

Police presence returns to Port schools this fall

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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Officer will be assigned to work at middle, high schools for the first time since 2009

For the first time in four years, a police officer will be assigned to public schools in Port Washington, Police Chief Kevin Hingiss said Tuesday.

Officer Tom Schleg, a 20-year veteran of the force, will be assigned to Thomas Jefferson Middle School and Port Washington High School for the start of classes next week.

“Officer Schleg’s demeanor and experience make him an ideal candidate for this position,” Port Washington-Saukville School Supt. Michael Weber said.

The new school policing effort will be different than the previous school liaison program, which was discontinued at the beginning of the 2008-09 school year, Hingiss said.

Under the now defunct liaison program, which was jointly funded by the police department and school district, an officer was assigned to all schools in the district with the mission of building positive relationships with students, conducting programs on such topics as student safety and responding to incidents.

“When the liaison program was started, it was new and different, and it was effective,” Weber said. “But as it went on, and with the advent of other efforts like Character Counts, we got to a point where it wasn’t needed.”

After the program was discontinued, officers made regular visits to schools, but this approach suffered from a lack of the continuity that is achieved by assigning a specific officer to the school beat, Hingiss said.

“One of the most difficult things for us was having so many different officers in schools,” Hingiss said.

The new program, which is being funded exclusively by the police department in its normal operating budget, calls for Schleg to focus on middle and high schools exclusively.

“That’s where we end up having the most contact with students,” Hingiss said. “Our mission is twofold. Above all, we want to build trust between the police and students. We also want to eliminate the issues that result in student-police contact.”

Schleg will spend between eight and 20 hours per week in the schools depending on scheduling demands within the department.

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Hingiss said he was able to assign an officer to the schools because of the recent hiring of another police officer, James Russel, who was sworn in on Aug. 6. Schleg's time in the school will be limited until Russel completes his field training — a three-month process — and joins the regular patrol rotation.

"It's worth mentioning that I would never assign an officer to the school who didn't want to be there," Hingiss said. "Officer Schleg is very excited to be doing this."

Weber said Schleg is a welcome addition to the school system.

"The school district and police department crafted this program together so students would become more comfortable around police officers and so we would have an officer who can talk to our classes and emphasize respect for others and respect for property," Weber said.