



*Safe Communities ~  
Safe Schools*

# FACT SHEET

FS-SC11

2001,2009

## Implementing an Effective School Resource Officer Program

### School Resource Officers (SROs) and the School Community

Collaboration between law enforcement officers and schools is an important step in increasing school safety. The concept of having law enforcement officers involved with schools stems from the practice of community policing. Community policing utilizes the assistance of community members for identifying and prioritizing problems and developing solutions. The school community may involve the following: superintendents, administrators, principals and assistant principals, teachers and assistants, counselors, school nurses, school social workers and psychologists, bus drivers, custodians, maintenance and cafeteria personnel, students and parents. In a School Resource Officer program the members of the school community partner with the law enforcement officer assigned to their school in order to create a setting that is safe and secure, with a focus on prevention and early intervention activities.

### Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the school resource officer vary from school to school. A diverse range of duties can be incorporated into the SRO job description. Some functions served by the SRO include: law enforcement officer, public safety specialist, community liaison and problem solver, law-related educator, and positive role model.

1. **Law Enforcement Officer** - Although a less performed role, the SRO is still a law enforcement officer with the authority and duty to handle crimes and make arrests when necessary. It is important to differentiate between school code of conduct violations and crimes. SROs should not be involved in code of conduct violations, but should take the lead on criminal violations. Part of this role is also the responsibility to serve as a liaison between the school and the local police department.
2. **Public Safety Specialist** - The SRO should be aware of current research on effective strategies for increasing school safety, and assist the school in implementing research-based strategies. The SRO should be involved with discipline policies, school safety assessments, physical safety of the school, crisis and emergency management planning, crime prevention or intervention, and other safe school planning processes.
3. **Community Liaison and Problem Solver** - Many problems require change within or assistance from the community. The SRO should be aware of community resources and contacts that can be helpful in solving a problem. Some community resources of which the SRO should be aware include: mental health services, substance abuse assessment and treatment providers, child protective services, runaway shelters, domestic violence services, and family counseling agencies.
4. **Law-Related Educator** - Law-related education is designed to teach students the fundamentals and skills needed to become responsible citizens in a democracy. Law-related education teaches social competence, problem-solving skills, a sense of autonomy, and reinforces high expectations for youth and positive peer norms. This should be a fun and interesting class with field trips, community service projects, visits from juvenile justice representatives, classroom participation, and mock trials or public performances.
5. **Positive Role Model** - One of the most influential roles held by the SRO is that of being a positive role model to students. Students often seek approval, direction and guidance in informal interactions with an SRO that they trust. Some ways for the SRO to be a positive role model include: setting limits by being clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable; setting an example; being honest; being consistent with students, staff and parents; encouraging responsibility; and showing respect for students. The SRO should always try to maintain a professional appearance; be visible and accessible; take concerns seriously and follow through with commitments to take action; participate in and support school functions; maintain a relationship with students' parents; and maintain a relationship with faculty and the school administration.

### Establishing Relationships

A critical aspect to the success of the school resource officer is the establishment of relationships with school staff and specialists, parents, and especially students. It is important for the SRO to be aware of the services being provided by school specialists such as guidance counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers, speech pathologists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. The SRO should establish collaborative working relationships with the specialists and with school staff. Parents are key players in the school community and should also be the focus of relationship building by the SRO. The SRO should attend PTA meetings, parent nights and conferences. It would also be useful for the SRO to create a brochure or fact sheet regarding the roles of the SRO; this could be distributed to parents, teachers, students and other community members. Without a doubt, the most important relationships for the SRO to cultivate are relationships with the students. Getting youth actively involved in the School Resource Officer program can help the SRO to build rapport with students; reduce stereotypes of police officers; provide opportunities for youth to be involved in the improvement of their school; and promote crime and delinquency prevention. Some ideas for student involvement include:

- **School Safety Surveys** - surveying peers regarding the safety of their school.
- **Vandalism Prevention** - using posters/brochures to bolster school pride and to educate.
- **Crime Watch** - encouraging students to watch for crime and suspicious activity and report it.
- **Drug Abuse Prevention** - educating peers on the dangers of alcohol and drugs.
- **Community Clean-ups** - working with peers to paint over graffiti, pick up litter, etc.
- **Mentoring** - assisting younger students through tutoring, reading, or spending time.
- **Teen Courts** - using students to try cases of other students.
- **Senior Citizen Assistance** - assisting the elderly with errands or tasks and checking in on them.

### **The School Resource Officer and School Safety**

The school resource officer is a key player in all of the components of safe school planning, which include:

- **Planning Teams** -The SRO should be included in planning meetings to discuss school safety issues and contribute to decisions about school safety.
- **Assessments** - School safety assessments should be performed in the school and community; the SRO can assist or direct the process since he/she should have relationships with students and the community that would add credibility to the efforts.
- **Prevention Programming** - The SRO should be aware of the importance of research based programs. With the results from the assessments, the SRO and the Planning Team can choose programs which are appropriate to the needs of the school and community.
- **Social Support Team** - The SRO is a critical member of the collaborative interagency team known as the Social Support Team. This team is to be made up of some or all of the following: school administrator, local law enforcement, SRO, community-based mental health professional, school counselor/psychologist, and a legal advisor. This team meets to address the needs of at-risk youth and to manage individual student cases.
- **Crisis Planning** - The SRO should be a key player in the development of the school crisis response plans. The SRO can help facilitate the communications between the school and law enforcement, and can help ensure that all plans are practiced, not only within the school, but also with the involvement of all applicable agencies (law enforcement, parents, media, etc.).

### **School Resource Officer Program Assessment**

In a 2005 NCJRS assessment of nineteen SRO programs nationwide, key issues were discovered that could benefit other programs.

- Programs should consider how best to allocate an SRO's time between the level of crime and disorder in the school, the administration's goals, and the individual SRO's personality and experience.
- Applicants should be carefully screened before hiring and then trained from the beginning and supervised conscientiously.
- An SRO's role and responsibilities should be spelled out clearly.
- Establishing a productive relationship between SROs principals, assistant principals, and teachers was essential to the success of a program.
- SROs who could walk the fine line between being an enforcer of the law and being a teacher and mentor to a student were more effective in working with students.
- Those who received the most support from parents were SROs who used PTAs and other community meetings or resources to inform parents about what they were doing in their schools.
- Although few of the programs studied conducted assessments of their programs, program evaluation was essential to improving the program and convincing funding sources of its value.

Atkinson, A.J. (2000). *The Successful School Resource Officer Program: Building Effective School and Law Enforcement Partnerships*. Richmond, VA: Greystone Publishers, Inc.

Finn, Peter, McDevitt, Jack, (2005) *National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs Final Project Report*, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, U. S. Department of Justice, Rockville, MD.

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