Today's School Resource Officer

Overview for Senate Judiciary Committee

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Common Roles for School Resource Officers

School resource officers in schools provide a wide array of services. Although their duties can vary considerably from community to community, the three most typical roles of SROs are **safety expert and law enforcer, problem solver and liaison** to **community resources, and educator**.

Safety Expert and Law Enforcer

As sworn police officers, SROs play a unique role in preserving order and promoting safety on campus by, for example:

- Assuming primary responsibility for handling calls for service from the school and in coordinating the response of other police resources
- Addressing crime and disorder problems, gangs, and drug activities occurring in or around the school
- Making arrests and issuing citations on campus
- Providing leads and information to the appropriate investigative units
- Taking action against unauthorized persons on school property
- Serving as hall monitors, truancy enforcers, crossing guards, and operators of metal detectors and other security devices
- Responding to off-campus criminal mischief that involves students
- Serving as liaisons between the school and the police and providing information to students and school personnel about law enforcement matters.

K-12

Beyond serving in a crime prevention and response role, **SROs are likely to serve as first responders** in the event of critical incidents at schools, such as accidents, fires, explosions, and other life threatening events. In addition, SROs often support advance planning for managing crises, including assisting with:

- Developing incident response systems
- Developing and coordinating emergency response plans (in conjunction with other emergency responders)
- Incorporating law enforcement onto school crisis management teams

- Developing protocols for handling specific types of emergencies
- Rehearsing such protocols using tabletop exercises, drills, and mock evacuations and lockdowns.

Problem Solver and Liaison to Community Resources

In the school setting, problem solving involves coordinated efforts among administrators, teachers, students, parents, mental health professionals, and community-based stakeholders. SROs frequently assist in resolving problems that are not necessarily law violations, such as bullying or disorderly behavior, but which are nonetheless safety issues that can result in or contribute to criminal incidents. Helping resolve these problems frequently requires the officer to act as a resource liaison, referring students to professional services within both the school (guidance counselors, social workers) and the community (youth and family service organizations). In particular, SROs often build relationships with juvenile justice counselors, who are responsible for supervising delinquent youths, connecting them with needed services, and recommending diversionary activities.

- Problem-solving activities commonly include:
- Developing and expanding crime prevention efforts for students
- Developing and expanding community justice initiatives for students
- Assisting in identifying environmental changes that can reduce crime in or around schools
- Assisting in developing school policies that address crime and recommending procedural changes to implement those policies.

Educator

A police officer can serve as a resource for classroom presentations that complement the educational curriculum by emphasizing the fundamental principles and skills needed for responsible citizenship, as well as by teaching topics related to policing. SROs can present courses for students, faculty, and parents. Although SROs teach a variety of classes, there is no research indicating which classes are most useful or how to ensure an officer's effectiveness in the teaching role. Topics commonly covered in an SRO curriculum include:

- Policing as a career
- Criminal investigation
- Alcohol and drug awareness
- Gang and stranger awareness and resistance
- General crime prevention
- Conflict resolution
- Restorative justice
- Babysitting safety
- Bicycling, pedestrian, and motor vehicle safety
- Special crimes in which students are especially likely to be offenders or victims, such as vandalism, shoplifting, and sexual assault by acquaintances.

Changes in Perceptions of Safety

A police presence can make some communities feel safer; this is true for school communities as well. Most studies of the effects of SRO programs focus on reports that faculty, parents, and students feel safer when there is a police officer present in the school. Research by the Center for the Prevention of School Violence indicates that the presence of SROs in schools makes students, teachers, and staff feel safer and can be a positive deterrent to incidents and acts of violence. This finding corresponds with the results of a poll of the general public indicating that 65 percent of persons surveyed believe that placing a police officer in schools would reduce school violence.

Key SRO attributes:

- The ability to work effectively with students within the age range of the school
- The ability to work with parents
- The ability to work with principals and other school administrators
- Knowledge of school-based legal issues
- Knowledge of school resources
- Knowledge of social service resources
- An understanding of child development and psychology
- An understanding of crime prevention through environmental design
- Teaching skills
- Public speaking skills
- Knowledge of school safety technology and implementation.

Schools that currently have SROs in place have reported higher levels of perceived safety and security than those without SROs.

It is believed that SROs can play a valuable role in promoting positive citizenship among students, and that SROs with their law enforcement training and experience in emergency operations can also serve as deterrents to potential threats on school premises.