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Strangulation Death Occurs at Home for the Abused

By *The Associated Press*, March 15, 1999

BANNER ELK, N.C. (AP) -- The death of a nine-year-old boy who suffocated after being restrained by his teacher has sparked an investigation into a home for abused children that has been the target of a number of complaints.

The death of Timithy Thomas, who weighed only 53 pounds, happened shortly after he was subjected to a "basket hold" by his teacher.

Basket holds are used on unruly children and involve a teacher getting behind the child, crossing his arms and holding on to the child's wrists. But on Thursday afternoon at Grandfather Academy, something went wrong.

County and state officials are now investigating the disciplinary procedure, which is used by various juvenile workers and is considered by some to be controversial.

"I feel like it was definitely unnecessary," Avery County Sheriff Richard Buchanan said Monday. "We feel like that this probably was the cause of death."

Buchanan said the death is the latest in a series of problems at the home in the western North Carolina mountains. The academy is the school for youngsters living at the Grandfather Home for Children.

Several children have run away from the home, claiming staff members verbally and physically abused them, Buchanan said. His office is investigating two other employees in connection with an unrelated assault case, he said.

Principal Roy Krege said he and the school board stand behind the school staff and have no immediate plans to change any procedures. He said children at the academy have extensive emotional and behavioral problems and must be restrained at times.

The teacher, whose name was not released, is an experienced employee with an exemplary personnel file, he said.

"If something did go awry, it was certainly and totally unintentional," he said.March 15, 1999

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