



Effective Responses

School Community Resource Officers

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What Works in Preventing School Violence

RESOURCES:

Community Links

(Newsletter published by the National Sheriffs' Association on behalf of the Community Policing Consortium.)

Community Policing Exchange

(Newsletter for Law enforcement personnel and community agencies)

Community Policing Consortium
1726 M St. N.W., Suite 801
Washington, DC 20036
Publications: 202-530-0639
800-833-3085

nsapubs@communitypolicing.org

National Association of School Resource Officers

Curt Lavarell, President
561-554-4903

<http://www.rt66.com>

National Center for the Prevention of School Violence

Website includes information about SRO roles and responsibilities, sample job descriptions, and information about other safety and security programs.
800-299-6054

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/cep/PreViolence/CtrPreSchVio.html>

The School Community Resource Officer program, also known as the School Resource Officer (SRO) program, is a part of a larger community-oriented policing program focusing on building collaboration and strong relationships between police agencies and communities. Community policing aims to build stronger ties between law enforcement agencies and communities. As a part of this community policing philosophy, the US Department of Justice has initiated a Youth-Focused Community Oriented Policing initiative, which, among other efforts, has provided some funding to support the assignment of police officers to schools as their primary "beat." In addition, some communities have found their own funding for these types of assignments.

Overview: School Community Resource Officers

A school resource officer is a uniformed street police officer who (typically) volunteers to have one or more schools as his or her "beat." SROs should be distinguished from security guards hired by some school systems who are not sworn law enforcement officers, and from the school district police departments in some larger cities which are separate sworn law enforcement departments serving only the school system (though the latter typically may be similar in function to SROs).

Each SRO is expected to continue to function as a complete police officer by enforcing all laws within the general community, and by responding to calls from the central dispatcher at other locations when needed. The officer is usually assigned an office or desk within the school, and maintains communication with his/her Police Department offices via normal radio communication. Many schools also provide the SRO with radio communication to the school building administrator or principal's office. These school liaison officers vary somewhat in their responsibilities, but have as their primary mission the reduction of youth crime, particularly at school. Often an important part of the responsibility of an SRO is the teaching of the Gang Resistance Education and Training program (GREAT) within the schools, and the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program (DARE) in elementary schools.

The goals of the SRO program are to support school staff in efforts to provide a safe, productive learning environment, to educate students about law-related issues, and to directly affect certain student behaviors, such as decision-making. In addition, the program supports comprehensive, proactive partnerships among police, youth, and the community, as well as establishing close working relationships and better information sharing with school personnel.

What We Know About the School Community Resource Officer Program

Numerous positive outcomes of SRO programs in the context of community policing have been identified in local evaluations of these programs (Marans & Schaefer, 1998). While there have not been extensive national evaluations of the SRO program, there has been research supporting the positive effects of community policing on community crime more generally. Some local evaluations of the SRO program have provided strong support for the program and recommended expanding the program as soon as possible to cover all

secondary schools and elementary schools on a rotating basis (Walker, 1995). According to these reports, the major goals for the SRO program as listed above have been achieved. In addition, several related benefits were identified, including more rapid response time to calls, better traffic enforcement around the schools, fewer calls to street officers to deal with school-based difficulties, fewer fights, and a generally more orderly environment in the school.

Making it Work

The SRO program has required close cooperation between the school district and police department, and the availability of sufficient combined resources to be able to fund SRO positions, though some state and federal grants may also provide support in some locations. Lack of law enforcement resources have limited the use of this program to some moderate and large city locations, and have made the program unavailable in rural and small town locations. Only police departments with a strong community policing orientation are most likely to embrace this program (Trump, 1997).

Schools have reported that much of the success of the SRO program hinges on the development of relationships, communication, and trust between the officer and students. Some states require specialized training for SROs. North Carolina, for example, requires 40 hours covering educational settings, juvenile law, special education laws, and giving classroom presentations. While the close proximity and opportunities for interaction promote the development of this relationship, it also depends on the personality and motivation of the officer to engage and find ways to relate to students. When the program works well, the officer serves as a mentor and role model for students and as a law-related educator of students, as well as a deterrent to crime in the school. Law enforcement agencies that have SROs have indicated that the program has provided valuable crime prevention information which would not otherwise have been available, and that the relationships with community youth developed in schools have been maintained even when officers cycle out of resource officer positions. Pamela Riles, Director of the Center for the Prevention of School Violence, indicated that in a North Carolina Survey, SROs outperformed most of the widely-used programs in a principal survey of program effectiveness (Popularity of Resource Officer Programs

Grows, 1997).

Where the program has been less successful, sending students to the SRO has been used as a classroom management consequence or school discipline enforcement device. This has permitted school officials to evade their responsibilities and interfered with the officer developing a positive relationship with students. The program has also been less successful where officers are involuntarily assigned, are assigned to too many schools, or are assigned to other non-school based duties that interfere with the ability of the officer to have daily regular contact and familiarity with students in one or two schools (Trump, 1997). School officials have been positive about the program in virtually all communities when it has avoided these problems.

Summary

In those locations that have implemented the SRO program it has proven to be a highly valued program due to its social impact and preventative effects as much as for its actual law enforcement function. Most schools have found this program to be highly desirable.

- Reece L. Peterson

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About the Safe & Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing and studying prevention-based approaches to school safety. The Project is currently working with schools in districts in Indiana and Nebraska to integrate best-practice strategies in school violence prevention into comprehensive school-based plans for deterring school disruption and violence. **Visit our web site: www.indiana.edu/~safeschl.**

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