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U-46 mandates new training for school resource officers
by Madhu Krishnamurthy

School resource officers at Bartlett High School and elsewhere in Elgin Area School District U-46 must be trained on nonviolent intervention techniques and special needs awareness. *Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer, 2018*

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School resource officers serving in Elgin-area schools must be trained on nonviolent crisis intervention techniques and special needs awareness, officials at Elgin Area School District U-46 said Monday.

The U-46 school board discussed spending roughly $1 million in contract renewals with the city of Elgin and the villages of Bartlett, South Elgin and Streamwood to hire six school resource officers for the district's high schools and eight officers for its middle schools.

School board members in the past cited a need for additional training for officers in one of the suburbs' most diverse school districts, stemming from the disproportionate number of Black students who end up being disciplined.

The contracts mandate two days of training sessions for school resource officers each year in the Crisis Prevention Institute's nonviolent crisis intervention course used by U-46 staff members to de-escalate situations, and in separate sessions to learn how to work with students with special needs.

"As the parent of an autistic child, I'm very happy to see the specific autism-based training happening," school board member Melissa Owens said. "The knowledge that you're going to make sure that these officers understand how to deal with these kids better is appreciated."

CPI training will be provided in August of each school year by a U-46 CPI-certified instructor to each new batch of school resource officers. Also, the district's Student Specialized Services Department will provide special needs training, said Richard Bosh, U-46 coordinator of school safety and a former police officer and school resource officer with the Bartlett Police Department.

"Things like enhancing student voice and ... working with students and building those relationships ... it's something that's highlighted much more prominently than it was in the previous (contract) language," said Brian Lindholm, U-46 chief of staff.

School resource officers will act in the capacity of law enforcement, teachers and informal counselors/mentors, but they will not enforce school rules, policy or discipline. They will give presentations to students, staff members and parents "to support and empower schools to be welcoming centers of family and community engagement," per the contract.

"SROs, explicitly in our training, are not allowed to be involved in student discipline," U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said. "That is strictly on the deans and the principal, and that school's staff. Only if it rises to the level of criminal offense of some sort that must be reported, then they do get involved, but for discipline, they are not involved."

Sanders said since most school resource officers come from the Elgin Police Department, the district will partner with Elgin's youth empowerment program organized by Police Chief Ana Lalley, which aims to reduce the over-identification of students who are in trauma.

---Elgin Courier-News---08/24/2021
U-46 students and staff contracting COVID-19, but to be expected as local numbers climb, superintendent says
by Mike Danahey; Note: The following story also ran in the Chicago Tribune at chicagotribune.com.

The start of the school year at <mark>District U-46</mark> has been positive but for one thing — the number of teachers and staff testing positive for COVID-19 or in quarantine for being exposed to or showing symptoms for the virus, Superintendent Tony Sanders said.

"With all the great and wonderful things that have happened (with the opening of school) ... I have to note that we continue to have COVID cases," Sanders told the U-46 School Board Monday. "When you see a spread of COVID within our communities, you are also going to see it within our schools."

As of Monday afternoon, 11 students and three staff members had tested positive for coronavirus and another 180 students and 10 staff reported to the district that they were either symptomatic or had been exposed, he said.

The cumulative numbers since Aug. 5 shows 83 students and 20 employees have tested positive and 848 students and 57 employees were either exposed or symptomatic, he said. The first day of school was Aug. 16.

U-46 students live in Cook, DuPage and Kane counties, all of which remain in the moderate range for COVID cases but are experiencing climbing 7-day positivity rates, Sanders said.

The superintendent stressed the district is continuing to follow a layered prevention strategy, and will start doing voluntary COVID testing of students and staff after Labor Day.

In order to alleviate lunchroom congestion, the district has purchased picnic tables that will allow students to eat outside when the weather allows, Sanders said. They should be delivered by week's end, he said.

Suzanne Johnson, deputy superintendent of instruction, said students who are quarantined are working with teachers to access such online resources as Canvas. Teachers also have the option to set up classes so they can be viewed by the student at home and online tutorials will be ready to launch in early September, she said.

Should an entire classroom or building need to be closed because of COVID, the district would handle it the same way as it has dealt with other infectious diseases such as H1N1, MRSA and influenza, Sanders said. Any closure would come in consultation with the regional office of education and state and county health departments.

"We would seek their guidance before making any such decision," Sanders said.

Student board advisor Jessica Pearce, a junior at the the STEM Academy at Bartlett High School, told the board later in the meeting that students are very happy to return to a normal classroom setting.

"People are really glad to be back in school," she said. "It's certainly better than Zoom, even with masking."