



Stun guns will remain at schools

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GREENSBORO — Guilford County Sheriff BJ Barnes did not budge Tuesday from his decision to arm school resource officers with Tasers, despite safety concerns raised at a community forum.

Deputies in 14 middle and high schools will continue to carry the stun guns this school year.

"I haven't heard any compelling argument against having them there," Barnes said after the hour-and-a-half-long forum at Smith High School.

However, Barnes did offer to allow members of the Board of Education to help evaluate along with senior sheriff's officials an officer's judgment in the case a Taser is used on a student. Barnes also said he would provide specific guidelines to be given to parents that would explain what circumstances would justify an officer's being allowed to use a Taser on campus.

That doesn't leave Guilford County Schools much of an alternative in keeping Tasers out, said Board Chairman Alan Duncan.

The Board of Education could vote to remove school resource officers from middle schools to appease parents, Duncan said, but an attempt to do that failed in May. Law enforcement agencies have the legal authority to supply officers with weapons and North Carolina requires high schools to have school resource officers.

Board member Darlene Garrett, who attended the forum, said she is willing to consider removing school resource officers from middle schools again. Any discussion of this would likely occur in September.

"I think we need to look at what we can do," Garrett said.

About 70 people attended the forum, with 20 parents, school employees and law enforcement officials serving on a panel. Duncan scheduled the meeting after board members and parents expressed concerns in May after they found out sheriff's deputies received Tasers. School resource officers supplied by High Point and Greensboro police departments do not carry Tasers.

Opinion was split pretty evenly between speakers who supported the carrying of Tasers and those who did not.

Smith High School parent Jeff German said he supported officers carrying Tasers.

"I would hate for us to be in a situation where a tragic-type situation presents itself to a student ... because we choose not to arm our (school resource officers) with Tasers," German said.

Lena Murrill, a Hairston Middle School technology teacher, said she was disturbed to see a brief video Barnes showed the audience of deputies being Tasered. Although uninjured, deputies grimaced, cursed and shrieked, "Ooooh!" and "Jesus Christ!" as fellow officers laughed in the background.

"I would rather spend my energy teaching my kids about nonviolence," Murrill said to applause. "I do not want to see you in my school with a Taser."

Anthony Scales, school safety coordinator with the district, pointed out that serious violent incidents in local schools are uncommon. The school system reported four possessions of firearms and about 230 possessions of a weapon last school year, he said.

"This is a tempest in a teapot," Barnes said. "The kids pay no attention to this. It's simply another tool on the toolbelt."