

Minority students to learn about police work

[George Hunter, The Detroit News](#) Published 12:36 p.m. ET March 22, 2018

A group of minority high school students will learn first-hand what it's like for police to respond to domestic violence runs, traffic stops and other situations, in an effort to help the youths understand what cops deal with every day.

The "Be the Change Turnabout Program" is scheduled Saturday at the Macomb Community College Emergency Service Training Center. Program director Darnell Blackburn, a longtime police officer, said he hopes to attract more minorities into law enforcement careers.

"We have to be the change we want to see," said Blackburn, a field representative for the Michigan Coalition on Law Enforcement Standards. "Change is most effective from the inside out, not the outside in.

"If police agencies don't want to be integrated, then they should be infiltrated," Blackburn said. "The demographics of cities, counties and states are changing drastically, and in order to better serve all, police agencies should look like all."

Eighty minority juniors and seniors from Dakota, Mount Clemens, Henry Ford II, Clintondale, Chippewa Valley and Utica high schools were selected by school administrators to participate in the program.

In addition to encouraging young minorities to pursue law enforcement careers, Blackburn said the program aims to create empathy by having cops play the role of community members; allow young people to interact positively with police officers; and to educate the participants about the guidelines under which cops work.

According to a press release, the students will be given lectures by 36th District Court Chief Judge Kenneth King on lethal force, the arrest criteria for domestic violence, and the difference between civil infractions and misdemeanors in traffic enforcement cases.

The students will then be assigned to one of five groups and proceed to five 30-minute breakout sessions that will go over domestic violence, traffic stops (and the language barriers that come up), suspicious situations, racial profiling in traffic stops, and a firearms simulation system.

"All of the actors in the scenarios are minority police officers or corrections deputies, most of whom work in Macomb County police agencies," Blackburn said. "At the conclusion of the day, once all the students have participated in the scenarios, a debriefing will be held to talk about the program objectives."

Also scheduled to participate are Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, Macomb County Sheriff Anthony Wickersham, Sterling Heights police Chief Dale Dwogiakowski; and Anthony Lewis of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

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