



Fact Sheet

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School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding

School Resource Officer (SRO) programs can play an important role in maintaining and increasing safety in schools and neighboring communities. In order to effectively implement such programs, law enforcement agencies and schools should develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to clearly document the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the individuals and partners involved including SROs, school officials, law enforcement, education departments, students, and parents. At a minimum, a successful MOU documents the program's purpose, partner roles and responsibilities, requirements for information sharing, and supervision of the SRO. Law enforcement agencies and schools should use this fact sheet as a guide to developing the MOU.

Define a memorandum of understanding

An MOU, also referred to as an interagency agreement or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), is an instrument used to build mutual respect and trust between partners while

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delineating specific roles and responsibilities of the partnering agencies. Every jurisdiction with a school and law enforcement partnership should have an MOU that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the individual partners involved, including school districts, boards or departments of education, school administration officials, law enforcement agencies (including SROs), students, families, and social service agencies. As a policy instrument, all parties should sign and abide by the MOU, and it should be considered a living document that operates within the context created by applicable federal and state laws—including, but not limited to, federal civil rights laws and privacy laws.

For all COPS Hiring Program (CHP) and Tribal Resources Grant Program – Hire SRO awards, a signed MOU must be submitted to the COPS Office within 90 days of the date shown on the award congratulatory letter. Implementation of the award without submission and acceptance of the required MOU may result in expenditures not being reimbursed by the COPS Office and/or award deobligation.

Developing your school-based partnership

School and law enforcement partnerships are also built on a foundation of shared goals and objectives, which are approached in a constructive and positive manner and achieved through open communication. When schools, communities, and law enforcement agencies work together to creatively address problems, positive outcomes can be achieved, including

- an increased ability of law enforcement agencies, schools, and community groups to gather and analyze useful and timely information about crime and fear of crime in schools in accordance with applicable privacy laws;
- an increased ability of law enforcement agencies, schools, and community groups to work together in developing innovative, systemic, long-term approaches to reducing and preventing different kinds of crime in and around

their schools and preventing unnecessary law enforcement involvement in noncriminal student misbehavior. Measurable outcomes may be determined by implementing strategies focused on targeted crimes, thereby improving the quality of life for those affected (students, teachers, school personnel, and parents), promoting a safer environment conducive to learning, and decreasing the fear of crime and violence among students, school employees, and the surrounding community;

- an increased understanding of how to effectively interact with youth through coordinated training on topics such as basic childhood and adolescent development and age appropriate responses and de-escalation techniques;
- an increased understanding of an SRO's roles and responsibilities, including an understanding that school code of conduct violations and routine discipline of students remains the responsibility of school administrators and that law enforcement actions (such as arrest, citations, ticketing, or court referrals) are only to be used as a last resort for incidents that involve criminal behavior or when it becomes necessary to protect the safety of students, faculty, and staff from the threat of immediate harm;
- an increased ability through coordinated training for schools and law enforcement agencies to properly train and respond to school safety threats;
- an increased ability to plan for and respond appropriately to emergencies.

NOTE: The U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice released guidance for schools on emergency planning. See *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2013), https://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf. See also <https://www.schoolsafety.gov/protect-and-mitigate/emergency-planning> for additional updated school emergency plan guidance.

MOU guidance

The following information must be included within an MOU: Statement of Purpose; Defined Roles & Responsibilities; Information Sharing; Supervision & Chain of Command; Official Signatures. The COPS Office requires law enforcement agencies to work collaboratively with school partners to formulate additional information that will help successfully implement the overall school safety plans. To promote transparency, the completed MOU should be available online via the school district and law enforcement agency websites.

Under COPS Office SRO awards, agencies must have a defined SRO deployment policy developed with the school partnership that is focused on youth-related duties at K–12 schools. Individual award programs may have additional terms and conditions related to SRO duty assignments. The time commitment of the SROs must be above and beyond the amount of time that the agency devoted to the schools before receiving the award. There must be an increase in the level of community policing activities performed in and around primary or secondary schools in the agency's jurisdiction as a result of the award.

A. Purpose of the MOU

The statement of purpose should describe the agencies that are entering into the partnership, the purpose of the partnership, and the effective date of the agreement. This statement may already exist within your ongoing partnership, or it may need to be developed jointly to assist in defining the primary purpose of your agreement. The effective date of the agreement must cover the term of the award or contain language regarding the annual renewal of the agreement through the term of the award.

B. Description of partner roles and responsibilities

This description must include the roles and responsibilities of the school, the school district, and the law enforcement agency, and each partner should be specifically listed within the document. It must clearly indicate that SROs will not be responsible for requests to resolve routine discipline problems involving students. The administration of student discipline, including student code of conduct violations and student misbehavior, is the responsibility of

school administrators unless the violation or misbehavior involves criminal conduct. SROs should not respond to incidents that do not pose any threat to safety or would not be considered crimes if they occurred outside the school setting.

The MOU must include the roles and responsibilities of the school partner. These roles may include providing a secure work space for SROs to conduct interviews and maintain confidential records; establishing standing meetings; and working with school administrators in identifying problems and evaluating progress under the MOU, including data collection and evaluation. The school administrator should ensure that staff cooperates with police investigations and any subsequent actions related to crime or criminal activity on campus.

The law enforcement partner is responsible for the selection of officer(s) assigned to the school, and these officer(s) should adhere to the principles of community policing. This section of the MOU must define the roles and responsibilities of the SRO and the assigned hours of SRO duty, including arrival and departure times and specifying if after-hour duties may be performed and if time spent in court, attending interagency meetings, and investigating school-related crimes are within the scope of SRO duties.

The MOU should include examples of the activities that the SRO will engage in, such as

- handling requests for calls for service in and around schools;
- conducting comprehensive safety and security assessments;
- developing emergency management and incident response systems based on the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the four phases of emergency management: mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery;
- developing and implementing safety plans or strategies;
- integrating appropriate security equipment/technology solutions, including incorporating crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) as appropriate to enhance school safety;
- responding to unauthorized persons on school property;
- serving as liaisons between the school and other police agencies, investigative units, or juvenile justice authorities when necessary and consistent with applicable civil rights laws and privacy laws;

- serving as a member of a multidisciplinary school team to refer students to professional services within both the school (guidance counselors or social workers) and the community (youth and family service organizations);
- building relationships with juvenile justice counselors to help connect youth with needed services;
- developing and expanding crime prevention efforts for students;
- developing and expanding community justice initiatives for students.

C. Information sharing

This section must address the type of and the extent to which information will be shared between the law enforcement agency and school or school district partners. For example, it should define the type of information the school is permitted or willing to share with law enforcement, as well as information flow from law enforcement to school partner(s). When entering into an MOU, agencies should consider all federal or state laws that govern the collection, use, and dissemination of student records. The MOU should also include a mechanism for the school district to receive feedback regarding SROs' activities and actions.

Federal privacy laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), and civil rights and other laws must be considered when developing plans for information sharing that involves personally identifiable information from student education records. For more information on FERPA, see the U.S. Department of Education's *School Resource Officers, School Law Enforcement Units, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* at <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources/school-resource-officers-school-law-enforcement-units-and-ferpa>; for more information on HIPAA, see the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' FERPA and HIPAA page at <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/faq/ferpa-and-hipaa/index.html>; and for an overview of FERPA issues relevant to emergency planning and SRO programs, please see the "Closer Look" section of the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* at https://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf.

D. Supervision responsibility and chain of command for the SRO

This section must clearly establish a definitive chain of command for the SRO, including the individual(s) with the responsibility for the supervision of the SRO. With rare exceptions, this responsibility lies with the law enforcement executive or his or her law enforcement designee.

E. Signatures

The MOU must be signed and dated by both the highest ranking law enforcement executive (i.e., police chief or sheriff) and the school official(s) who will have general educational oversight and decision-making authority (i.e., board of education chairperson, superintendent, or school principal). The MOU should be developed with participation from school administrators and officers assigned to the school(s) so that staff members who are impacted by the agreement clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Successful MOUs are often developed by teams that include students, families, social service agencies, and other community members committed to keeping schools safe, in addition to school and law enforcement members. The MOU should be publicly available to members of the school community.

Supplemental Information

In addition to the required information set forth in the MOU guidance, training requirements and performance monitoring should be addressed in the MOU. The COPS Office recommends including a section that describes training requirements prior to placing SROs in educational settings, as well as specific in-service training requirements throughout their deployment in the schools. The COPS Office also recommends a section that establishes a process to closely monitor the SRO program through an annual program assessment, including comprehensive disaggregated data collection on school-based arrests, citations, searches, and referrals to court or juvenile justice programs consistent with applicable federal, state, and local privacy laws. This section should also describe outreach to students and their families to solicit feedback on the SRO program and specific incidents and collectively problem solve or address student or community concerns.

Annual Review

The MOU should be reviewed on an annual basis by the school district and law enforcement agency to identify any necessary updates based on new policy or best practices. A copy of the MOU should also be provided to SROs for their review and suggested updates.

Contact the COPS Office

For more information about COPS Office programs and resources, please contact the COPS Office Response Center at AskCOPSRC@usdoj.gov or 800-421-6770 or visit the COPS Office website at <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.

Resources

Advancement Project

Proposed Memorandum of Understanding between School District and Police Department.

<https://advancementproject.org/resources/sample-agreements-police-schools>

Advocatr

Student self-empowerment tools to build safe schools funded via a schoolwide safety framework called SOARS (Student Ownership, Accountability, and Responsibility for School Safety).

<https://advocatr.org>

Averted School Violence database

Anonymous reporting system for SROs and school professionals to share averted school violence events and lessons learned.

<https://avertedschoolviolence.org>

Bureau of Justice Statistics

Survey of Law Enforcement Personnel in Schools (SLEPS). <https://bjslecs.org/SLEPS2019>

COPS Office Supporting Safe Schools page

Federal and stakeholder resources for SROs, including the documentary *Beyond the Badge*.

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

FERPA Act FAQs

<https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/frequently-asked-questions>

The National Center for School Safety

The National Center for School Safety (NCSS) is the BJA STOP Program technical assistance provider, focused on improving school safety and preventing school violence. <https://www.nc2s.org/about-us/>

National Center for Education Statistics

Primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. <https://nces.ed.gov>

NCMEC Cyber Safety Tools

KidSmartz teaches elementary school kids and their families about personal safety. NetSmartz is an education program teaching kids and their families about online safety.

<https://www.missingkids.org/education/kidsmartz>
<https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/home>

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Center

Technical assistance hub that provides information, resources, training, and services in the field of school and higher education emergency operations planning. <https://rems.ed.gov>

School Safety Clearinghouse

Federal Government resources to create a safe and supportive learning environment for students.

<https://www.schoolsafety.gov>

U.S. Department of Education Student Privacy Guidance

Student Privacy 101 website. Provides official guidance on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov>