ANN HEALEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Police beat: *Farmington Hills police officer Jim Baker talks to teachers at William Grace Elementary about gang activity in school. He shows the group how beepers can be used to communicate gang affiliation.*

Police   *from page 1A*

on-one with high school students as much as talking to grade schoolers at Grace Elementary about Halloween trick-or-treating and safety.

"I love working with kids," he said. "Kids today are faced with some things that we weren't 20 years ago. We're just another resource to help them."

The program was developed to curb teen crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and now also targets potential gang problems. Vandalism, assaults and thefts are also problems the officers can address on the scene.

"We will hear about a potential fight," Baker said. "We'll talk to the kids and that will re-

solve the problem."

There is another advantage for students. Whether dressed in uniform or in plain clothes, the police have a presence. And students know they can talk to an officer.

Christine Guinan said she can get information for regular patrol officers on juvenile problems.

"They'll talk to me even though they didn't talk to the original officer who investigated it," Guinan said.

Baker says students seem to know that the officers are trustworthy, but at the same time, the kids treat the officers

with respect.

"It's a nice approach, because we aren't reactive," Baker said. "We treat them as a person, not just a kid."

Murphy said because so many students are from single-parent households or households where both parents work, the contact with adults is limited.

"For a lot of kids, there is nobody who has the time to talk to them," he said.

Anderson agreed.

"More than anything, they need someone to talk to," he said.

The cities and schools agree that the split cost of the program ($25,000 for each) is mon-

ey well-spent.

"It's the best $50,000 we will spend for the amount of service," Cowan said.

Officers have to volunteer for the program and pass tests, oral boards, demonstrate the ability to work with children and be able to build trust, Murphy said.

The officers, who have both served in the patrol unit among others, will someday return to other duties. That, they agree, is important.

"Without the patrol experience and backup from the department, I wouldn't be prepared for this," Baker said.

Recall   *from page 1A*

to time that someone did not know what they were signing, or were led to believe they were signing something other than what they were," Thomas said. "But for the most part, it hasn't been a problem."

Betty Lurie of Voters' Voice said although no decision had been made about taking signatures off petitions, she thought it presumptuous of the City Council to direct the clerk's office to offer the service.

"The clerk's office is being used," Lurie said. "I talked to the elections director (Thomas) and (he) said there was no law that he

knew of that addressed the issue.

"I'm not sure if it would be legal to take those signatures off."

Lurie added that the process of going through petitions, finding the signatures that might not even be there, and then removing them would take valuable time Voters' Voice needs.

"Right now we're trying to get signatures on the petitions," she said.

Lurie said it makes more sense for the Say No to Recall committee to get the names of people who wanted signatures taken off the petitions.

Policy   *from page 1A*

Benefit Services. Non-union employees and new hires are on the plan.

Both MESSA and MEBS use Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Coverage is identical, school officials have said.

In the interim, MESSA has continued to provide insurance to union employees at its own cost pending the judge's ruling. As of Feb. 1, the company will stop.

MESSA officials couldn't be reached for comment.

The district is working on a plan to cover employees, said Sue Zurvalec, assistant superintendent for Community and Employee Relations.

"Basically our position for our employees is they will not go without insurance coverage," Zurvalec said.

Breck's ruling may have larger

> ■ '(It's) simply the uncertainty of not knowing what the decision would be.'
>
> *Zan Alley*

implications.

MESSA, a subsidiary of the Michigan Education Association, is considered to have a monopoly. It's an insurance carrier for more than 300 districts.

School boards have reportedly been forced to accept the union's insurance company or face a strike. There's interest in the Farmington case, Zurvalec said.

"I know insurance costs and the ability of school boards to choose a carrier is an important issue," Zurvalec said.