

## Board of Education approves \$2.5 million security contracts

BY TEVIN STINSON  
THE CHRONICLE

Despite calls from the community to use the funding for other needs, the local board of education has approved \$2.5 million security contracts with the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office (FCSO), Kernersville Police Department (KPD), and North State Company Police.

The SRO (School Resource Officer) contracts that were approved during a virtual meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 25, includes \$1,866,790 for 20 officers from the FCSO and \$588,153 for six officers from the KPD. When schools return to in-person learning, SROs from the Sheriff's Office will be assigned to the middle and high schools in Forsyth County, not in Kernersville. And the SRO's from the KPD will be assigned to the remaining middle and high schools.

The contract with North State Company Police is for \$58,011 for one company police officer who will be responsible for providing "support security" with focus on administrative sites and elementary schools.

In past years, the bulk of the SRO duties were handled by the Winston-Salem Police Department (WSPD), but to fill many of the vacancies on patrol, the WSPD decided not to renew the contract for the 2020-2021 school year. According to Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WS/FCS) Deputy Superintendent Tricia McManus, the contract with the FCSO is \$1.2 million less than the previous contract with the WSPD. "All together I think we saved about \$1.5 million in the SRO contracts this school year," she said. Until students return to in-person learning, SROs will be assigned to meal pickup sites and remote learning centers throughout the district.

"As you know our students are not in school right now so they are actually supporting us by providing coverage at meal pick-up sites, remote learning sites,

and Wi-Fi bus locations," McManus said. "The purpose of this is to provide an extra layer of security for our families that are utilizing and taking advantage of these resources. But more importantly than that ... it's allowing them to build and strengthen relationships with our students, our families, and the community while they're out in the field."

Although the cost is less, the contract with the FCSO will increase the number of SROs. During the public comment portion of the meeting, several speakers urged the board to use the funding for other needs, such as increasing the number of nurses and mental health experts in schools across the district.

Katie Sonnen-Lee, vice president of Action4Equity, a grassroots organization geared toward ensuring equity for every student in the district, said the money should be used to support students and families that need it most. She said in our state more than 45% of juvenile cases are referred by schools, and in Forsyth County, those number are even higher and in most cases the student is Black.

"What if we spent that money on childcare support for the community during this time? Health care? Providing desperately needed services for exceptional children ... or more support for families who are struggling to make it through this in a myriad of ways?" Sonnen-Lee asked. "We have to take a long hard look at whether our discipline and SRO system is fixing problems or creating them."

To address concerns from the community and board members about increased policing of students, Superintendent Dr. Angela P. Hairston agreed to sit down with the FCSO and KPD to discuss changes that can be made to reconstruct the role of law enforcement in schools.

When it came time to vote on the contracts, the SRO contracts passed unanimously. The contract for North State Company Place passed 7-2 6-3.

## Forsyth County Public Library System launches 'Books, Buttons and Bright Smiles' project

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

When Jessica Hassler, a library supervisor in the children's department at the Forsyth County Public Library system, realized that wearing face masks was making it more difficult to create a friendly atmosphere in the Library, she came up with the idea of creating three-inch but-

tons and will be rolling it out to the public from Aug. 24 to Nov. 28.

During library operating hours, customers can have their pictures taken and made into buttons like those the librarians are wearing. The Library hopes that the community will embrace the effort and wear the buttons in public as well as at the Library.

Anyone can participate in the button project. Customers are invited to come into their favorite FCPL branch, fill out a registration form and smile for the camera. They'll receive their buttons in the mail within seven to ten business days. Random buttons will also have a sticker inviting people to return to the Library to receive a



Submitted photo

Here are some of the buttons created by the Forsyth County Public Library system.

tons to wear that showed librarians' smiling faces.

"I find myself smiling reassuringly at strangers as we edge past in the grocery aisle, only to realize that my mask has covered all friendly intent from sight," she said. "The button was the result of a brainstorm on how to make the Library a little more welcoming as we've opened to the public."

Hassler worked with other Librarians on a project they're calling, "Books, Buttons & Bright Smiles,"

County residents are also discovering new ways that the Library system can support them during the pandemic, Director Brian D. Hart said.

"In addition to Books, Buttons and Bright Smiles, we're providing access to print and digital reading materials, and a host of online databases that can assist residents with needs ranging from homework help for students to marketing plans and funding opportunities for entrepreneurs," he said.

free book. These are books that have been donated and are suited to a range of ages.

Photos for the buttons will be taken outside when weather permits, or inside while practicing social distancing. The Library will not keep the photos or use them in any way.

After receiving their buttons, customers are encouraged to post their pictures wearing their buttons on social media, using the hashtag #SMILEWITHFCPL.

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