



U-46 to cut officer presence at Elgin middle schools

By Kerry Lester | Daily Herald Staff

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Escalating costs compounded by budget cuts will slash police officers' presence in Elgin middle schools next year, Elgin Area School District U-46 officials said this week.

Instead of having one full-time officer at each middle school campus, Abbott, Ellis, Larson and Kimball middle schools will now share two officers.

However, Tefft and Canton in Streamwood, Eastview in Bartlett and Kenyon Woods in South Elgin will continue to keep one officer each.

Doesn't seem fair? U-46 officials say the situation is not entirely in their control.

While a municipality's police department employs each school's police liaison officer, U-46 pays that department a per diem reimbursement for the officer.

"We don't have any influence on negotiating the increases," District Safety Coordinator John Heiderscheidt told the school board this winter. "That's a department cost."

Elgin police have historically asked U-46 to pay about 75 percent of an officer's cost, district spokesman Tony Sanders said.

For the upcoming school year, they asked for 100 percent.

U-46's tentative \$427 million budget assumes no increase in state aid and flat property tax revenues. It also factors in a decline in interest on investments and a \$17 million increase in negotiated salary and benefits for union employees.

Along with cutting nearly 350 positions and trimming spending on supplies and capital outlay, Sanders said, U-46 has approached all of its police departments to reduce reimbursement costs. Because the district is in the process of finalizing those contracts, Sanders said was not able to provide exact costs per officers at each school.

Traditionally, he said, the district has reimbursed other police departments at a higher rate than Elgin. However, this year, those departments agreed to lower their costs, with Elgin asking for an increase.

High schools in Elgin will remain unaffected by the move, with one full-time officer at Elgin, Larkin and Gifford Street.

"It is a concern," Sanders said. "Middle schools are typically less problematic than high schools. But, at the same time, we'd prefer to have coverage in all of our schools."

Sanders said that U-46 "did not have any readily available statistics" on the number of incidents that took place at middle schools this past school year.

Sgt. Gary Neal, the supervisor for the Elgin police department's school liaison officers, said officers "are going to have to work a lot harder next year."

Neal said his department plans to use the summer to brainstorm just how to do that.