Chicago revamps community policing program
Retooling doesn’t mean new beat officers on the streets

By Natalie Moore
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With persistent attention toward the city's murder count, the Chicago Police Department is revamping its community policing program.

The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy or CAPS, as its also known, has been seen as a national model. Police officers regularly meet with community members to talk about crimes in the areas and solutions on how to fix those problems. But in recent years, the program has faced budget cuts and a decline in attendance at its neighborhood meetings.

Previously, police headquarters managed CAPS, which Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy said didn’t make any sense. Officers will now work out of individual districts instead of police headquarters. The new changes, however, don’t translate into new beat officers on the street. “District commanders will be responsible for the development, execution and oversight of community policing efforts in their districts,” McCarthy said Tuesday morning at the 3rd Police District on 70th and Cottage Grove.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel said the changes were made because community policing became a bureaucracy.

“We had as many people in the headquarters doing CAPS as we had in the district but they were removed from the neighborhood, the community and the people they were supposed to be working with,” Emanuel said.

Arthur J. Lurigio, a criminal justice and psychology professor at Loyola University, said some of the CAPS changes aren’t new. They harken back to the original philosophy.

“All of the changes are favorable in terms of the improvement of policing in Chicago and police community relations in Chicago -- some of what’s suggested is part of the original caps model, which is coming on its 20th anniversary,” Lurigio said.

Some efforts to work with the community yield positive results. For example, CPD credited residents for success in one arena. Already this year, Chicago police have confiscated 180 guns. In 2012, police confiscated more than 7,400 guns, including 300 assault weapons. That’s nine times as many guns as New York City and three times as many in Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, Mayor Emanuel is still pressuring Illinois lawmakers to restrict high-capacity magazines and assault weapons.