

Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Keeping students safe is crucial to their development and success in school and a top priority for the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). The principles in this document are offered as a guide to those jurisdictions that have opted to implement a school resource officer (SRO) program to ensure that the presence of law enforcement in schools is as beneficial as possible and to avoid harmful impacts on students and the learning environment.

These principles should not limit communities in their consideration of the range of programs and interventions that can help improve safety on school campuses. Implementing an SRO program is a local decision, and communities should consider the range of options available that best fit their needs. We also encourage communities to reach out to the COPS Office directly for any additional assistance with operationalizing these guiding principles.

A copy of the fully articulated guiding principles can be found at <https://cops.usdoj.gov/supportingsafeschools>.

Guiding Principles

- 1. Local decision-making** Operating an SRO program is a local decision that should be made with significant community input.
- 2. Memorandum of understanding (MOU)** Law enforcement agencies should have a fully executed MOU with the school district(s) where SROs are assigned.
- 3. School discipline** SROs should not be involved in school disciplinary incidents that would normally be handled by teachers, administrators, and other school staff.
- 4. Judicious use of law enforcement powers** SROs should detain, arrest, or use force only as a last resort.

5. Specialized hiring processes Law enforcement agencies should have a collaborative selection process for SROs that includes specialized qualifications and traits.

6. Tailored performance evaluation and supervision Law enforcement agencies should develop systems of evaluation and supervision for SROs that are tailored to their duties and expectations.

7. Development of transparent data and tracking system Law enforcement agencies should develop systems to track SRO duties and activities that are as transparent to stakeholders as the law allows.

8. Specialized training Law enforcement agencies should ensure that SROs receive specialized training that is unique to their role in promoting school safety and distinguishes SRO duties from the duties of general law enforcement officers. School staff should be trained in the operations of SROs and the SRO program.

9. Student and family engagement Law enforcement agencies and school districts should regularly engage in outreach to students, families, and school staff to solicit feedback and collectively problem-solve to address student or community concerns.

10. Annual program assessment SRO programs should be reviewed no less than annually to ensure that they are meeting expectations.

11. Duty assignments When possible, SROs should have fixed duty assignments with one or a limited number of schools.

12. Community of practice and professional support Law enforcement agencies should provide SROs with opportunities to interact with peers and national networks.

These guiding principles may change as we continue to increase our understanding of how best to use SROs and other school-based law enforcement to improve school safety and security and avoid any potential harmful effects arising from these roles. We also encourage communities to reach out to the COPS Office directly for any additional assistance with operationalizing these guiding principles.