



District to add two officers to schools

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2008-02-19 22:38:15

ALTON — Students in Alton’s two largest schools should see more police in the hallways in the coming months.

The Alton School Board voted Tuesday night to begin the process of placing another Alton Police Department officer at Alton Middle School and another Madison County sheriff’s deputy at Alton High School. There currently is an Alton police officer, Detective Mike O’Neill, who works part-time at the middle school. The high school also has one full-time deputy, Brock Cato, as the school resource officer.

The School Board voted to “enter an intergovernmental agreement” with both the village of Godfrey — which has no police force of its own and contracts with the Sheriff’s Department — and the city of Alton.

The Alton School District will foot the bill for both of the officers’ salaries. The district will pay roughly \$68,000 to employ the police officer at the middle school.

An officer has not been chosen to fill that position, Police Chief Chris Sullivan said. The Alton Police Department pays O’Neill’s salary.

At the high school, the additional deputy will cost the school district about \$73,000. That deputy also has not been chosen, Sheriff Robert Hertz said.

Hertz said Tuesday that he approached Alton Schools Superintendent David Elson on Jan. 25 and then met with the school district’s finance officials on Feb. 12 to talk about adding another deputy at the high school.

“I suggested to them it may be prudent to increase security (at the high school),” Hertz said.

The sheriff said a bomb threat and fights at the school prompted him to meet with school leaders about adding another deputy.

The Alton School District has expelled 26 students this year, which “have come in batches,” Elson said last month. Entire groups of students have been expelled for fighting and vandalism, among other offenses.

However, the beefed-up police presence won’t mean just another badge in each of the schools, Elson said Tuesday.

“At the high school, we hope to be able to give this person provisional certification, so that person could teach a section or two of law enforcement (classes), which would be good for our students,” Elson said Tuesday.

Hertz said the deputy tapped to fill the new job at the high school would come from the existing ranks of the Sheriff’s Department, and another deputy would be hired to fill the vacated position.

The hiring situation at the Alton Police Department is unclear, and Sullivan said a decision would be

“made down the road.” Whether the vacated position is refilled could depend on if the Police Department receives a grant that would free up salary money. There currently are 65 officers in the city police ranks.

“I would say probably under the current financial conditions of the city, (another hiring) is something that would probably have to be decided by a grant (to pay another officer’s salary),” Sullivan said Tuesday.

Besides the added officer and deputy, who go by the title of School Resource Officer, each school also has hired part-time employees to work in “student management,” Elson said.

Three workers at Alton High either check in visitors, maintain order as students line up at buses or patrol the parking lots during school hours. At the middle school, five part-time employees do roughly the same duties at the three-building campus.

“By doing that, it enables our teachers to teach,” Elson said.

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