in dietary per meal.

Staff stated that some equipment was broken in the kitchen. Reportedly, the stove had recently been replaced and the dishwasher was going to be looked at to see if it needed repairs or

replacement. The fluorescent lights in the dining areas were in the process of being replaced with LED lights, and staff showed JHA visitors the lights that had been replaced and the ones that had not. Staff also told JHA visitors that they believed there were plans to redo the kitchen in the next couple of years. A staff member who had worked in dietary at an IDOC prison before coming to Warrenville said that the kitchen at Warrenville was much nicer and that the food was better than what they had seen at their previous job.



This report was written by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at (312) 291-9555 x205 or jvollen@thejha.org

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report concerns and issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff are reading every letter and tracking this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website www.thejha.org or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks all the persons who agreed to be interviewed for this report and who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.



The John Howard Association was the proud recipient of the 2015 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions