



School Resource Officers and School-based Policing

A **school resource officer (SRO)** is a career law enforcement officer assigned in a community policing capacity to a local educational agency. SROs work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations to provide a positive and visible law enforcement presence on school campuses. SROs have four major roles:

- **Law Enforcement.** SROs address crime and disorder in and around school campus. SROs strive to employ non-punitive techniques when interacting with students, using citation and arrest only as a last resort under narrow circumstances.
- **Informal Counselor.** SROs build relationships with students and act as liaisons to community services for youth and families.
- **Educator.** SROs teach students about crime prevention and safety, drug awareness, conflict resolution, and other topics related to law enforcement and the legal system.
- **Emergency Manager.** SROs develop and implement emergency preparedness policies, including comprehensive school safety plans, and coordinate with first responders in an emergency. SROs are integral members of a school threat assessment team.

Developing Your School-Based Partnership

It is essential for law enforcement agencies and schools implementing an SRO program to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clearly documents the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the SROs, school officials, law enforcement, education departments, students, and parents. A useful MOU documents the program's purpose, all partner roles and responsibilities, and the parameters for information sharing. (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws support SRO and school

information sharing to maximize coordinated response and student safety.) The MOU should be reviewed and updated as needed on an annual basis.

Information sharing between SROs and school personnel should include student records when necessary to promote school safety and the physical security of students. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) supports such information sharing to maximize coordinated response and positive outcomes.

One essential element of an MOU is the clear prohibition on SROs responding to disciplinary matters. MOUs must clearly indicate that SROs will not be responsible for or involved in routine student discipline. Disciplinary issues are the sole responsibility of school personnel and should be carefully selected and trained.

Selection and training

SRO candidates should be sworn law enforcement officers or deputies with at least three years' work experience and an interest in developing positive, community-oriented relationships with youth and the school community. Candidates should volunteer for the assignment.

Every new SRO should complete an initial training on police work in a school setting. Training should cover youth development, problem-solving and mentoring, positive behavior interventions, and emergency management. In addition, SROs should have annual refresher training to learn about new standards and policies and the most current research. The COPS Office partners with the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) to support local, national, and online training.

Emergency management

SROs are also integral to school emergency preparation and response. In addition to formal prevention measures such as threat assessments and safety plans, SROs can also intervene with students at risk of violence. In an actual emergency, such as an attack or a natural disaster, SROs respond in their law enforcement capacity and act as a liaison between the school and first responders.

School-based Policing

School districts and law enforcement agencies may not be able to sustain assigned SROs in the K-12 setting, but officers and school personnel can still collaborate to increase student safety and reduce crime. Officers can be involved in schools as visiting instructors, coaches, or mentors for programs such as Youth Cadets. Officers can be integral partners in threat assessment and emergency management teams. Officers can also provide support and crime prevention for specific events such as after-school sports. Security staff can support safety initiatives but do not replace law enforcement.

Ongoing communication between officers and youth, through either an SRO program or school-based policing, leads to improved trust and mutual respect, which results in a safer school and improved outcomes for students.

What is a School Resource Officer?

Federal statute defines a school resource officer as a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department to a local educational agency to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations to

- educate students in crime and illegal drug use prevention and safety;
- develop or expand community justice initiatives for students;
- train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime and illegal drug use awareness.

Resources

Supporting Safe Schools webpage.

<https://cops.usdoj.gov/supportingsafeschools>

Beyond the Badge: Profile of a School Resource Officer – A film about SRO Ronald Cockrell and the work of SROs, with accompanying discussion guides.

<https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-CD050>

To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools – A NASRO publication.

<https://nasro.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NASRO-To-Protect-and-Educate-nosecurity.pdf>.

Averted School Violence Database – A reporting system that enables law enforcement, school personnel and mental health professionals to share their stories and lessons learned.

<https://www.avertedschoolviolence.org/>

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Center (REMS TA) – A technical assistance hub that provides information, resources, training, and services in the field of campus emergency operations planning.

<https://rems.ed.gov/>

Protecting Student Privacy: K-12 School Officials – Resources addressing FERPA, including guidance for SROs and school based policing.

<https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/audience/school-officials-k-12>

Contact the COPS Office

For more information about COPS Office programs and resources, please call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770 or visit the COPS Office website at www.cops.usdoj.gov.