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Parent hands cardboard with 'gun' written on it to teacher at Madison school, police say

Logan Wroge | Wisconsin State Journal

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A parent of a Shorewood Hills Elementary School student entered the school Thursday morning and handed a piece of cardboard to teachers that said "gun" on it, police said.

PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

A Madison man has been arrested and banned from Shorewood Hills Elementary School after he handed a piece of cardboard with “gun” written on it to a teacher Thursday morning.

Police said there was no danger to the school and didn’t speculate on what the parent’s motive was.

Shorewood Hills Police Chief Aaron Chapin said Jonathan M. Fitzgerald, 35, activated a front door buzzer at the school, 1105 Shorewood Blvd., around 10 a.m., requesting access to the building. When he was allowed in, he walked past the school office where visitors are required to check in, Chapin said.

A staff member followed Fitzgerald as he went down the hall to the classroom his child was in, Chapin said.

“Fitzgerald made statements to the teacher in the room about being an intruder who was allowed access to the school and gave the teacher a piece of cardboard with the word ‘gun’ on it,” Chapin said.

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Chapin said Fitzgerald left the classroom and went to the administrative office where he made similar statements and handed staff another piece of cardboard with “gun” written on it, then left the school building.

“There was no actual threat to the school or people in the school, no threat to their safety, during the incident,” Chapin said. “Whatever the ultimate goal of the individual, the actions that he took were obviously not appropriate and should not have been done.”

Chapin said Shorewood Hills and UW-Madison police officers made contact with Fitzgerald at a building on the university’s campus and arrested him on a tentative charge of disorderly conduct. He was taken to the Dane County Jail and later released on bail.

UW-Madison spokesman John Lucas said Fitzgerald has been enrolled since 2016 as a graduate student in a Ph.D program in molecular and cellular pharmacology. The university has been made aware of his arrest and is “gathering more information,” Lucas said.

The incident follows a mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, that sparked a national conversation about school safety and gun control.

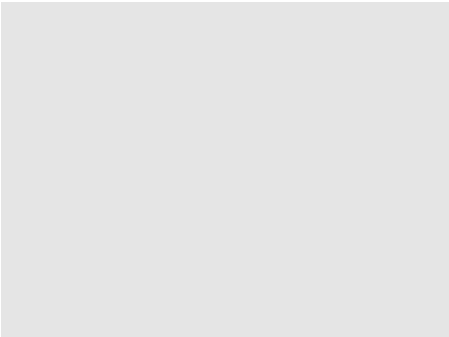
Liz Merfeld, a spokeswoman for the Madison School District, said Fitzgerald is banned from the school and all school district grounds until further notice.

The incident left the teacher and students “shaken up,” Merfeld said. She said a restorative circle approach was used for the children to discuss and process the situation, after which they reported feeling “secure, safe and supported.”

“What the parent did was bizarre, and understandably, the event left (the teacher) feeling emotional,” Merfeld said.

She said district-wide policy is that visitors sign in at the school’s office, indicate what their visit is for and receive a visitor’s pass.

Fitzgerald was cooperating with officers, Chapin said.



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DANE COUNTY JAIL

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