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During the kickoff for the Normandy Schools Collaborative's "Brunch Patrol," after watching local police officers share a meal and interact with high school students, a local reporter approached Chief of Security Steve Harmon and asked the date of the next time.

Tomorrow, Harmon said. This isn't a once-a-quarter special event; it's an everyday thing.

That everyday thing means that officers from the 12 municipal police departments in the Normandy, Mo., school district are welcome in any of the seven schools' cafeterias, any time, to share a free breakfast or lunch and a visit with students. (Two of the local departments provide two school resource officers each to the district, but student interaction with officers from the other 10 agencies usually happens outside of school.)



Harmon says in an area and an era where distrust of law enforcement trends high, the program's goal is to help build healthy, positive relationships between students and local law enforcement, and he hopes the Brunch Patrol can lead to encounters along the lines of "how ya doin' Officer Mike," rather than those that are more negative.

Harmon, a retired police officer and attorney who took over the security chief's position in 2018, says that although the district will have some minimal costs for the additional meals, he thinks the payoff in improved relationships will be well worth it: "I hope this will foster relationships between students, their families, local law enforcement and everyone in the community."

The need for improved community relationships hits close to home. Teenager Michael Brown, who was fatally shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014, graduated from Normandy High School. The shooting touched off protests that lasted for weeks. A grand jury decided not to indict the officer.

Harmon hopes the Brunch Patrol program can be a part of an effort to ensure that his suburban St. Louis district does not experience anything like the incidents in neighboring Ferguson in the future. To that end, local law enforcement provided a strong turnout for the mid-September kickoff event, and Harmon hopes the officers continue to come out during the rest of the school year. He believes that a strong show of support from the administrations of the local law enforcement agencies and the school district provide a strong indication that they will.

"We've heard nothing but positive feedback from both of them, and I was pleasantly surprised to find out we had strong support from the teachers as well. They told me they thought it was 'the neatest thing' and wondered why no one ever thought of it

before,” Harmon says. “Local officers have always been encouraged to stop in and visit with students when they had time, but adopting an official program with a name gives them that much more incentive to stop in, share a meal and make some friends.”

Although it is too soon to begin measuring the program’s success, the positive feedback from stakeholders and the fact that officers continued to stop in at the various schools for meals following the kickoff event provide encouraging initial indicators.

“Things are no different here than in many other communities in the United States in that there is a need to improve relations between communities and the police,” Harmon says of the 3,200-student district, which encompasses a high school, an early learning center and five elementary schools.

“I hope that other school districts and departments pick up on it. There are all kinds of Police Athletic Leagues around the country that sponsor baseball, basketball and boxing. This could be another tool in that toolbox,” he says. “The students never get a chance to interact with police officers in a laughing, joking manner. This gives them a chance to see the police in a different light and maybe flip their attitude about officers to a positive one.”

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