

Sheriff, chief say they won't remove Tasers

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GREENSBORO — Law enforcement officials say they will listen to the Guilford County school board's concerns about Tasers, but they don't intend to disarm their school-based officers.



File photo (News & Record)

"If they are not comfortable with the equipment our sworn officers are carrying, then we may need to have a conversation about having our officers in the schools," said Greensboro police Chief Tim Bellamy.

Greensboro police officers working as school resource officers were armed with Tasers for the first time this year. Bellamy said he made a deliberate decision that protects the school and his officers.

Sheriff BJ Barnes echoed that sentiment, saying all deputies are trained to use their weapons appropriately. He said not arming a school resource officer with a Taser while all other deputies are armed with them is like saying the resource officer is less competent.

"The idea that we want to hurt any children is ridiculous," Barnes said.

High Point police Chief Jim Fealy could not be reached for comment. High Point school resource officers were equipped with Tasers for the first time this year as well.

The Guilford County Board of Education voted 9-2 during its regular meeting Tuesday to invite the two chiefs and the sheriff to a meeting to discuss the use of Tasers by school resource officers.

The board has discussed the issue of Tasers in schools since the sheriff's office began arming deputies with the weapons in 2007, but the debate has heated up in recent weeks. Several parents and community members have addressed the board on the issue since a school resource officer used a Taser on a female student at Ragsdale High in September.

Days later, another resource officer was injured breaking up a fight at Northeast High. The sheriff's office said the deputy did not use a Taser because of the previous controversy.

The school district contracts with the law enforcement agencies to provide school resource officers at almost every middle and high school. Nearly all officers are armed with a Taser.

School board member Sandra Alexander made the first suggestion to invite the law enforcement agencies to discuss removing Tasers from the schools. The board opted to approve board member Paul Daniels' suggestion instead, which softened the wording to simply inviting them to discuss the issue in general.

Alexander said the Tasers need to go, and school resource officers need training specifically for working in schools and for de-escalating situations with children.

“Working with children requires special training, and I don’t know if they’re getting the training they need in that regard,” she said.

A majority of board members are uncomfortable with Tasers in schools and so are many voters, Alexander said.

“I think the citizens of Guilford County have something to say about who occupies those offices, and we hope that law enforcement administrators will enter into this discussion about Tasers with that thought in mind,” she said.

Daniels supports the decision to arm school resource officers with Tasers and said he offered to have the discussion with the chiefs and sheriff in hopes of changing the minds of some school board members .

“It’s an invitation, not a subpoena,” Daniels said. “I hope that people will come away from this meeting maybe understanding each other a little better and maybe have a better understanding of why our SROs carry Tasers and why they have to use them sometimes.”

A date for the meeting has not been announced.

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