

THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER – NORTH CAROLINA

## Police to carry Tasers in schools

Chief Hamilton sees the stun guns as useful tools

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Resource officers at three high schools in Concord will carry Taser electrical stun guns this academic year, Concord Police Chief Merl Hamilton told Cabarrus County school board members Thursday.

Hamilton said he made the decision after considering feedback from the community and the three high schools that are in the city limits.

Resource officers stationed at Central Cabarrus, Concord and Robinson high schools started carrying the stun guns Friday.

It's another way for officers to help protect the students while avoiding potential physical confrontations, Hamilton said.

"We are seeing great value in the Tasers," Hamilton said. "We are seeing that it is a very useful tool to disarm someone."

Cabarrus County Schools Superintendent Harold "Butch" Winkler said he's comfortable with the decision.

"We've trusted police officers in our school with much more lethal weapons than Tasers," Winkler said. "I'm not uncomfortable with them being equipped with that mechanism."

Concord police school resource officers also carry handguns, nightsticks and pepper spray.

A Taser jolts a person with about 50,000 volts of electricity. It fires two barbed probes connected to the gun by wires about 20 feet long. The voltage causes the muscles to contract, immobilizing the person.

The Cabarrus County Sheriff's Office, which provides resource officers for Mount Pleasant and Northwest Cabarrus high schools, does not equip the officers with Tasers. Neither does the Kannapolis Police Department, which provides officers to Kannapolis schools.

In April, resource officers at the three schools carried Tasers for a month but did not use them. School officials have said they didn't know anything about it at the time. Hamilton apologized to the board members Thursday for failing to tell them and said it wouldn't happen again.

Board member Grace Mynatt has said she wants Tasers used only as a last resort.

Board member Holly Blackwelder asked police to keep the public informed about Tasers.

"The whole thing of the Taser gun has been so foreign to a lot of people," Blackwelder said. "But if most people know about it, then they would feel more comfortable with it."