

Officer to be embedded at middle school next year

- By RICK GREEN, THE LACONIA DAILY SUN
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LACONIA — Starting next year, the Laconia Police Department will have an officer embedded in the middle school.

Police Chief Matt Canfield and middle school Principal Alison Bryant are to discuss the school resource officer position at the School Board meeting Thursday evening.

The City Council has agreed to fund the position, which will be filled with an existing officer, whose position will be backfilled with a new officer, Canfield said.

An internal process will be undertaken to select the new school resource officer, with emphasis given to those who have participated in drug education programs.

The officer will institute a program called Law Enforcement Against Drugs, which provides training and programming concerning drugs, bullying and violence.

As the school resource officer at the high school, Steve Orton has been effective in providing a safe and secure atmosphere for students, faculty, parents and staff, Canfield said. Orton also works as an assistant football coach.

“Sometimes kids grow up in bad homes and experience certain interactions with police,” Canfield said. “We want to change the culture of how police are perceived by some kids. We want to establish trust, prevent violence and help kids having a tough time.”

With school shootings often in the news around the country, school officials and police are keen on preventing violence and bullying. The first word of a potential problem could come on social media or word of mouth among students.

“Having an officer embedded in the school builds rapport with faculty and students and prevents problems,” Canfield said. “They are in the school and speaking with the kids.

“The rapport allows us to get information. Someone may say, ‘Hey, so and so is talking about guns and said this or that.’

“That’s how we develop information to prevent tragedy.”

School Superintendent Brendan Minnihan also said having an officer embedded in the school makes it easy to report if there is an issue of concern.

“You have that relationship,” he said. “A student or staff member might be more inclined to say, “This is nothing, but I heard someone say this, this morning.”