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Comparison of Program Activities and Lessons Learned among 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs

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Executive Summary

Abt Associates Inc. and its subcontractors conducted a National Assessment of School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs (“National Assessment”) through a cooperative agreement with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) supported by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office).

Chapter 1 Introduction

The purpose of the National Assessment was to identify what program “models” have been implemented, how programs have been implemented, and what lessons selected programs may have for other programs. To obtain this information, *Abt Associates and its subcontractors collected implementation data by telephone and on site from 19 SRO programs.*

This cross-site report discusses commonalities and differences among the 19 sites with a particular focus on lessons learned—information based on the experience of the sites that can benefit other jurisdictions in setting up or improving an SRO program.

The report focuses on seven issues:

1. Choosing a Program Model
2. Defining Specific SRO Roles and Responsibilities
3. Recruiting SROs
4. Training and Supervising SROs
5. Collaborating with School Administrators and Teachers
6. Working with Students and Parents
7. Evaluating SRO Programs

Chapter 2 Choosing a Program Model

In the basic School Resource Officer “triad” model, SROs enforce the law, teach, and mentor. Most of the 19 programs included in the National Assessment reflect this model, but *the level of emphasis that SROs devote to each of these three roles varies considerably across and within programs.* As a result, it is more accurate to think in

terms of where individual programs and SROs fall along a *continuum* between, at one extreme, engaging in mostly law enforcement activities and, at the other extreme, engaging in mostly teaching and mentoring.

There are several considerations that staff in new—and existing—SRO programs should think about in deciding how their SROs should allocate their time according to the three basic SRO roles, including *the level of crime and disorder* in a school and *the wishes of the school administration*. However, *the personality and experience of the individual SRO* may ultimately prove the most decisive factor in determining where on the continuum each SRO's balance of activities falls.

Chapter 3 Defining Specific SRO Roles and Responsibilities

When SRO programs fail to define the SROs' roles and responsibilities in detail before—or even after—the officers take up their posts in the schools, problems are often rampant—and often last for months and even years. Successful programs have generally followed several steps in developing a list of SRO roles and responsibilities, including:

- identify roles and responsibilities *in writing*;
- *avoid relying on a personal relationship, easy access, and a handshake* between police and school administrators for establishing SRO roles;
- *involve the schools* in developing the SRO roles and responsibilities;
- *distribute* the roles and responsibilities, and *periodically review them*; and
- provide *a mechanism for resolving disagreements* between school administrators and SROs about the officers' responsibilities.

In developing the written description of SRO roles and responsibilities:

- narrow the considerable leeway of *what it means for SROs to engage in “law enforcement”*;
- make clear whether and how SROs will be responsible for *enforcing discipline*; and
- be specific about the SROs' *teaching, and counseling and mentoring, responsibilities*.

Chapter 4 Recruiting SROs

Carefully screening applicants is usually necessary for recruiting and retaining officers who are well qualified by temperament and skills to be SROs. It is especially important

to develop written criteria for who can qualify as an SRO, including choosing someone who:

- likes and cares about kids;
- has the temperament to work with school administrators;
- has the capacity to work independently;
- is not a rookie; and
- knows the community in which he or she will be working.

Other keys to successful screening and recruitment include:

- assigning officers with the right personality—someone, as one principal put it, with “an outgoing, caring, but no-nonsense personality”;
- using incentives, such as take-home cruisers and a salary increment, when there is a lack of qualified applicants; and
- involving school district and school-level administrators in the screening process to increase acceptance of the SROs by school personnel.

Chapter 5 Training and Supervising SROs

Few of the 19 programs train all their SROs before they go on the job. Nevertheless, *any delay in training can be a serious problem* because SROs then have to learn their jobs by “sinking or swimming.” One program has provided for timely pre-service training by arranging for a long-standing SRO to become certified as an SRO trainer. Several other programs arrange for new SROs to “shadow” an experienced SRO before going on the job. A number of programs also provide in-service training, including sending SROs for advanced training with reputable SRO training organizations. Most SROs and school administrators agree that it would be valuable to train principals and assistant principals along with SROs as a team.

Most programs fail to provide consistent or close supervision of the SROs’ work. However, adequate supervision of SROs is important to make sure the officers are working to their full potential and are not experiencing unreported or unacknowledged problems. Typically, programs require SROs to complete monthly activity logs and meet once a year with the supervisor. In some programs, supervisors periodically visit SROs and school administrators at the schools and observe the officers teach.

Chapter 6 Collaborating with School Administrators and Teachers

Perhaps the single most troublesome area for most programs has been establishing productive relationships between their SROs and principals and assistant principals, in large part because of fundamental differences in the law enforcement culture and the school culture in terms of goals, strategies, and methods. Administrators expressed three principal initial concerns about having an SRO in their schools:

- *Who's In Charge?*
- *Who Makes the Decision to Arrest?*
- *Why Isn't "My" SRO Available All the Time?*

Over time, most administrators developed good working relations with their SROs and came to value the program highly. While sometimes this change in attitude involved just getting used to the SRO, *many programs found they could expedite the process of improving working relationships* by:

- collaborating with school administrators in planning, operating, and supervising the program;
- explaining program benefits to administrators;
- orienting school-level administrators to the program;
- training SROs before they go on the job; and
- addressing administrator concerns about the SROs' availability.

Gaining the support of teachers is essential if SROs want to get invited to teach their classes—and *teaching is an important SRO responsibility for improving kids' perceptions about "cops" and for taking advantage of a unique opportunity for motivating students to seek out the SROs* outside of class when the youth are having problems. Many SROs are constantly invited by teachers to address their classes because the officers have taken the time to:

- orient teachers to the program before it begins;
- explain how SROs improve student learning; and
- go beyond the normal SRO responsibilities to help teachers.

Chapter 7 Working with Students and Their Parents

Program coordinators, SROs, and school administrators all recognize the difficulty SROs experience trying to maintain authority as enforcers of the law while at the same time

preserving a helping relationship with students as teachers and mentors. *Walking this fine line plays itself out in two particular areas: (1) counseling and (2) supportive interpersonal relationships between SROs and individual students.*

Especially when there is a poor or no relationship between the school guidance counselor and a student, the SRO often fills the gap. However, in addition to the serious risk of giving poor advice, SROs are exposed to the criticism—and even civil liability—of practicing psychological counseling without a license when they help students with personal problems unrelated to the law. Nevertheless, the vast majority of school administrators said they trusted the SROs’ judgment to know when to refer a student for professional help with a personal problem and involve the parents.

Most familiarity between SROs and students is harmless, such as students using informal names to refer to the officers (e.g., “Officer Nancy” or “JD”). However, a few SROs have skirted or exceeded the boundaries of appropriate behavior with students. Programs can help SROs balance being supportive while remaining an authority figure by:

- establishing specific guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behavior;
- arranging to provide formal training for SROs on the topic; and
- instructing SROs to act defensively—for example, never closing their office doors when talking with a student of the opposite sex.

Some parents become concerned that an SRO’s presence in the schools suggests their children’s schools must be unsafe. Programs that used PTAs, other community meetings, newsletters, letters to the home, and newspaper articles to inform parents about the program reported few or no objections from parents. In turn, *parents who support the program often encourage their children to seek out the SRO for help and, in three different sites, have helped pressure city officials to reverse their plans to drop their SRO programs.*

Chapter 8 Evaluating the Program

Very few of the 19 programs included in the study conducted useful and valid assessments of their programs. However, *program evaluation is essential* to learn

whether and how the program needs improvement and to convince funding sources of the importance of continuing the program.

The first step in any evaluation is to review the program's goals and then ***decide what questions to ask about each goal***. For example, if a program's goals include reducing truancy and improving kids' image of the police, the evaluation can ask:

- By how much have truancy rates changed since the program began?
- How have students' opinions of the police changed since the program began?

The second step is to ***identify the information to collect*** that will answer these questions, and the third step is to ***determine how to collect the information***.

The law enforcement agency and school system should collaborate on the assessment by interviewing or obtaining written assessments from principals and assistant principals. One school district conducts annual focus groups of randomly selected students designed to assess their opinions and use of the program.

Program supervisors need to circulate the evaluation findings to the chief or sheriff, the city manager or mayor, and the school board to bolster their case for continued funding, and distribute them to each SRO and school for purposes identifying problem areas that need addressing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Abt Associates Inc. conducted a National Assessment of School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs (“National Assessment”) through a cooperative agreement with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) supported by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office).

Background to the Report

There has been growing interest in placing sworn law enforcement officers in schools as School Resource Officers (SROs) to improve school safety and improve relations between police officers and youth. By 1999 there were at least 12,000 law enforcement officers serving full-time as SROs. Thirty percent of local police departments, employing 62 percent of all officers, had full-time SROs during 1999. Local police departments had about 9,100 full-time SROs assigned to schools. A majority of the departments serving 10,000 or more residents had SROs.¹ An estimated 38 percent of sheriffs’ departments, employing 63 percent of all officers, had deputies assigned full-time as SROs. Nationwide, about 2,900 sheriffs’ deputies worked as SROs during 1997.²

However, when the National Assessment began in May 2000, relatively little was known about SRO programs. The purpose of the project was to identify what SRO program “models” have been implemented, how SRO programs have been implemented, and what lessons selected programs may have for other programs. To obtain this information, *Abt Associates collected implementation data by telephone and on site from 19 programs:*

- 5 large established programs;
- 4 large new programs;³
- 5 small established programs; and
- 5 new programs.

¹ Hickman, Matthew J., and Brian A Reaves. *Local Police Departments 1999*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, May 2001.

² Goldberg, Andrew L., and Brian A. Reeves. *Sheriffs’ Departments 1977*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, February 2000.

³ The National Assessment expected to include five large new programs. However, because one of the large new sites selected for inclusion rejected its COPS in Schools grant, it had to be excluded from the study. By the time the site turned down the grant, it was too late to substitute another site.

We defined “large” SRO programs as those operated by law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers and “small” programs as those operated by agencies with less than 100 officers (the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ definitions for large and small agencies). We defined “established” programs as those that had been in existence since at least 1995. The definition of “new” that we used was that the site had not reported SROs in schools in the past on the 1999 Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey, and the site was the recipient of a COPS in Schools grant in 1999 from the COPS Office for hiring SROs.

This cross-site report discusses commonalities and differences among the 19 sites, representing a combined total of 104 SROs. The report focuses especially on lessons learned—that is, information based on the experience of the sites that could benefit other jurisdictions in setting up or improving an SRO program. The box “Basic Site Information for 19 SRO Programs” presents selected features of each program.

Other Reports Prepared for the National Assessment

The cross-site report is one of six reports that Abt Associates and its subcontractors (see the box “The Research Team”) have prepared for NIJ as part of the National Assessment. The other five reports, all available from NIJ, are summarized briefly below:

1. The *National Survey of SRO Programs and Affiliated Schools* summarizes the results of 322 responses to a mail survey of law enforcement agencies with SRO programs and 108 responses from affiliated schools.
2. An *Interim Report: Fear and Trust* summarize preliminary impressionistic observations concerning (a) perceptions of fear about campus safety among school administrators, faculty, and students among 15 of the 19 sites and (b) trust in the police among these groups in the 15 sites.
3. *Case Studies of 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs* provides in-depth descriptions of each program’s history, SROs, program activities, and program monitoring and evaluation efforts.
4. *Results of a Survey of Students in Three Large New SRO Programs* presents the results of a survey of nearly 1,000 students designed to identify the relationship between perception of safety and the SRO program.

| Basic Site Information for 19 SRO Programs | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Program/Jurisdiction | Location | Population of Community Served* | Agency Size (sworn)* | Date Begun | Number of SROs | Number of Schools Served and Grade Levels |
| Large Established Programs | | | | | | |
| Large Established #1 city | Mid-West | 75,000 | 140 | 1995 | 3 | 3 junior high |
| Large Established #2 city | Southwest | 500,000 | 1,000 | 1962 | 21 | 21 elementary middle |
| Large Established #3 county | South | 100,000 | 250 | 1995 | 9 | 14 junior high middle senior high |
| Large Established #4 city | South | 50,000 | 150 | 1995 | 3 | 3 junior high |
| Large Established #5 city | West Coast | 200,000 | 200 | 1993 | 15 | 70 K-12 |
| Large New Programs | | | | | | |
| Large New #1 county | South Central | 600,000 | 130 | 1999 | 5 | 5 K-12 |
| Large New #2 county | Mid-West | 400,000 | 100 | 1999 | 5 | 9 -- varies by county |
| Large New #3 city | Northeast | 45,000 | 100 | 1999 | 3 | 3 middle high school |
| Large New #4 city | Southwest | 250,000 | 600 | 1999 | 38 | 10 middle 20 high school |
| Small Established Programs | | | | | | |
| Small Established #1 city | South | 40,000 | 40 | 1995 | 1 | 1 high school |
| Small Established #2 city | South | 20,000 | 50 | 1993 | 3 | 3 middle high school |
| Small Established #3 county | South | 60,000 | 50 | 1992 | 3 | 5 middle high school |
| Small Established #4 county | South | 27,000 | 30 | 1994 | 4 | 4 middle high school |
| Small Established #5 county | South | 35,000 | 30 | 1995 | 4 | 4 middle high school |
| Small New Programs | | | | | | |
| Small New #1 county | South | 25,000 | 10 | 1999 | 2 | 1 high school |
| Small New #2 county | South | 24,000 | 20 | 1999 | 1 | 1 high school |
| Small New #3 county | South | 25,000 | 10 | 2000 | 1 | 1 high school |
| Small New #4 county | South | 20,000 | 10 | 2000 | 1 | 1 high school |
| Small New #5 city | South | 20,000 | 10 | 2000 | 1 | 2 middle high school |

5. The ***Final Project Report*** describes the activities Abt Associates conducted for the National Assessment and summarizes the study findings. The report has five sections: the mail survey; the process of selecting the 19 study sites; the site visits; modifications to the research methodology; and data analysis and findings.

Information from the first four reports—in particular, from the case studies report—has been integrated, as appropriate, in the present cross-site report.

The Research Team

Three subcontractors assisted Abt Associates Inc. in collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data for the project:

- The Center for Criminal Justice Policy Research at Northeastern University
- The Justice and Safety Center, College of Justice and Safety, at Eastern Kentucky University
- the Center for the Prevention of School Violence in North Carolina

Two consultants assisted Northeastern University in collecting and analyzing the data:

- Timothy Bynum, School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University
- Scott Decker, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis

Topics the Report Addresses

Rather than trying to address every issue the 19 programs have confronted, the cross-site report focuses on a selected number of areas where new programs may run into serious problems or where many existing programs could still use help. Five criteria guided the selection of the topic areas that the report addresses:

1. ***A number of the 19 programs*** in the study experienced difficulty with the issue.
2. The problem area is not a trivial one but rather ***can have a serious effect*** on preventing a program from achieving its goals.
3. There are ***documented solutions*** to the problem—that is, some of the 19 sites overcame the obstacle.
4. Program planners and participants ***are likely to implement*** the solutions these programs came up with.

5. *No existing materials* present the solutions to the problem as comprehensively or present solutions based on actual program experience.⁴

Based on these criteria, the report focuses on seven issues:

1. Choosing a Program Model
2. Defining Specific SRO Roles and Responsibilities
3. Recruiting SROs⁵
4. Training and Supervising SROs⁶
5. Collaborating with School Administrators and Teachers
6. Working with Parents and Students
7. Evaluating SRO Programs.

The report does not purport to present the problems or solutions of the “typical” SRO program or of a random sample of programs. Indeed, because of the criteria used to select the programs for study (see the separate project report, “Final Project History,” for the complete study methodology), the programs selected are likely to be exemplary rather than representative. However, while the study lacks generalizability because we did not randomly select the programs, it represents the most intensive study of programs to date—involving a total of 198 person days (almost 8 months) spent on site.

⁴ Other studies have identified many of the issues this report identifies as problematical for SRO programs. However, existing materials that raise these issues either are not based on much empirical evidence or do not treat the topics with the depth that this report does.

⁵ The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services will be making a report available that discusses in greater detail how programs have successfully gone about screening and recruiting SROs.

⁶ The same report will also address issues of SRO training and supervision.

This document is a research report submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice. This report has not been published by the Department. Opinions or points of view expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Chapter 2: Choosing a Program Model

Chapter Summary

The basic School Resource Officer model involves SROs in enforcing the law, teaching, and mentoring. Most of the 19 programs in the National Assessment reflect this model, but the level of emphasis that SROs devote to each of these three roles varies considerably across and within programs. For example, some SROs focus primarily on law enforcement, while one SRO spends 80 percent of his time teaching and mentoring. As a result, it is more accurate to think in terms of where individual programs and SROs fall along a *continuum* between, at one extreme, engaging in mostly law enforcement activities and, at the other extreme, engaging in mostly teaching, mentoring, or both.

However, the relative emphasis devoted to each of these three roles changes in most programs because *implementation is often an incremental process in which what an SRO actually does is developed over time rather than representing a response to a preconceived conceptual model*. In particular, most of the 19 sites focused initially on law enforcement and evolved only later into a more balanced approach with increased teaching and mentoring. Why?

- Many law enforcement agencies and schools did not provide their SROs with either instructions on how they should spend their time on campus or training in how to teach and mentor. As a result, most SROs fell back on doing what they *were* trained to do and *did* know how to do—enforce the law.
- Many school administrators wanted the SROs to do nothing but enforce the law, while, at the same time, many SROs were nervous about talking in front of a class or mentoring students.
- Teachers were often initially uncomfortable inviting SROs into their classrooms—or were not even aware that the officers could teach.

In most programs, SROs and school administrators alike came over time to realize the benefits of officers teaching classes and mentoring students.

There are several considerations that new—and existing—SRO programs should think about in deciding how their SROs should allocate their time.

- The *level of crime and disorder* in a school should influence the proportion of time the SRO spends on law enforcement compared with teaching and mentoring.
- Programs need to consider—although by no means always or completely accede to—*the wishes of the school administration* in establishing the SROs' focuses.
- *The personality and experience of the individual SRO* may ultimately prove the most decisive factor in determining where on the continuum each SRO's balance of activities falls.

Programs should expect that, *after SROs have been trained* in how to teach and mentor, they may increase the proportion of time they spend teaching and mentoring. Often, it is a matter of the SROs establishing their credibility with administrators, faculty, and students *over time* that results in a balance among the SROs' three roles.

Because programs evolve over time, and because schools' needs may change, SROs and school administrators should not feel they have to stick with their program's initial or current position on the continuum. Furthermore, some programs, within certain limits, encourage their SROs to emphasize one or another of the three roles at any given time based on changes in the schools' needs, turnover among school administrators, and alterations in student behavior.

The basic School Resource Officer model supported by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office), the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), Corbin and Associates, and the Center for the Prevention of School Violence (CPSV) expects SROs to engage in three types of activities: law enforcement, teaching, and mentoring. Most of the 19 programs included in this study reflect this model—but the level of emphasis in terms of priority and time that SROs devote to each role varies considerably across and within programs. As a result, *it is more accurate to think in terms of where individual programs and SROs fall along a continuum within the tripartite model* between, at one extreme, engaging in mostly law enforcement activities and, at the other extreme, engaging in mostly teaching, mentoring, or both.

How the Programs Fall on the Three-Focus Continuum

Abt Associates' survey of SRO programs conducted at the beginning of this study (see the separate report, National Survey of SRO Programs and Affiliated Schools) found that, among 322 law enforcement agencies that returned the questionnaire, SROs on average divided their time as follows:

- 50 percent on law enforcement activities;
- 25 percent on counseling or mentoring;
- 13 percent on teaching; and
- 12 percent on other activities (e.g., meetings).

SROs who responded to a survey from the Center for the Prevention of School Violence at the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reported that they typically spent about:

- 50 percent performing the law enforcement role,
- 20 percent teaching, and
- 30 percent counseling.⁷

There is considerable variation in the proportion of time the SROs in the 19 sites included in this study devote to each of the three roles. Two SROs, for example, spend nearly 100 percent of their time doing law enforcement.

- Two years into the program, the lone SRO in a small new site had not started any teaching duties or collaborated with any outside groups or organizations. While police and school administrators would like to see the SRO develop teaching and mentoring activities, she has been so busy with law enforcement activities, especially investigations and case preparation, that she has been unable to do anything else. During one two-day period, she was working on 10 theft reports, an armed robbery report, a drug possession and trafficking case, and a first degree criminal mischief investigation involving slashed tires and cut phone lines.
- The SRO at the high school in a large new site spends almost all his time on law enforcement in part due to personal choice and in part because of school administrator instructions. Because the SRO views his role as addressing criminal issues, and because as a single father he refuses to give up his evenings, he rarely attends after-school events with its opportunity to mentor kids. For her part, the principal has not included the SRO in staff meetings and sees no need for officer involvement in the classroom. As a result, the SRO has almost no interaction with teachers. In terms of mentoring, the principal expects the SRO to refer students with emotional or family issues to counselors rather than address the problems himself.

At the other end of the continuum, the middle school SRO in a small established site spends about 80 percent of his time teaching and mentoring, and only 20 percent of his time doing law enforcement. Furthermore, even when they devote a plurality of their time to law enforcement activities, many SROs spend a *majority* of their time on the *combined* activities of teaching and mentoring.

⁷ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. COPS in Schools: Keeping Our Kids Safe, p. 16.

SROs in the same school district—even though they are all participating in the same SRO program—may spend very different percentages of time on each of the three roles. In one jurisdiction, the high school and junior high school SROs do more counseling than do the two middle school SROs because the latter lose so much time traveling among the several middle schools. In one large new site, the specific needs of each school, as well as the particular preferences and operating style of each SRO, have led to diverse emphases in each of several school districts.

School level can also influence the ratio of time SROs spend on law enforcement versus teaching and mentoring. In general, SROs assigned to middle and elementary schools are able to spend more time teaching because of the reduced need for enforcing the law with younger students. In addition, some SROs and school administrators feel that younger students are more amenable to educational approaches than are “jaded” high school students.

There are widespread differences, too, in the proportion of time SROs spend on teaching versus mentoring. In some school districts, officers rarely teach in the classroom, while in other districts officers teach frequently at feeder schools in addition to their assigned schools.

- In three jurisdictions, SROs spend considerable time teaching because all of the SROs are certified D.A.R.E. instructors. In one of these three jurisdictions, the SROs are also trained as Child Abuse Resistance Education (C.A.R.E.) instructors, a local program created to curb the high rate of child abuse. Over a period of 6 to 8 weeks, these dually certified SROs spend as many as three days a week devoted almost entirely to teaching at elementary schools.
- SROs in two large established sites are responsible for teaching the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) curriculum, which alone can take up to one-quarter of their time for many weeks. One of these SROs estimates he spends 40 percent of his time in the classroom, sometimes teaching seven straight periods a day.

The relative emphasis devoted to the three types of activities changes over time in most programs. ***Many program participants described implementation as an incremental process in which what an SRO actually does is developed over time rather than***

representing a response to a preconceived conceptual model. In particular, many of the 19 sites had an *initial* focus on law enforcement that *evolved* into a more balanced approach with increased teaching and mentoring (although law enforcement may still remain the highest priority). For example, most of the SROs in the five small established sites shifted over time from doing primarily or almost exclusively law enforcement to spending increased time on education and mentoring.

This evolution of role emphasis is consistent with the findings of research conducted by the Center for the Prevention of School Violence⁸ that found that an initial focus on law enforcement often evolves into a more balanced approach, although law enforcement typically remains the single highest priority among the three types of activities as it did among several of the 19 sites in the present study. The COPS in Schools training manual used by the COPS Office also observes that SRO non-enforcement roles tend to develop more fully over time.

Many programs began with a major emphasis on law enforcement at the expense of teaching and counseling for reasons that had nothing to do with advance planning on the parts of either the law enforcement agencies or schools.

- Many law enforcement agencies and participating schools did not provide their SROs with instructions or even guidance on how they should spend their time on campus except, perhaps, for a vague mandate to enforce the law, teach classes, and mentor kids. Some law enforcement executives in the small established sites applied for grant funding because the money was available—and then did not give the SROs *any* assignments. As a result, SROs did what they knew best—enforced the law.
- Because few SROs received training how to teach in the classroom or mentor kids, they again fell back on doing what they *were* trained to do—enforce the law.
- SROs were also significantly guided in what they initially did by what their local school administrators wanted or would allow them to do. Some principals were receptive to—and facilitated—the idea of SROs teaching classes; however, most principals initially wanted SROs to limit their activities to enforcing the law and, in some cases, enforcing discipline.

⁸ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. COPS in Schools: Keeping Our Kids Safe, p. 16.

- Many teachers were initially uncomfortable inviting SROs into their classrooms because faculty objected to an armed presence in their rooms or assumed that the officers had nothing of educational value to offer students.

For several reasons, over time SROs tend to devote a larger proportion of their time to teaching and mentoring.

- As principals, assistant principals, and teachers become comfortable with their particular SROs and aware of their skills, administrators and faculty increasingly support the SROs' spending more and more time in the classroom.
- SROs, many of whom are initially nervous—even terrified—about teaching, become more comfortable with the role after giving it a try, especially if they receive training in how to teach young people.
- SROs do more mentoring as students come to trust them. Because of this trust, students approach the SROs to share personal problems, offering the officers an opportunity to mentor and counsel.
- As crime (e.g., fights) and other student misconduct decline as a result of the SROs' presence, consistency, and firmness, the officers find they have more time to devote to teaching and mentoring.

How to Select a Position on the Continuum

Despite the strong tendency to begin the SRO program on the law enforcement end of the continuum, it is clear from the experiences of these and the other programs that *there are several considerations that new—and existing—SRO programs should think about in deciding how their SROs should allocate their time.*⁹

- ***Level of crime or disorder.*** Not surprisingly, most SROs concentrate more or less on the law enforcement role depending on the level of crime or disorder in the schools to which they are assigned. For example, an SRO reported that fights and assaults occur every day at his school and they involve as many as 50 students. As a result, almost all of his time is taken up stopping them and then dealing with the aftermath. Of course, there are exceptions. In one large new site, the longest active SRO working at a highly distressed, inner-city school district where gang involvement abounds has focused on counseling and mentoring activities. Conversely, the SRO in another school in the same school district uses an almost “SWAT-like” approach even though the school is perhaps the least troubled of all the high schools in the district. Despite these exceptions, *the level of crime and*

⁹ This assumes, of course, that the program was not established with the express and permanent goal of exclusively providing law enforcement services.

disorder in a school should at least influence the proportion of time the SRO spends on law enforcement compared with teaching and mentoring. It should have this influence for several reasons:

- SROs will not have time to teach or do mentoring in a school with many serious discipline problems because administrators will be constantly calling on them to deal with fights, weapons, drugs, and other situations on campus that require a law enforcement response and then may require follow-up paperwork and court time. Regardless of administrators’ preferences, several SROs reported that they had to get control over miscreant students before they could do almost anything else because they would be derelict in their duties if they ignored the serious misconduct the students continued to engage in when the officers first arrived at their schools.
 - SROs will lose all credibility with administrators, faculty, and students if they turn a blind eye to serious misbehavior in the school—credibility they need to establish to be effective as teachers and mentors.
 - By addressing serious student misconduct, SROs get the opportunity, if they handle the problem correctly, to gain respect from students. On the one hand, many troublemakers whom the SRO arrests, issues a citation to, or turns in to administrators realize that—unlike the past when they would only be suspended or given detention—there will now be consistent and strict punishment for misbehaving. On the other hand, when “good” kids see that there are real consequences for misbehavior, they may become more willing to report rumored or observed misconduct confidentially to the SROs.
 - By arresting, citing, or turning in students to school administrators, SROs get to know the troublesome kids and can then concentrate some of their effort on mentoring them. A number of SROs reported they ended up mentoring kids whom they had initially gotten to know by punishing their unacceptable behavior in a firm but respectful manner.
- ***Wishes and culture of the school.*** Programs need to consider—although by no means always accede to—***the wishes of the school administration*** in establishing the ratio of time that SROs spend on law enforcement, teaching, and mentoring. In a large established site, school administrators made education and mentoring the SROs’ principal focus from the beginning, with enforcement always considered a distant third. However, in many sites school administrators initially preferred—or even required—that SROs spend almost all their time doing law enforcement. Interested SROs can work to expand their role in schools whose administrators want them to do nothing but enforce the law. Of course, disobeying a strong-willed administrator’s instructions can be difficult. For example, a principal in a large new site forbids her SRO from engaging in any

other activity than addressing criminal manners. She instructs her staff *always* to contact parents before turning a child over to the SRO. She expects the SRO to “know his limitations” and refer students to counselors rather than handle difficult emotional or family issues himself. She also sees no need for SRO involvement in the classroom. By the time students reach high school, she claims, “They have become bored with law-related education, tired of hearing the same old messages so many times. By high school, kids see the officers as law enforcers and expect them to act as such.” However, SROs can sometimes *eventually* turn more attention to teaching and mentoring if they can craft a collaborative relationship with administrators and faculty; acceding temporarily to administrator wishes that the officers concentrate on enforcing the law can help forge this relationship. Using that positive relationship as a foundation, SROs can then educate administrators to the importance of the officers’ teaching and mentoring roles. Indeed, as administrators and teachers became comfortable with their particular SROs, in almost every site they increasingly supported the SROs’ spending more and more time teaching and mentoring.

- ***Personality and skills of the SROs. The style and orientation of the individual officer*** may ultimately prove the most decisive factor in determining where on the continuum each SRO’s balance of activities falls.
 - An SRO in a large established site who taught extensively when she was a physical education instructor before becoming a police officer chose to spend considerable time teaching kids because she was comfortable with the role and felt that at the elementary and middle school levels where she worked the kids were more impressionable than kids at the high school level would be.
 - An SRO in a large new site who always wanted to teach and who is married to a teacher has made classroom activities a standard in his daily routine.
 - An SRO in a small established site had jumped at the opportunity to serve as an SRO mostly because, before becoming a sheriff’s deputy, he had hoped to pursue a teaching career.
 - The SRO in a large new site reported that he spends most of his time on investigative and follow-up activities at the district’s high school and three middle schools. Even though a lot of his work involves investigating alleged sexual assaults, he has not offered any classes or presentations focused on the prevention and consequences of date rape. He stated that he enjoys working “big cases.”
 - A high school SRO in a large new site, unlike the other SROs in the program, attends almost no after-school events (where he would be able to

mentor kids) because, as a single father of a 5-year-old, he wants to spend as much time as possible with his child.

- In a large new site in a highly distressed, inner-city school district, one of the school district’s SROs prefers to relate to kids in the formal setting of the classroom rather than mentor them in his office or in the corridors. A second SRO in the district focuses more on mentoring activities than on teaching because of his interest in the field of counseling. Objectively, without knowing the personal preferences and individual personalities in play, one might have expected that *neither* the education *nor* the counseling role would have held such significance for the SROs in this school district where the burdens of gang activity and violence might easily have elicited a greater emphasis on enforcement. However, individual SRO preferences and personalities trumped school safety conditions.
- **Training.** The relative emphasis SROs place on the three basic SRO program components is affected by whether and how soon they develop teaching and mentoring skills. While many SROs learn how to perform both of these activities by trial and error, training SROs in how to perform them can expedite by months their devoting serious attention to teaching and mentoring.
- After an SRO in a large new site learned at a NASRO training about the significant potential for classroom teaching, he expanded his teaching load considerably.
- After they had attended a COPS in Schools conference, which has a 90-minute segment on “classroom strategies,” the SROs in a small new site dramatically increased their teaching and counseling.

Whatever the initial mix of roles a program’s SROs start out with, one large new site implemented a policy that all programs can consider adopting. The site produced a brochure that presents the triad of roles but emphasizes that any given SRO in any given school may emphasize one or another of the three elements at any given time or continuously based on several factors, including changes in the school’s needs, administrator turnover, and alterations in student behavior (e.g., less fighting).

Deciding the relative emphasis the program should place on law enforcement, teaching, and mentoring is a relatively broad issue. Programs still need to decide what *specific* responsibilities SROs will have *within* each of these three program focuses—the subject of the following chapter.

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Chapter 3: Defining Specific SRO Roles and Responsibilities

Chapter Summary

One of the most frequent and destructive mistakes many SRO programs make is to fail to define the SROs' roles and responsibilities in detail before—or even after—the officers take up their posts in the schools. When programs fail to do this, problems are often rampant at the beginning of the program—and often persist for months and even years.

Successful programs have generally followed several steps in developing a list of SRO roles and responsibilities.

- (1) Identify roles and responsibilities *in writing*.
- (2) ***Avoid relying on a personal relationship, easy access, and a handshake*** between police and school administrators for establishing SRO roles because:
 - key personnel change;
 - verbal agreements are subject to misinterpretation and distortion; and
 - written role descriptions make it easier to evaluate SROs' performance.
- (3) ***Involve the schools*** in developing the SRO roles and responsibilities.
- (4) ***Distribute the list*** to SROs and to school district and school building administrators, and ***periodically review them***.
- (5) Provide ***a mechanism for resolving disagreements*** between school administrators and SROs about the officers' responsibilities.

In developing the written description of SRO roles and responsibilities, keep the following considerations in mind:

- Narrow the considerable leeway in ***what it means for SROs to engage in “law enforcement.”***
- Make clear whether and how SROs will be responsible for ***enforcing discipline***.
- Be specific about the SROs' ***teaching and mentoring responsibilities***.
- Specify which responsibilities ***apply to all SROs in all schools*** (e.g., patrolling the cafeteria at lunch) and which responsibilities ***are negotiable*** between individual SROs and their local school administrators (e.g., standing in the corridors between classes).

There is a close relationship between determining the proportion of time SROs should spend on law enforcement, teaching, and counseling, on the one hand, and defining their specific roles and responsibilities, on the other hand. However, deciding the proportion

of time SROs spend in each of these three areas is a broad issue. Specifying roles and responsibilities is a “micro” issue where attention to detail is critical.

A Critical Early Step—but It’s Never Too Late to Do It

One of the most frequent and destructive mistakes many SRO programs make is to fail to define in detail the SROs’ roles and responsibilities before the officers take up their posts in the schools. *Even though the SROs’ specific responsibilities may change over time and may vary from school to school, it is still essential to define them at the outset.* As the following observations by program participants attest, when programs fail to specify roles and responsibilities, problems are often rampant at the beginning of the program. Moreover, because of turnover among SROs and local school administrators, these problems can persist—for years—until they are finally addressed.

- *Last school year was . . . consumed by trying to figure out what the role of the officer was to be. The actual role continues to evolve.* – small new program
- *The biggest early problem was figuring out what the SRO should do. They [program participants] were given no “game plan,” and he had to figure it out as he went along. The principal and the SRO “played it by ear.”* – small new program
- *There was a major gap in understanding about the SRO’s and school administrators’ duties, responsibilities, and legal obligations to act in certain situations.* – large new program
- *The lack of defined roles caused a great deal of tension and frustration at the high school where the SRO and principal both reported they routinely “butt heads.”* – large new program
- *SROs recounted feeling uncomfortable and even alarmed by the inactivity and uncertainty of their early days.* – large new program

The potentially damaging effects of failing to clearly establish SRO responsibilities are illustrated in a large new site where there was major gap in understanding about the SROs’ and school administrators’ respective duties, responsibilities, and legal obligations to act in certain situations. Monthly logs written by all three SROs highlight this problem. The following account of a reported child molestation, taken from one of these logs, exemplifies the degree of tension that can erupt at particularly troubling or stressful

times if roles are not clarified in advance. In this case, a teacher had given the SRO a letter left behind by a student in which the student describes having been sexually abused at home. The SRO conferred about the letter with both her police supervisor and the school's principal. She wrote:

[The principal] informed me that the Aunt of the female student who wrote the letter would be at the school at 1130hrs. I informed [the] Capt. of this meeting and asked if he wanted me to attend, Capt. stated he did. . . . [The principal] expressed wanting me to do lunch duty instead of attending the meeting with the Aunt. I informed him that I needed to be involved in the meeting due to the seriousness of the letter. He was upset at my decision. After the meeting adjourned at 1215hrs I left the office to help with lunch duty. Upon leaving the office there was a boy on the phone who was crying and told [the principal] that he was jumped at lunch. [The principal] looked at me and stated that "this is why I needed you at lunch . . . I knew this was going to happen!" As I began to enter his office [he] yelled, "I don't need your help . . . this doesn't concern you . . . this doesn't have anything to do with law enforcement! I will contact your supervisor . . . !" I informed him that I realized as an administrator that lunch duty is important because of liability reasons and that I try to understand his job as an administrator. However, he needed to try to understand my role as a law enforcement officer and that it was my duty to act on the female student's letter. I realize that he does not understand my position and if he needed to contact my supervisor that was okay. I told [the principal] that I am trying to help him the best I could. [He] calmly told me that he knew I was trying to help, but that he needed a line drawn and he would contact my supervisor.

Programs have followed several important steps in spelling out their SROs' roles and responsibilities.

Put the Roles and Responsibilities in Writing

Developing a memorandum of agreement (MOU) or contract is of critical importance for minimizing conflict related to:

- who is in charge of the SROs,
- who pays the SROs salaries, training, and equipment,
- when SROs are expected to be in school,
- who evaluates the SROs (and how), and
- how conflicts will be resolved.

A detailed discussion of roles and responsibilities can also form part of the MOU or contract. For example, the draft memorandum of agreement in a large new site (which the school district never signed) specified the conditions under which SROs may:

- detain individuals;
- question individuals, including minors;
- conduct pat downs and searches; and
- respond to incidents that violate school policy.

The SROs' roles and responsibilities can also be a stand-alone document. Indeed, *identifying roles and responsibilities in writing may be more important than having an MOU or contract.*

- Four of the five small new sites had MOUs concerning the SROs' deployment in the schools, but the agreements described the officers' activities in very general terms, such as stipulating that the officers worked for the law enforcement agency and noting who paid them and who supervised them. Because the MOUs did not elaborate on the SROs' day-to-day operations, many of the small new sites experienced moderate to serious start-up problems.
 - In one site, because the SRO initially established his role on his own according to his experience and interests, there was tension in his relationships with school administrators as working arrangements developed.
 - In a second site, the first year of the program was problematic in large part because it was primarily consumed by trying to figure out what the SRO's role was to be. The most important tension has been the changing nature of the SRO's role: the officer has had to assume a wide variety of tasks, with his workday often consumed pursuing minor incidents typically handled in the past by teachers or other school staff (such as finding students who have skipped class).
- In a small established site, the formal contract between the school system and sheriff's department merely states that the department agrees to supply officers for the SRO position. Serious problems with the program resulted.

Program coordinators in some small sites insist that informal verbal understandings are sufficient or even desirable for establishing SRO roles and responsibilities (see the box "Sealing Agreements with a Handshake"). However, there are several critical advantages to developing a *written* and *detailed* description of SRO roles and responsibilities.

- (1) A written list forces participants to iron out many potential conflicts in advance. As a former SRO wrote, “Will the officer, for example, be expected to routinely provide lunchtime coverage in the school cafeteria or bus loading and unloading duties? Most agencies believe that these are *not* law enforcement functions and are the responsibility of the school’s administrative team. Yet what happens when the principal *insists* that the officer comply with a directive to work these specific assignments?”¹⁰
- (2) The list serves as written record everyone can refer to when in doubt. Verbal agreements are subject to misinterpretation and distortion, especially as time passes.
- (3) Even if the initial verbal arrangement works smoothly, key personnel change, and new law enforcement executives, SROs, and school administrators have nothing written to guide them regarding the previous arrangement (unless they talk with their predecessors).
- (4) With a specific written list of SRO responsibilities it is much easier to evaluate whether SROs are performing their jobs properly. One assistant principal observed that she could not evaluate her SRO’s performance because there was no list of responsibilities she could refer to.

Sealing Agreements with a Handshake

Especially in small programs, police and school administrators sometimes feel that their personal acquaintanceship and easy access to each other make it unnecessary to document anything about the program in writing.

- In several small established sites, the discussions that occurred before the placement of the officers took place directly between sheriffs or police chiefs and school district superintendents. The agreements they developed were often sealed with a handshake. As one rural law enforcement chief executive said, “We handle these things with a handshake here.”
- In most of the small new sites, the solution to poor articulation of SRO duties and expectations that was used was simply to proceed with the hope that the SROs, the schools and the host law enforcement agencies “would work it out as we went along.” Initially, SROs in these programs learned their responsibilities by trial and error on the job, while over time the schools developed unwritten standards for appropriate and inappropriate use of the SROs.

¹⁰ Thomas A Gavin, “A Partnership Clearly Defined.” *School Safety*, Fall 1995, pages 9–11.

Program staff in two small new sites said that an MOU or contract could be harmful:

- A school system and police department both felt that adding procedures and written agreements might hamper the collaborative process in the future.
- An assistant principal said that written guidelines and formal contracts “may only add an excessive amount of unnecessary paperwork.”

However, as explained in the text, relying on informal understandings, even in small sites, can lead to trouble from the start. Reflecting these dangers, an article entitled “An Analysis of Interagency Communication Patterns Surrounding Incidents of School Crime” that looked at how schools and law enforcement agencies communicate concluded that, while in rural settings there is a network of interpersonal acquaintanceships formed between law enforcement and school officials, “. . . it is important to realize that the . . . network [of interpersonal acquaintanceships] sometimes impaired communication and interaction.”*

A good example of the unreliability of relying on informal relationships occurred at a large new site. The local police chief had a good rapport with the superintendent of schools, and together they planned a police-school collaboration. However, shortly after the SRO program began, the school superintendent left his position after a series of incidents that were described as “gross misconduct,” including allegations of widespread “kickbacks” and problems relating to alcohol use. Several board members openly criticized and actively opposed the superintendent. Other members defended him and his suggested policy changes. The struggle polarized opinion around most aspects of the superintendent’s “agenda,” including the SRO initiative, which was badly stigmatized.

* Minor, Kevin L., Fox, James W., and Wells, James B. “An Analysis of Interagency Communication Patterns Surrounding Incidents of School Crime,” *Journal of School Violence*, V. 1, No. 4: 2002.

In developing a written description of SRO roles and responsibilities, programs should keep the following considerations in mind.

- The document should ***narrow the considerable leeway in terms of what it means for SROs to engage in “law enforcement.”*** Does the SRO’s responsibility include enforcing the law just on campus or also in the school neighborhood? Does the role include traffic control? For example, the SRO in one small new program regularly helps out with traffic before and after school, while the police supervisor in a small established program prohibits his SRO from doing traffic control. The operations manual for a large established site’s program stipulates under “Security Responsibilities” that the SROs will:
 - Maintain a high level of visibility during school entrance and dismissal times as well as during passing periods.
 - Supervise parking lots before school and at dismissal periods.

- Make clear whether SROs will be responsible for *enforcing discipline* on campus and, if so, which violations of school rules they will be responsible for enforcing and what their options are for enforcing them (see the box “To Enforce or Not to Enforce Discipline”).
- ***Be specific about the SROs’ teaching responsibilities.*** For example, even when there is agreement that SROs will teach, SROs may *unnecessarily limit* themselves or be limited by school staff to engaging only in *law-related* education, as they tend to in some of the five small established programs. By contrast, without something in writing, SROs may *inappropriately expand* their teaching. SROs in one large established program range far afield from the law in their classroom presentations, such as teaching about the importance of good writing skills. It may also be desirable to stipulate a range in the SROs’ hours or proportion of time that they will be expected to devote to teaching on average over the course of a week or month or year—for example, between 4-8 hours a week or 10-20 percent time. Especially for new SROs, it may be sensible to stipulate an increasing proportion of time—for example, between 5-10 percent from September through November, 10-15 percent from December through February, and 15-20 percent from March through May.
- ***Specify the nature of the counseling*** SROs will do. In the area of counseling, many SROs in the 19 programs talk with students who are (or think they are) pregnant, say they are suicidal, or are having conflicts with parents—areas that go well beyond providing counseling “about the law.” Concerns about SROs, as unlicensed mental health practitioners, engaging in “counseling” as opposed to mentoring should also be explored (see chapter 5, “Collaborating with School Administrators”).
- Because responsibilities can vary by school depending on the personal preferences of individual principals and SROs, as well as the legitimate needs of the individual school, the list of responsibilities should ***specify which ones apply to all SROs in all schools*** (e.g., no SRO will patrol the cafeteria at lunch) and ***which responsibilities are negotiable between individual SROs and their local school administrators*** (e.g., each SRO and principal may decide whether the officer will stand in the corridors between classes). For example, the SRO procedures manual in one site calls for SROs to “Perform preventive patrol for students en route to and from school. Attention will be directed to observations pertinent to the safety and well being of children.” While it makes sense to leave SROs and principals some latitude in specifying the officers’ responsibilities on their own, this can be carried to an extreme. The five SROs in a large new site agreed that, although they understood that the sheriff’s office had deliberately avoided providing them with firm guidelines so that the officers could better respond to particular problems in each school district, this lack of direction created stress for the deputies.

- The agreement needs to *provide a mechanism for resolving disagreements* between administrators and SROs about the officers' responsibilities.
- The police or sheriff's department immediate supervisor—and his or her supervisor—should *sign the document* along with the SRO.

To Enforce or Not to Enforce Discipline

School discipline involves dealing with students who break school rules as opposed to handling students who violate state statutes and local ordinances. Examples of misconduct that is not illegal but may violate school rules include tardiness, inappropriate dress, going to the parking lot without a pass, swearing, verbal bullying, and defiance.

The topic is important because it is a source of repeated friction between SROs and school administrators in many sites. How the SRO handles discipline can also hamper establishing rapport with students and teachers. For example, while the program planners in a large new site did not intend for SROs to handle matters of discipline, it took two years to establish the policy firmly in the minds of all school administrators and faculty. Some administrators asked SROs to send students to the assistant principals for punishment and to recommend penalties for school rule violations such as not getting to class on time. Two administrators used their SROs as substitute building administrators, leaving them in charge when the administrators left the building. The program's supervisors resorted to repeated written and verbal communication with these administrators to end these practices.

There are also numerous gray areas that administrators and SROs need to iron out—for example, is shoving to be treated by the SRO as a criminal matter (battery) or by the assistant principal as a violation of the school discipline code?

Programs vary considerably in the latitude they allow SROs to enforce discipline.

- At one extreme, the memorandum of agreement in a large established site makes clear that the SRO “shall not act as a school disciplinarian as disciplining students is the responsibility of the school district and their faculty.” Similarly, two sample SRO job descriptions of programs in another state stipulate, “Refrain completely from functioning as a school disciplinarian. The School Resource Officer is not to be involved in the enforcement of disciplinary infractions that do not constitute violations of the law.”
- At the other extreme, some SROs in some sites consistently enforce discipline—or enforce it on a case-by-case basis on their own initiative or at an administrator's request. The SRO in a large established program learned what to do by trial and error—“playing it by ear,” as he put it. For example, when some students began to

challenge his authority to tell them to tuck their shirts in (“You can’t make me do that”), in order to enforce his authority he filled out and turned in a discipline slip form not knowing whether the school administrators would honor it—but the student was suspended. The SRO continues to sometimes write discipline reports on students who are in the parking lot during school hours without a pass. He also writes up students who fail to tuck in their shirts in violation of the school uniform policy after he has asked them three or four times the same day to do so.

Finally, there is a separate but related issue not of *whether* SROs do discipline or of *how often* they do discipline but *whether they want to handle punitively through the criminal justice system school rule violations that are also minor offenses*. In particular, an individual SRO’s previous orientation as a law enforcement officer may impel the officer to handle minor infractions either informally or by referral to school administrators, or by making arrests and handing out citations. For example, if an SRO as a street officer practiced a “legalistic” style of policing, punishing every type of misconduct (whether through personal choice or department philosophy) and carries over this previous enforcement orientation into the school setting, the officer may continually come into conflict with school administrators (and parents) who are used to handling most minor violations through the school discipline process.

Like their other roles, the SROs’ role in enforcing discipline can change over time. When one large established program began, the chief made clear that “the Police Officer would not involve himself in violations of school rules. He would confine himself to the problems which normally fall within the police jurisdiction.” However, the current Intergovernmental Agreement calls for SROs “to enforce the school district’s student disciplinary process, utilizing police involvement where appropriate”

Even with a written list of roles and responsibilities, there can be problems because no one can anticipate every possible area of disagreement and because some activities are gray areas that could legitimately be more than one person’s responsibility. For example, some school administrators may consider a group of students who are “picking on” a student by calling him names to be the principal’s responsibility, but some SROs may feel that students who bully need to be told that their behavior could have legal ramifications if it involves sexual harassment or physical contact. SROs may also feel that they need to step in because victims of bullying sometimes end up taking revenge on the students who taunt them—or on innocent parties in the school. However, it is possible to avoid many of these areas of potential conflict between SROs and administrators by discussing them in advance and committing agreed-upon resolutions to them to paper.

Involve the Schools in Developing the Responsibilities

A consistent theme in this cross-site report is that SRO programs work most successfully when they address the concerns and needs of both partnering agencies—law enforcement and education. Because in most sites the law enforcement agency takes the lead in setting up the program, an early crucial step in this collaboration for police is to involve the schools in the process of establishing the SROs’ roles and responsibilities.

The chief deputy in a sheriff’s department spearheaded the SRO program in one small new site. When he saw the availability of COPS Office funding for SROs, he approached reluctant school district administrators and sold them on the idea. However, he gained invaluable support for his ideas through an advisory committee he established consisting of a school board member, teacher, parent, and community member. This committee remains active, holding monthly meetings to share information about the program and develop new ideas.

Some School Districts Have Initiated the SRO Program

The school district assistant superintendent in a large new site was the driving force behind the SRO program and the COPS in Schools grant application. The assistant superintendent introduced the community to the idea of having police officers in schools in the early 1990s when he was principal of a local elementary school. He had a number of friends who were law enforcement officers and, because he believed there were benefits that officers could bring to schools (especially, increased interactions between kids and the officers), he started inviting them to come to his school. He developed a curriculum for a program intended to teach elementary school students respect for officers, and he initiated a CrimeStoppers program at the school.

After he became assistant superintendent, he heard about the COPS in Schools grant program from a regional school administrator. He asked the city’s police department to partner with the county school district in submitting an application. Of course, he wanted his former elementary school to be included. In the end, four schools—one high school, two middle schools, and his elementary school—were included in the program.

A particularly effective approach to involving schools is through joint training attended by both the SROs and local school administrators. The assistant superintendent in a large new site attributed early tensions about the SRO program to lack of role definition. When should administrators “pull in the SRO” for discipline problems? What situations posed potential violations of student rights if the SRO gets involved? How could the district approach the integration of the two distinct cultures of law enforcement and school administration? These questions remained “sticking points,” she said, until the SROs, together with a principal or superintendent’s representative from each of the five school districts, attended a full-day seminar on school law. The presenters, a law group from a nearby city, distributed a handbook on safety, order, and discipline in American schools. The SRO and district officials have referenced this handout countless times for guidance on Federal and state law and “best practices” concerning police involvement in schools. They consider it an essential resource.

Similarly, program staff in a small new program who attended a COPS in Schools conference reported that they found it extremely helpful for both the SROs and school administrators to have the opportunity to specifically define the SROs’ roles during the conference. Indeed, according to the terms of the grant, each new grantee *must* send one school administrator, along with the SROs, to a COPS in Schools conference.

Distribute the List of Roles and Responsibilities, and Periodically Review Them

Administrators—and SROs—may forget that an agreement even exists. In one large established program, some school administrators seemed not to be aware of the agreement signed by the police department and their school district; others knew of it but either had not seen it or could not lay a hand on a copy. An SRO called it “defunct.” As a result, programs need to take steps to keep the document “alive.”

- An SRO in a small established site who wrote his own list of duties meets with each new school administrator to review them before the school year begins.
- At the beginning of the program in a large established site, the principal who coordinates the program reviewed the SROs’ responsibilities for several months at each bi-monthly coordination meeting attended by the SROs, the police department SRO supervisor, and other school administrators.

Developing written SRO roles and responsibilities is essential for recruiting candidates for the position—officers need to know what their work in the schools will entail if they are to make an informed decision about whether to apply for the posting—and if program supervisors are to be able to make wise decisions about which candidates will be suitable for the job. This recruitment process is the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Recruiting SROs

Chapter Summary

Perhaps the single most important component of an SRO program is recruiting and retaining officers who are well qualified by temperament, skills, and motivation to be SROs. This requires careful screening of applicants and then conscientiously supervising them.

Developing Application and Selection Criteria

While most programs included in the study do not have written criteria for who can qualify as an SRO, without written criteria different people involved in deciding whom to approve as an SRO may be applying different—even contradictory—criteria. In addition, *officers* need to know what the job criteria are.

A number of programs in the study use similar criteria in selecting officers, including:

- likes and cares about kids;
- has the temperament to work with school administrators;
- has good communication skills;
- has the capacity to work independently;
- knows the community in which he or she will be working; and
- is not a rookie.

Although applying written criteria to the selection of SROs will help ensure they are suitable for the position, almost every program participant agreed that it was the SRO's personality that enabled the officer to be effective—as one principal put it, “*An outgoing, caring, but no-nonsense personality* is needed.”

Recruitment Methods

Programs use roll call and department bulletins to publicize the availability of SRO openings. However, one program found that *stuffing every patrol officer's mailbox with the announcement was the most effective approach*. A few sites, because of a lack of interested applicants, have offered incentives such as take-home cruisers and a five percent salary increase to attract candidates.

The Screening Process

Because not all applicants may have appropriate motives for wanting to become an SRO—for example, they want the daytime, weekday hours—many programs require a written application and an oral interview (often with a panel of individuals). *Involving school district and school-level administrators in the screening process increases acceptance of the program and the SROs among school personnel*.

Programs have taken several steps to reduce rapid turnover among SROs, such as:

- implementing a careful screening procedure to weed out inappropriate officers;
- telling candidates about the drawbacks to the position (for the same reason); and
- providing SROs with timely and adequate training and supervision.

As with many occupations, the *qualifications and the personality of the SRO are likely to make or break the program*. Even the most detailed written list of SRO roles and responsibilities, or the most supportive local school administrators, will be of little importance if the SROs are not qualified by skills and temperament for the position. For example, all five small established programs reported making at least one mistake in assigning an officer who was inappropriate for the position. As a result, perhaps the single most important component of an SRO program may be staffing it properly *by developing criteria for selecting qualified officers and then screening applicants carefully*.

Solicit Volunteers for the SRO Positions

Precisely because SROs have to have some skills and personality characteristics that are different than those required for patrol duty, programs that have assigned officers to be SROs involuntarily have found that this can result in officers doing a poor job because they did not have the ability or desire for the position. While some officers assigned to the position grow to enjoy and become good at it, some of the least effective programs involved officers who had been forced become SROs.

By contrast, several programs reported that *allowing officers to volunteer to serve as SROs seems to result in a higher level of commitment to the program*. (The Center for the Prevention of School Violence report, “An Effective Practices Outline for the School Resource Officer Approach,” also recommends using only volunteers.)

When candidates for SRO positions are invited to apply for the job, the selection process begins by *developing explicit, written criteria for who qualifies for the position*.

Developing Application and Selection Criteria

Most programs included in the study do not have written criteria for who can qualify as an SRO. This is a mistake. Without written criteria, different people involved in making the decision about whom to post to the schools may be applying different—even contradictory—criteria. In addition, *officers* need to know what the job criteria are—and have the criteria provided in writing, not just verbally.

As discussed below, there are two types of criteria most programs in the study use to select officers to become SROs:

- core competencies—or minimal requirements—and
- desirable qualities and skills.

Core Competencies

Most programs agreed on the following minimal set of criteria for selecting officers as SROs:

- likes and cares about kids;
- communicates well;
- has the ability to teach or the capacity to learn how to;
- has the flexibility to work with school administrators;
- has the capacity to work independently, especially important for SROs in rural areas; and
- is not a rookie.

While the first four criteria are self-evident, the last two require comment.

- In terms of ***having the capacity to work independently***, while all patrol officers (unless they have shift partners) function largely without direct supervision or in collaboration with other officers, programs have reported that SROs are particularly isolated. In part, they are out of sight (literally—inside the school building) and therefore out of mind. Usually, they do not even appear for roll call. They are also isolated inasmuch as their direct (if unofficial) supervisor for day-by-day activity is typically a principal or assistant principal, not the police or sheriff’s department SRO supervisor. As a result, SROs must be capable of and comfortable working alone, with minimal contact with the department.
- In terms of ***assigning only experienced officers to be SROs***, the rationale is that, because rookies do not have experience in enforcing the law, do not know how statutes, local ordinances, and department general orders are applied in practice (especially in relation to juveniles and children), and have not gotten to know their colleagues and supervisors well, they will be at a serious disadvantage

working in schools where this experience is critical to their law enforcement role. (The Center for the Prevention of School Violence report, “An Effective Practices Outline for the School Resource Officer Approach,” recommends that “An **effective** practice is to choose an experienced street officer, although a set number of years’ experience cannot be realistically identified for all programs [emphasis in the original].”)

Desirable Qualities and Skills

Several programs use additional criteria for selecting SROs. For some of these programs, SROs may not be selected unless they meet these criteria but, in most programs, these criteria are more of a “wish list” that departments add to the minimal criteria identified above. Among these desirable qualities and skills departments look for are the following:

- has completed some college (one program prefers candidates with some college because, according to an SRO supervisor, “that means they are connected to education, and the SROs’ work is prevention more than anything else”);
- is willing to put in overtime—including uncompensated overtime;
- is a good listener and problem solver;
- prefers to—and knows how to—resolve disputes by deescalating tensions rather than by using force as a first resort;
- is skilled in and comfortable exercising discretion;
- can put up with being teased by other officers (e.g., as a “Kiddie Cop”); and
- has ties to the local community.

The final criterion in the list can be extremely beneficial. In some programs, the SROs were students of the principals with whom they were working. In others, they went to school with many of the students’ parents. ***This familiarity with the school and community makes it much easier for the SROs to establish credibility and rapport.*** In one small established program, all but one SRO position was filled with “home-town” boys who had graduated from the schools they now serve. Program supervisors and SROs in this site believe that their understanding and knowledge of the people and families in the community was essential to their effectiveness.

Minimum and Maximum Tours of Duty

Some programs require candidates to agree to remain SROs for a minimum number of years. One large established program requires a two-year commitment and another a five-year commitment, while a small established program requires a three-year tour of duty. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence report, “An Effective Practices

Outline for the School Resource Officer Approach,” recommends that “The first year should evolve into assignment to a particular school for a minimum of three years [which] . . . allows the SRO to go through high school with a given tenth-grade class.”

On the one hand, requiring a minimum tour of duty has the advantage of helping to ensure consistency among SROs and avoiding the problems of frequent turnover (see below). On the other hand, requiring an SRO who no longer wants the position to continue serving as an SRO is likely to create resentment, resulting in poor job performance. Programs should reassign SROs who truly “want out.”

A few other programs *restrict SROs from serving for more than a specified number of years*. Police chiefs and sheriffs who have instituted mandatory rotation sometimes want to have periodic SRO openings so they can reward other officers with the position. However, limiting the number of years SROs can remain in the position can be harmful because the program may lose officers who are happy and effective, and create temporary gaps in effectiveness as new SROs who replace the seasoned SROs take time to learn the job and win the confidence of school administrators, faculty, students, and parents. In one large established site, however, the collective bargaining agreement requires that all officers rotate out of specialized posting, and the SRO program qualifies as a special post.

The Key: The SRO's Personality

Although applying written criteria to the selection of SROs will help ensure they are suitable for the job, almost every program participant agreed that it was the SRO's personality that enabled the officer to be effective or rendered the officer ineffective:

- An assistant principal: “We are lucky to have an SRO with his personality.”
- A principal: “Without a doubt, the personality of the officer . . . is key to the success of the position.”

While program coordinators and school administrators do not always agree on what “the right personality” refers to, an assistant principal summed up *three attributes that seem to be the core of the personality characteristics that make an officer an effective SRO* when he said, “*An outgoing, caring, but no-nonsense personality* is needed.”

Recruitment Methods

Recruiting SROs involves advertising the position and considering offering incentives.

Announcing the Position

Programs use one or both of two methods of announcing the SRO openings:

- roll call announcements and
- department bulletins (regular bulletins or special notices).

Roll call announcements have the advantage of enabling officers to ask questions (if the SRO program supervisor or an SRO makes the announcement), while department bulletins ensure that every officer has an opportunity to learn about the opening (some officers may be on vacation, in court, sick, or in training on the day the opening is announced at roll call). Ideally, programs should announce the opening both ways.

One large established site uses two additional methods of announcing openings: stuffing every patrol officer's mailbox with the announcement and e-mailing it to them. This site has found that using officers' mailboxes is the most effective of the four methods for drawing officers' attention to the job openings.

Using Incentives

In most programs, there have usually been more than enough applicants to fill the available openings. In one large new site, the 5 SRO positions initially attracted interest from over 10 candidates. When 6 additional SRO positions were created, 53 deputies bid for the positions.

In a few programs, not enough officers have applied. No one at all volunteered for the position initially in one small new site. In another jurisdiction, the number of candidates declined from 18 to 4 after they saw that SROs were required to teach and work one-on-one with students. As a result, 4 of the 19 programs in the National Assessment provide one or more incentives to attract applicants:

- take-home cruisers, which eliminate the time SROs have to spend each day going to and from the station house to pick up and return a cruiser each day—and also save wear and tear on the SROs' personal cars;

- opportunities for paid overtime not available to patrol officers;
- a salary bonus (five percent in one small established site); and
- making it known that the position can be a stepping stone to eventual promotion and other coveted assignments.

However, using incentives was not commonplace among the programs. (Similarly, among the 658 SROs and SRO supervisors polled in the 2002 NASRO School Resource Officer Survey, only 19 percent reported receiving additional benefits.) Furthermore, incentives have to be used with caution because they may attract inappropriate candidates who are more interested in the “perks” than in working with youth.

Finally, although no examples were found among the 19 programs included in the study, agencies can try to increase the number of applicants, especially well-qualified applicants, by *minimizing or neutralizing what officers may perceive to be disincentives to becoming SROs*, such as anxiety about teaching in front of a class, being seen as a “Kiddie Cop” by other officers, or closing off promotional opportunities. Program coordinators—and the chief or sheriff—can make clear that candidates will receive training in how to teach and that the position is a valued posting in the department.

Finally, if current SROs make informal brief presentations describing the program at trainings or roll call, they can specifically address any perceived disincentives in question and answer sessions either by explaining them away or pointing out how the advantages of being an SRO outweigh any actual drawbacks. SROs can also accomplish this by talking informally about the program with officers they run into.

The Screening Process

A thoughtful screening process can significantly improve the chances of assigning qualified officers as SROs. For example, the vast majority of SROs contacted in the 19 programs reported that they had applied for the program at least in part because they enjoy working with kids—clearly a prerequisite for becoming an effective SRO.

However, some applicants did not have any appropriate motives for wanting the position. Screening can help to weed out these individuals.

- In one large new site, some officers reported they went after the position only because they viewed it as a good opportunity to get away from paperwork or to get on the same schedule as their children's.
- An SRO in a large established site said he joined just because he would not have to work nights or weekends.
- Some older officers view the position it as a “cushy” job until they retire.

Sometimes SROs who accepted the position for the “wrong” reasons (e.g., to have evenings and weekends free) came to like the work and became good at it. However, more often than not inappropriate motives for applying resulted in problems working with school administrators and students, tarnished the reputation of the program and of the law enforcement agency—and resulted in frequent SRO turnover.

Careful screening can also often avoid embarrassing appointments. A vocal parent in one large established site went through court records and discovered that an SRO had had a child out of wedlock and had never paid child support. The sheriff had to replace the officer.

Programs follow as many as three steps in screening candidates. While only one program requires candidates to take *a written examination* to become an SRO, a large established program requires applicants who apply to submit an essay explaining why they want the position and what they expect to accomplish on the job. Most programs also conduct *an oral interview*. Oral—and especially panel—interviews provide a unique opportunity to observe candidates’:

- demeanor;
- ability to communicate clearly and fluently;
- comportment under pressure; and
- responses to problem scenarios SROs might encounter in the schools.

Much more controversial—and a source of potential conflict—is the issue of *whether and how school personnel should be involved in the screening process*. In one small established program, the sheriff has refused requests from the principals to participate in the selection of the SROs. While the police in a large new jurisdiction have worked in

the local schools for more than a decade, they still assign officers without consulting with school officials.

Leaving schools out of the screening process can damage the program. For example, at the large new site cited above, officers in some schools are left on their own, having little interaction with school administration. Furthermore, despite frequent police department reservations about sharing the screening process with schools, *the law enforcement executives in the study that involved school district and school-level administrators in the screening process uniformly said it was advantageous because it increases acceptance of the program and the SROs among school personnel.* School administrators in these program also said they valued the opportunity to play a part in the selection process.

- The school superintendent in one large new site served as the school representative for officer screening and selection. She interviewed over 10 candidates for the initial five slots. With so few adult role models for the many minority students in her district, this superintendent wanted at least one African-American or Latino(a) officer placed there. She also believed it best to have one male and one female SRO available to her students. She made a specific request for one of the two officers she interviewed and approved of the second, as well.
- In a small established site, a community panel interviews all applicants for the SRO position. The panel consists of school officials, parents, the chief of police, the department head for the community policing division, and a representative of the North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence. The chief of police considers the recommendations of the panel but makes the final choice.

A more contentious issue is whether schools should have veto power over which candidates are chosen. In the small established program cited above, the sheriff maintains ultimate decision over which officers will be posted to which schools. Occupying a middle ground, one large established program allows individual school principals to reject candidates for their schools—but not for the program as a whole.

Retaining SROs

Many SROs have remained in their positions for years—as long as 8 in two sites. In one site, all three SROs stayed the maximum four years the chief allows except for one who

was promoted after three years. The majority of SROs in the large new sites had been in their schools since the programs' inception more than two years before. Two reported they hoped to stay in the program until they retired.

Other programs have had severe problems with turnover. One school district had five different SROs in less than three years. At another program, a school had four different SROs in four years—they all quit because of an authoritarian principal. When the principal retired, the next SRO remained in the position.

Of course, circumstances beyond anyone's control sometimes result in turnover, including promotions, retirements, and resignations. However, high turnover may also reflect "burnout" of officers who confront severe problems coupled with a strong desire to help students, limited supervision, and scarce support from—or worse, conflict with—administrators, such as the dictatorial principal noted above.

Minimizing turnover is important because replacing an SRO makes the program less effective for several months as the new officer learns how to do the job. The new SRO needs to develop teaching and counseling skills, and school administrators, faculty, and students must begin the process all over again of learning to trust and rely on the officer. A few programs have taken one or more of the following steps to help reduce turnover among SROs:

- (1) ***Implement thorough screening procedures*** to help make sure officers are not chosen who will not work out and therefore have to be replaced.
- (2) Straightforwardly ***inform candidates about drawbacks to the position*** they may not have considered, such as:
 - the need to overcome their fears about standing in front of a classroom and
 - working harder than they ever thought the position would require—or harder than they ever worked as patrol officers.
- (3) ***Provide SROs with timely and adequate training and supervision***, as suggested in chapter 4 below, so the officers do not become disappointed in the position as they flounder around ill equipped to teach and counsel students.

(4) Be willing to *consider changing some agency policies* that can interfere with job satisfaction.

- The union contract or department policy may require giving overtime assignments to the most or least senior officers, which can make it impossible for SROs—who know their students best—to be assigned to school events.
- In some programs, SROs cannot be promoted to sergeant as long as they work in the schools.
- The program supervisor in a large new site allowed SROs to ignore a department rule on the purposes for which cruisers may be used in order to let the officers drive students home to retrieve medication they had forgotten to bring to school.

Once SROs have been recruited, programs need to thoroughly train and conscientiously supervise the officers—as discussed in the following chapter.

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Chapter 5: Training and Supervising SROs

Chapter Summary

The vast majority of the 19 programs included in the study provide adequate training, but frequently not in a timely manner. Most programs do not conscientiously supervise their SROs.

Training SROs

Few of the 19 programs train SROs before they go on the job, not usually because of the expense but because training is generally not offered after SROs have been selected and before they go on the job. Nevertheless, *any delay in training can be a serious problem* because SROs then have to learn their jobs by “sinking or swimming” with the possible consequences of providing ineffective services and making serious mistakes on the job. A few programs have found ways of providing pre-service training:

- A large established program arranged for its most long-standing SRO to become certified as an SRO trainer.
- A few programs arrange for each new SRO to “shadow” an experienced SRO before going on the job.

A number of programs arrange in-service training, including advanced SRO training. SROs funded by COPS in Schools grants receive mandatory comprehensive training provided by the COPS Office. Program supervisors in one large program provide in-service training for SROs every two or three months. Training in problem-solving techniques is especially needed because most SROs are not familiar with the approach.

Most SROs and school principals and assistant principals agree that *it would be valuable to train principals and assistant principals along with SROs as a team*. One program requires new local school administrators to attend a week-long basic SRO training course.

Supervising SROs

One of the weakest components of many SRO programs in the study is the lack of consistent or close supervision of the officers’ work. Typically, the supervisor has other, higher priority responsibilities, feels that little monitoring is necessary, or, because lack of understanding of what SROs are supposed to do, would find it awkward or embarrassing to supervise them. However, *adequate supervision of SROs is important to make sure the officers are working to their full potential and are not experiencing unreported or unacknowledged problems*.

In most programs, SROs complete monthly activity logs and meet with their supervisors for an annual job performance assessment. In some programs, supervisors periodically visit SROs and school administrators at the schools and observe the officers teach.

There are compelling reasons to involve school personnel in supervising SROs, not the least because assistant principals have by far the most contact with SROs. In one site, an advisory committee of SROs, a teacher, a school board member, and school administrators meets monthly to review problems and develop new ideas.

Almost all the programs included in the study provide SROs with training, but few do this in a timely manner. Most programs fail to adequately supervise their SROs. However, for a number of reasons training and supervision are extremely important to a program's success.

Training SROs

Training falls into two categories: pre-service and in-service. Both are essential for a number of reasons.

- Because few SROs have experience teaching in the classroom or practicing counseling and mentoring youth, they need to be trained in basic teaching and counseling skills.
- SROs need training in child psychology and behavior in order to be most effective as counselors and mentors—and to know when to refer students for professional help.
- There are complex issues associated with enforcing the law in a school that many SROs are not initially ready to handle, such as legislation and case law related to search and seizure involving minors, interrogating juveniles, and privacy.
- SROs may need help to “unlearn” some of the techniques they learned to use on patrol duty that are not appropriate in dealing with students (for example, resorting too quickly to using handcuffs or treating misconduct as part of a person's criminal make-up when in a student the behavior may be an example of youthful indiscretion).
- SROs need guidance in how to collaborate with local principals and assistant principals from whom they will receive day-to-day instructions, requests, and complaints.
- SROs need to learn how to work effectively with parents.

Pre-Service Training

Almost all programs provide SROs with adequate training—eventually. Sooner or later most of the 19 programs send SROs for training to one or more of reputable training programs, including:

- the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services COPS in Schools training, mandatory for grantees, held several times a year in different parts of the country);
- the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) basic and advanced SRO training;
- Corbin and Associates basic and advanced SRO training; and
- the North Carolina Justice Academy whose course all SROs in the state must attend.

However, few programs train SROs before they go on the job. Some SROs have been on the job for as long as a year before they receive training. As a result, the National Assessment’s mail survey of 322 law enforcement agencies (see chapter 1) found that many SROs engage in activities for which they have not been trained, especially teaching and mentoring. The 2002 NASRO School Resource Officer Survey also found that “between 17% and 34% (depending on the topic) [of responding SROs] have not received specialized training in topics such as adolescent child behavior, counseling skills, . . . and related issues.” Rather than the cost of the training, the delay typically reflects the problem that training is offered only periodically, often not during the interval after SROs have been selected and before they go on the job.

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence report, “An Effective Practices Outline for the School Resource Officer Approach,” recommends that officers be sent for training in the summer before they go on their new assignments. However, only a large established site among the 19 programs follows this guideline. The SRO procedures manual in another large established site requires new SROs to call the training academy to attend the next available general instructors’ course (if they have not already taken it) and to arrange to be certified to teach the G.R.E.A.T. curriculum by contacting the department’s G.R.E.A.T. staff.

The delay in training is often a serious problem. First, when SROs learn their jobs by “sinking or swimming,” for several months—even the entire first year—the schools may be poorly served by the program. Second, without proper training, SROs can make serious mistakes related to their relationships with students, school administrators, and parents that at best cause short-term crises and at worst jeopardize the entire program in the school. An SRO in a large established site reported that:

I learned what to do by trial and error, playing it by ear—for example, bringing parents in with their children to talk with me. When students began to challenge my authority to tell them to tuck in their shirts (“You can’t make me do that”), to enforce my authority I filled out and turned in a discipline slip form not knowing whether the school administrators would honor it. But the student was suspended. But I could have made serious errors without the training. I could have been overzealous or apathetic, doing too much or not enough. Plus, you need training to cover you in court—training *is* policy in court.

A large established program solved the timing problem by arranging for its most senior SRO to become certified as an SRO trainer. The SRO then developed a week-long training syllabus, which he teaches during the summer to officers who might apply for any SRO openings the following school year. In the long run, this approach saves the agency money by avoiding the registration fees and travel expenses involved in sending SROs out of town for training by professional organizations (except for COPS in Schools training, which is paid for by grant funds—up to \$1,200 per required participant).

A few programs arrange for each new SRO to “shadow” an experienced SRO before going on the job much in the way new recruits ride with field training officers before they are “let loose” on their own. This approach has the considerable advantage of providing some orientation to being an SRO before a new SRO goes on the job. It also makes it possible for new SROs to gain indispensable real-world, on-the-job knowledge of the position that formal training typically cannot provide. Nevertheless, shadowing is an essential supplement, not a substitute, for formal pre-service training. Furthermore, if the established SROs whom the new SROs shadow are not doing their jobs properly or give poor guidance, the experience may be at best worthless and at worst harmful.

In their curriculum materials, the COPS Office, the Center for the Prevention of School Violence (CPSV), the National School Safety Center, and NASRO have identified the topics that new SRO training should focus on. As a result, the list of training topics below only summarizes the most frequently addressed and important topics (taken from the COPS in Schools training manual) that should be covered in pre-service training:

- legal issues;
- classroom teaching skills and strategies;
- mental health interventions;
- understanding the child’s perspective;
- cultural fluency;
- collaborative problem solving applied to the school setting;
- safe school preparation; and
- mentoring and counseling skills.

New SROs should also receive training, or at least advice, in how to remain a visible part of the department while being isolated in the schools—a frustrating experience for some SROs who feel they suffer from the “out of site, out of mind” phenomenon.

In-Service Training

Most SROs in the study’s 19 programs did not attend regularly scheduled in-service SRO-related training. The Florida Attorney General reported in its 2000 School Resource Officer Survey that 82 percent of 156 programs indicated that SROs had missed in-service training opportunities, 54 percent because they could not leave during the school day and 46 percent due to lack of funding. The 2002 NASRO School Resource Officer Survey suggests that many programs are unaware of sources of funding for training: “Almost two-thirds (65%) of SROs were unaware that U.S. Department of Education’s Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program funds can be used to pay for SRO training” However, even awareness of such funding does not necessarily result in a request for money: “[O]f those [SROs] who are aware [of the funding from this source], over half indicated that their district does not use the funds for such purposes.” One reason some departments do not apply for training funds is that they may still have to pay overtime for other officers to substitute for the SROs while the SROs are being trained.

A few programs provide funds for SROs to attend advanced SRO training after they have been on the job a year or two. One large established program with over 20 SROs provides in-house, in-service training at regularly scheduled intervals. Every two or three months, each of the three SRO supervisors holds trainings for the 6-8 SROs under his supervision, typically to explain a new technology, vendor, or piece of legislation or court ruling.

Florida's 2000 School Resource Officer Survey reported that the top three types of training *SROs request* are school law, conflict resolution, and emergency management. The SROs contacted in the National Assessment identified three other areas that in-service (and basic) training should address:

- working collaboratively with school administrators;
- establishing boundaries in terms of getting involved with students and determining appropriate and inappropriate issues to address with students; and
- engaging in collaborative problem solving.

The importance of addressing the first two of these three issues is discussed in detail in chapters 5 and 6 below. A brief discussion of collaborative problem solving follows below.

Training in Collaborative Problem Solving

The 19 programs in this study engage in very little, if any, collaborative problem solving—working with other agencies to implement the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) or some other model of collaborative problem solving. Of course, the collaboration between law enforcement and the schools inherent in the SRO position is a major example of collaborative problem solving. But within that framework, SROs rarely involved other individuals and groups outside the schools in implementing a permanent solution to get at root cause of a chronic problem such as bullying or vandalism. This was true even of SROs whose law enforcement agencies had adopted community policing or who had attended COPS in Schools conferences (which devote an entire module to “Bringing SARA to School”).

The COPS in Schools training manual, “Keep Our Kids Safe,” suggests that failure to use the SARA model may reflect lack of support from the school principal, difficulty accessing school records, lack of support from the police chief or sheriff and the agency SRO supervisor, and the inability to get free from immediate problems to engage in problem solving. This last explanation is consistent with the findings from the present study. *The SROs in the 19 sites generally do not have the time to pursue the steps of the SARA model*—for example, examining school records and meeting with potential collaborators. Many SROs cannot even complete their paperwork during normal business hours but must do so at night at home—when they are not doing a detail at a school athletic event or attending a PTA meeting. In one of the only two good examples of problem solving involving non-school organizations that the study discovered (see the box “Two Examples of Collaborative Problem Solving by SROs”), the officer had to find the time to meet individually with the owners of three homes adjacent to the school whose fences were being vandalized by students; solicit help from and develop a plan of action with the town code enforcement officer; and meet again with each homeowner accompanied by the code enforcement officer. To be sure, because the approach solved the problem, the SRO no longer had to deal with complaints from the neighbors. But for most SROs, an uncertain future benefit, even if it may ultimately involve saving time and frustration in the long run, is probably outweighed by the necessary initial investment of time and energy.

That said, if the obstacle to collaborative problem solving lies with school administrators and not with the SRO, the officer can explain the SARA model to them and point out how implementing the process will provide a return on their investment of time that will be well worth the effort.

The second most important reason the National Assessment found for the lack of collaborative problem solving is SROs’ lack of familiarity with the SARA (or any other) model for implementing joint solutions to chronic problems.

Two Examples of Collaborative Problem Solving by SROs

In a large established program, for over two years a few students on their way home at the end of the school day had been damaging the fences (already in a state of disrepair) around neighbors' front yards. After talking with the suspected students failed to resolve the problem, the SRO learned that there was a safety issue involved because of the loose and jagged boards and nails. As a result, the SRO invited a city code enforcement officer to join him in visiting the three complaining homeowners to ask them to help solve the problem by repairing their fences. The SRO, in turn, said he would see to it that the students stopped damaging them. One neighbor replaced his fence entirely, and the other two had theirs repaired. The vandalism stopped.

In a large new site, the police department received several complaints from senior citizens about high school students speeding in the area of the high school. The SRO discovered that the senior center's chess club met near the school and ended just as students were dismissed. The SRO spoke with a few kids, who agreed to drive more respectfully, and worked with the chess club to modify its schedule, thereby solving the problem.

Training for School Administrators

Although none were involved themselves in such an activity, several program coordinators and school administrators suggested that ***it would be valuable to train principals and assistant principals along with SROs as a team***, focusing especially on cultural differences between law enforcement agencies and school systems, supervision of SROs, and decisions about what SROs will and will not do. Even the SRO supervisor in a large established site in which the SROs engage predominantly in law enforcement recommended joint SRO training with school administrators, because "The biggest thing about being an SRO is not the criminal side but being able to work with assistant principals."

The COPS Office already requires grantee agencies to send one school administrator from a partnering school district along with the SROs supported by the grant to one of its three-day training conferences. (However, participating school districts are reimbursed for sending only one administrator.) One large established program requires new assistant principals and principals in schools with SROs to attend the week-long basic

NASRO training course. According to one school administrator who attended, “Since these trainings are attended primarily with SROs, the administrators have a tremendous opportunity to hear about the program from the officers’ perspectives and to gain information on a number of strategies from different jurisdictions for solving program-related problems.” In a large new site, a statewide legal aide group offers classes and materials about education-related law to school boards and police departments that participate in SRO programs.

Supervising SROs

One of the weakest components of many SRO programs in the study is the lack of consistent or close supervision of the officers’ work. Most law enforcement agencies assign a ranking officer to supervise the program, but typically the supervisor (often the same person as the program coordinator) has other responsibilities to which he or she gives higher priority. For example, in one large established site, the supervisor was also responsible for community and public relations, which occupied nearly all of his time.

Some program coordinators believe there is no need to supervise SROs—or at least not *their* SROs. The program supervisor in a large established program reported he does not need to monitor the SROs because “principals monitor them and tell me if there’s a problem.” For example, a principal called him to report that an SRO was constantly late for things. The supervisor spoke to the SRO and “he shaped up.” The only formal monitoring the program conducts is a three-hour meeting involving the SROs, sheriff’s department, and school administrators at the end of every school year to review problems and progress. In the small sites in particular, “supervision” occurs through informal conversations between the police chief or sheriff and school superintendent. In a few jurisdictions, it was clear that *experienced* SROs no longer did need close supervision because they knew their job and its limitations, were conscientious, and were self-motivated.

Finally, some supervisors, because they lack understanding of what SROs are supposed to do (never having been trained themselves in what the SRO program is all about or in how to monitor SROs' performance), take a "hands-off" approach because they would find it awkward or embarrassing to supervise them.

Importance of Supervision

Adequate supervision of SROs is important to:

- assist new SROs in making the transition from patrol officer to school-based resource;
- obtain information from school administrators and SROs that may suggest an impending or possible problem before it develops;
- identify existing problems that SROs or school administrators are reluctant to bring to the supervisor's attention;
- make SROs feel that their work is important and valued by the department;
- impress upon school administrators that the agency considers the program an important collaborative initiative; and
- identify disaffection among SROs that needs to be addressed to avoid turnover among officers who are performing well in the position.

Barriers to Supervision

There are several obstacles to effective supervision:

- Lack of time on the part of the police supervisor. Only 2 of the 19 sites in the present study—both large established programs—had more than one supervisor: one had three supervisors for 22 SROs, and the other had two supervisors for 18 SROs. (The Florida Office of the Attorney General reports in its Year 2000 "School Resource Officer Survey" that there was approximately one SRO supervisor for every 5 SROs among 156 responding programs in the State.)
- SROs' geographic separation from the rest of the department that can result in an "out of sight, out of mind" state of mind.
- The logistics and time involved in supervising SROs who serve multiple schools.
- Objections from principals to SROs leaving the campus (one supervisor considered calling monthly meetings to improve the flow of ideas and information among her six SROs, but school administrators refused to allow the SROs to leave campus during the school day).
- Lack of any written SRO roles or responsibilities that can provide a basis for supervision—knowing what to look for.

- Rapid turnover among program supervisors due to promotions or transfers, forcing SROs to adjust to each new supervisor’s approach to program monitoring.
- Failure to train supervisors in how to monitor SRO performance. (Although a number of supervisors had been SROs, no site trained its program supervisors in how to monitor SROs. Similarly, the 2002 NASRO School Resource Officer Survey also found that “school-based law enforcement supervisors are not specially trained in the supervision of school-based officers.”)

Approaches to Supervision

Programs do not follow any one model in how they go about supervising SROs. For example, among the four large new sites:

- in one program, the SROs begin and end each day at headquarters, touching base with their commanding officers;
- in the second site, the department relies on daily telephone or radio contact with the SROs, as well as weekly visits by a sergeant to each school district;
- in the third site, the SROs see their supervisor at roll call each day at 6:30 a.m.; and
- in the last site, the SRO supervisors hold a weekly unit meeting at their division offices.

In one small new site, the SRO calls in his activities to the law enforcement dispatch center. When a new activity starts, he radios in and the dispatcher records the precise time and activity category (e.g., “going on patrol now”; “responding to call to investigate possible drug use”; “going to teach driver ed now”). The dispatch system calculates time spent on each activity and can aggregate time spent on various activities on a weekly or any other basis.

Typically, program supervisors use a combination of two or more approaches to monitoring SROs, among them:

- requiring SROs to submit monthly activity logs with summary counts of various activities;
- periodically meeting with each SRO individually;
- meeting with SROs as a group at fixed intervals;
- fielding calls from SROs experiencing problems or concerned about potential future problems;
- visiting SROs, school administrators, or both at the schools; and
- observing SROs teach.

In many programs, supervision is limited to review of the SROs logs and an annual discussion with each SRO (or a meeting with all SROs as a group), with active intervention the rest of the year taking place only when the school, SRO, or parent brings a problem to the supervisor's attention. For example, in one large established site SROs log in their activities in a monthly activity report that they submit to the department's SRO coordinator, who compiles the reports for the department's service division captain. The report tracks activities each SRO undertakes according to the type of activity (e.g., fingerprinting class, PTA lecture on child safety), who requested it (e.g., teacher, coach, community person), date and place offered, and number of participants. For example, the SRO at one of the site's junior high schools documented that from January 1, 2001, through May 31, 2001, in addition to participating in an after-school program 21 times, he:

- presented 64 programs involving 1,798 attendees;
- attended 10 civic meetings and functions;
- devoted 2 hours to a newsletter;
- issued 11 misdemeanor citations;
- took 7 reports; and
- engaged in a number of other law enforcement-related activities.

The SRO coordinator prepares a yearly written evaluation of each SRO, but it is based only on the supervisor's own contacts with the SROs, not on contacts with school administrators. Otherwise, the SROs are largely on their own. For example, no one observes them teach.

Two large established programs had the most formal supervision.

- In one program, every new SRO is assigned to one of three full-time supervisors, all sergeants. New SROs must sign and submit a sheet to their supervisor documenting that they have read and are familiar with the department's SRO Procedures Manual. The Procedures Manual requires SROs to "Provide the supervisor with monthly activity sheets." SROs fill out the sheets weekly on their computers and e-mail them to their supervising sergeant at the end of each month. Supervisors observe their SROs teach and meet at least once a year with the SROs' school administrators. SROs call their supervisor periodically either for advice with a problem or to keep them apprised of something important that took place—for example, an angry parent who is thinking about filing a complaint.

- In another large established site, SROs complete a detailed monthly activity form but, unlike in most other programs, ***the program supervisor circulates the reports to command staff, school district administrators, and the school board.*** The school district superintendent of schools reads the reports carefully to monitor the officers' activities. SROs meet every other month for two hours with the school district's program coordinator, police department supervisor, and the middle school administrators at whose schools the SROs are stationed to make plans and address problem areas. Meetings have a written agenda and meeting notes are kept and circulated. The police department program supervisor meets every year with each SRO individually and with the SRO's school principal or assistant principal. He has observed each SRO teach. Finally, the school district conducts annual focus groups with middle school students to obtain their perceptions of individual SROs and the program as a whole.

The SRO in a small new site uses an incident tracking software program developed with funding from the National Institute of Justice called *School COP*, distributed at COPs in schools conferences and available for free at www.schoolcopsoftware.com. The software enables him to produce graphs showing incident trends and other displays of crime data at the request of the sheriff or school board. At one point, he became concerned because he had issued 35 drug possession or sales citations to date during the 2003–2004 school year compared with only 11 issued at the same time the previous school year—while the middle school SRO had issued only 2. This is an illustration of performance-based (self-) supervision that another study of SRO programs has investigated in depth (see the box “Supervisors in Five Programs Use Performance-Based Measures to Monitor SROs”).

Supervisors in Five Programs Use Performance-Based Measures to Monitor SROs

With funding from the COPS Office, Circle Solutions, a professional services firm in the Washington, D.C., area, piloted an outcome-oriented SRO performance evaluation process with five law enforcement agencies in six schools. For each SRO for the coming year, a group of SROs, their supervisors, and program “consumers”—students, faculty, staff, and parents—identified goals specific to the crime and disorder problems in the officer's school and designed measures to determine whether the SRO achieved the goals. Throughout the school year, SROs implemented activities designed to achieve the goals and tracked their activities. At the end of the year, the consumer group reconvened to assess how well the SROs had achieved their goals. The purpose of these efforts was ***to integrate the findings into the SROs' performance evaluation*** and to use the findings to adjust the activities the SROs would implement during the following school year.

Involving School Personnel in Supervising the SROs

Several sites involve school personnel in supervising SROs. ***There are compelling reasons for bringing principals and assistant principals into the supervision process.***

- Principals and assistant principals can usually assess SROs' performance in ways that program supervisors cannot because school administrators have vastly more contact with SROs. In effect, because of their daily contact with the SROs, they are the police agency's on-site "eyes and ears."
- Principals and assistant principals have a much better grasp than the law enforcement agency could ever have of the problems in their schools that the SROs need to address.
- Insofar as SRO programs represent a collaboration between law enforcement and the schools, it is only logical that there should be collaboration in terms of supervision.
- As with other attempts to involve the schools in the operation of the program, including school administrators in the supervision of SROs conveys the message that they are valuable partners in a joint initiative.

Several sites have formal procedures for involving school administrators in helping to supervise SROs.

- In a small new site, an advisory committee consisting of parents, a teacher, a community group member, and a school board member, as well as SROs, the chief deputy, and school administrators, meets monthly to share information about the program's operation.
- School administrators in a large new site contribute to ongoing supervision of SROs by preparing regular performance reviews at the police agency's request.
- A sheriff's department in another large new site encourages administrators from each of its five partner school districts to review, at least annually, the performance of its SROs. Two of the school districts developed specific reporting forms for this purpose, while administrators from the other three districts submit their evaluations in letter form.
- At yet another large new site, the program supervisor requests annual SRO evaluations from teachers, administrators, and other key staff members at each participating school. She collects these assessments personally, then reviews them individually with the officers. The school district assessments address performance factors ranging from attendance and appearance, to willingness to work with others, to interpersonal communication skills. The following excerpts illustrate the overall tone of the comments:

[He] embodies professionalism in law enforcement. His presence in the school provides an avenue for exposure to trust, safety, knowledge, and experience School conflicts have been reduced through his constant, positive interaction with the student body. – A faculty member writing about a high school SRO

Students who previously held a negative opinion of law enforcement now ask if they may go speak to the officer. He has developed a rapport with teachers as well. – A school guidance counselor writing about a high school SRO

As this chapter has suggested, training and supervision of SROs is most effective when school administrators are involved. This aspect of the collaboration between the law enforcement agency and the school system is part of a much larger issue of developing good relations between SROs and principals and assistant principals—the focus of the next chapter.

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Chapter 6: Collaborating with School Administrators and Teachers

Chapter Summary

Perhaps the single most troublesome area for most programs has been establishing productive relationships between SROs and principals and assistant principals. The underlying problem behind many conflicts between them stems from a fundamental difference in the law enforcement culture and the school culture in terms of goals, strategies, and methods.

Working with School Administrators

Administrators expressed three principal concerns about having an SRO in their schools:

- *Who's In Charge?*
- *Who Makes the Decision to Arrest?*
- *Why Isn't "My" SRO Available All the Time?*

These and other administrator concerns were commonplace mostly when the programs had been in operation less than a year. Over time, most administrators developed good working relations with their SROs and came to value the program highly. While much of this change in attitude can be attributed to administrators seeing that their worst fears were not materializing and that the SROs were in fact valuable assets, many programs found they could expedite dramatically the relationships between officers and administrators by taking the following steps.

- ***Collaborate***, through joint planning and open and frequent communication, in establishing SRO roles and responsibilities, screening candidates, and supervising the officers.
- ***Explain program benefits to administrators***, showing that they have a lot to gain by having an SRO in their schools, such as:
 - an immediate response to incidents requiring police intervention;
 - an increase in everyone's sense of security and actual safety;
 - being spared at least in part the hassle and time of handling incidents of serious student misconduct; and
 - assistance in preparing security assessments and emergency plans.
- ***Orient administrators to the program***—do not rely on school superintendents or SROs to do this.
- ***Train SROs before they go on the job***, to help SROs appreciate and learn to deal with the differences in organizational procedures and cultures between law enforcement agencies and educational institutions.
- ***Address administrator concerns about SROs' availability***, for example, by minimizing calling SROs away from the schools for special assignments.

Gaining Support from Teachers

Gaining the support of teachers is essential if SROs want to get invited to teach their classes. Teaching, in turn, is an important SRO responsibility (1) because of the opportunity it provides to educate kids about the law and improve kids' perceptions about "cops" and (2) because teaching offers a golden opportunity for *motivating students to seek out the SROs outside of class* when students are having problems.

Programs have been able to gain faculty support in a variety of ways to the point that in some schools teachers are constantly requesting SROs to take over their classes.

- ***Orient teachers*** to the program before it begins—or as soon as possible thereafter.
- ***Explain how SROs can improve student learning*** by teaching classes and by reducing any fear students may have about being safe at school.
- ***Go beyond the normal SRO responsibilities to be of help to teachers***, such as answering their legal questions and handling property crimes committed against them.

The single most troublesome area for most SRO programs may be establishing productive relationships between the officers and principals and assistant principals. According to the COPS Office training manual, *COPS in Schools: Keeping Our Kids Safe*, “. . . perhaps there is no more significant challenge than the development of an effective working relationship between the primary players.” The discussion below summarizes the problems SROs have experienced in working together in the 19 sites and suggests methods of collaborating positively.

The Basic Problem: A Culture Clash

The underlying problem behind many of the difficulties SROs and administrators experienced in developing a viable collaboration stems from a fundamental difference in the law enforcement culture and the school culture. ***Law enforcement agencies and school systems function in different worlds with different communication patterns, objectives, and methods.*** As a result, conflicts are inherent in the SRO position in balancing the enforcer role as a member of a police or sheriff's department with the educational and nurturing role of a school system. For example, a high school principal in a large new site recalled that he had had early misgivings about the SRO's ability to blend into a school culture—how could a police officer approach and interact with students in a positive manner, he wondered. Compared with the criminal justice system,

which he perceived as focused on law, order, and punishment, the educational system would require much more flexibility. “Dealing with kids,” he stressed, “means you have to understand that youngsters make mistakes—they make them all the time. You have to expect that kids make mistakes and use their blunders as an opportunity to work with them, not slam them.”

In a few cases, jurisdictions have been able to minimize these problems from the outset because of unusual circumstances that fostered a positive relationship between the law enforcement agency and the school system before the SRO program even began (see the box “Capitalize on Serendipitous Conditions”). However, in most instances program participants must make a concerted effort to overcome the barriers to collaboration because, as the COPS in Schools training manual points out—and as was confirmed in several of the programs included in the National Assessment—“While the school superintendent and the sheriff or police chief may have reached an agreement about the implementation of the SRO program, individual principals . . . may not be as open-minded regarding the assignment of a law enforcement officer to their school.”

Capitalize on Serendipitous Conditions

In a few jurisdictions, preexisting conditions made it possible to avoid in part or entirely the culture clash between the law enforcement agency and the school system that have plagued so many other programs.

- In one large new site, the police department’s juvenile division and school department administrators had occupied the same building for many years. This close physical proximity increased opportunities for staff from the future partnering agencies to interact and to experience the operating norms and culture of the other organization.
- In a large established site, the police department’s sworn SRO program coordinator had a master’s degree in education (indeed, he later retired from the force to become a school principal). This not only gave him an understanding of the perspective of school administrators but also enabled him to establish a quicker rapport with them than other SRO supervisors without a higher education background could have achieved.

- In another large established program, a school principal had known the sheriff for “years and years,” and he also knew the high ranking officer who was slated to run the SRO program. As a result, this principal spearheaded 90 percent of the program. For example, the sheriff came to him asking how he should go about recruiting SRO candidates. The sheriff had planned to arbitrarily tell road deputies they were going to be SROs. The principal instead suggested the sheriff ask for volunteers and set up an interview process with the principals and let them choose from the pool. The sheriff agreed.
- As a former elementary school teacher for four years, a school system’s assistant superintendent in a large established program had worked closely with the SRO in his school before the program expanded to the secondary level.

Other jurisdictions can look closely to see whether there are individuals in the police or sheriff’s department, and in the school system, who are uniquely equipped to help overcome the cultural barriers between the two organizations and then involve them in the planning and running of the program.

However, high level collaboration frequently does not extend to the grass roots where individual SROs and principals and assistant principals can be at serious loggerheads regardless of a positive relationship between their chief executives.

School Administrator Concerns about the Program

The vast majority of sites reported that initially there were conflicts between the SROs and school administrators at the local school level.

- Police program supervisors or SROs in four of the five small established sites told of at least one poor experience they had had with at least one school administrator.
- In several sites, conflicts between SROs and school administrators led to the SROs’ replacement.
- At two schools, administrators resisted the SROs’ involvement in school activities so firmly that teachers and students would not even acknowledge the officers’ presence.

Administrators expressed three principal concerns about having an SRO in their schools:

- “Who’s in charge?”
- “Who makes the decision to arrest?”
- “Why isn’t ‘my’ SRO available all the time?”

Who's In Charge?

Many school administrators initially fear they will lose control over running their schools or, at least, over the disciplinary process. Realizing that sworn officers have tremendous discretion and power, these administrators wondered whether the SROs would in effect take over the school when it came to all student misbehavior. As a result, when the SRO programs were in the planning stages in several large new sites, administrators felt the need to announce several times that they intended to maintain authority and control over discipline issues in their schools.

Who Makes the Decision to Arrest?

Closely related to the issue of who has control is the concern of many administrators to be the only persons to decide whether a student is arrested. In a few cases, **administrators wanted differential treatment for students**—they wanted to proceed gently with some students whom they saw as “good kids” by not arresting them.

- There have been serious conflicts in one large established site whenever school administrators want some students arrested but not others, although all the students have committed the same offense. According to the program coordinator, this usually happens “because one kid is ‘good’ and the other ‘bad’, or because of [a history of] more problems with one kid than another.”
- In another large established site, an SRO had arrested three students who admitted to writing lewd graffiti in a bathroom because, according to State law, criminal damage committed in a school is a felony. The principal objected because the students were members of a gifted and talented group. As a result, the principal developed a policy that graffiti writers would not be arrested unless the markings were gang related.
- In a number of school districts, school administrators want SROs to be lenient with special education students who act up, while SROs want to be consistent in their arrest practices regardless of the students’ status. “The biggest initial problem,” the SRO in a large established site reported, “was that administrators did not want special education students arrested, while the police said, if it is a battery, we have to make an arrest.”

Other administrators **wanted students to be arrested** without realizing that officers lack the legal authority to make an arrest under the circumstances.

- In a large established site, some school administrators initially wanted SROs to arrest students for alcohol possession or carrying pagers after administrators had already confiscated the items. The administrators did not realize that an officer in the State may not arrest offenders for most misdemeanor offenses unless the officer witnesses the crime.
- In the same site, the police program coordinator had to rescind an SRO's arrest for criminal trespass because there had been no prior warning (an essential element of a trespass offense). The police department's SRO coordinator said he had tried to explain officers' arrest powers to the administrators, "but we were reading from different sheets of music," so the department pulled the SRO out of the school for a couple of weeks and sent over a new SRO when the removed officer said he did not want to return.

Why Isn't "My" SRO Available All the Time?

The third concern many administrators expressed reflects their appreciation for the program—*disquiet and even anger when "their" SRO is not available in their schools all the time*. This was the most frequent source of conflict at the four large new sites, but it was also a problem at the large established sites.

- An assistant principal complained to the SRO because the officer went off campus to drive a student home. The SRO answered that he was always available by cell phone and was gone only five minutes—the student's home was a two-mile round trip on open roads.
- When the program began in another site, administrators at one school complained that, because the SRO was not staying on campus to teach, they were not sure if they wanted to continue the program.
- According to the SRO at a junior high school, a high school administrator would call the officer once or twice a week to come over to help with vandalism, fights, or unruly parents because the high school was walking distance from the junior high. Because the police department supervisor sanctioned this assistance, the SRO ended up spending considerable time at the high school, which annoyed the junior high school administrators.
- An early implementation problem in another site involved school administrator complaints that the SROs were not always available because the original four SROs were stretched among three schools and could not, as a result, operate proactively—for example, they could not patrol all three lunches. The program supervisor reported that some administrators complained to the SROs, "Why aren't you in *my* school now?" Complaints about SROs' not being constantly available persisted for several years even after the program had demonstrated its value.

- A principal insisted that the SRO station herself in front of the school before classes began and in another location during lunch. If she were not there, an argument ensued. When the SRO came back from a training, the principal asked her, “Why weren’t you in school? You report to me. I’ll tell you what you can and can’t do.” Whenever she left the school, he paged her to return. Because of the principal’s attitude, the police department almost decided not to replace the SRO when she left the department.
- Administrators wanted the SRO at their school year-round; the police department refused, instead assigning the officer to regular police duty when school was closed. For the police department, the reintegration of the SROs into regular assignments during school vacations helps avoid the problem of other officers viewing the SROs as “no longer real cops.” In addition, many departments want their SROs back on the streets during the summer so that they do not lose their skills as patrol officers. Finally, in smaller communities, SROs who go back to being beat officers during the summer can keep in touch with some of their troublesome students and continue to mentor them.

Although some administrators had unreasonable expectations about SRO’s constant and immediate availability, resisting the temptation to leave the campus unnecessarily can be difficult for new SROs, as well. Patrol officers, used to roaming their sectors with considerable freedom when not responding to a call, must adjust to remaining in a specific location—inside a building or in its immediate vicinity. It can take time for some new SROs to adapt to this new job condition.

Other School Administrator Concerns

Although less common, some administrators expressed three other concerns when the programs were in their early stages.

- Creating a “police state” atmosphere. While some administrators in one school district were delighted that there were new SROs available to make arrests, other administrators wondered if the officers’ presence would create a “police state” atmosphere within the schools. A high school principal in a small new site reported that, when the program began in his school, he had difficulty reconciling the functions of arrest, suppression, and intelligence gathering, which he attributed to police, with the functions of counseling, teaching, and skill building that he associated with educators. “After all, regardless of what you call a police officer,” he reasoned, “he or she still will view most situations through the criminal justice lens.”

- Not focusing sufficiently on security. Conflicts arose between SROs and a number of school administrators who—far from being concerned about creating a police state atmosphere—*wanted* to use SROs primarily or even exclusively for security purposes rather than allowing—much less encouraging or facilitating—the officers to act as teachers and mentors. For example, a principal in a large established site wanted the SRO to patrol the parking lots and watch students getting on and off the buses. The SRO, with his police supervisor’s backing, refused. According to the program supervisor in another large established site, “The biggest problem was—and still is—that school officials want SROs to be security, but it [the SROs’ purpose] is education and getting kids to see cops as friends rather than enemies—it’s not security only.”
- Creating unnecessary parental concern about school safety. A number of school administrators were apprehensive that parents would associate a law enforcement presence in the schools with the existence of serious problems.
 - A superintendent in a large new site said he did not want to unreasonably alarm parents or students by projecting an image that his school district had dangerous or “bad” schools.
 - School administrators in another large new site were concerned about unduly alarming parents who, with media coverage of the SROs’ activities, might think there had been a sudden increase in discipline problems and begin to fear for the safety of their children.
 - Administrators in yet another school system worried that minority parents might view the new police presence on campus as a reaction to “white flight” and the need for increased enforcement because minority school enrollment had increased.

While these concerns may suggest that most school administrators have negative attitudes toward their SRO programs, for the most part these apprehensions were commonplace only when the programs were first starting and had been in operation less than a year.

Over time, most school administrators developed good working relations with their SROs and came to value the program highly (see the box “After Initial Skepticism, Most School Administrators Support the SRO Program”). Supporting this finding from the 19 sites, the National Assessment mail survey of schools that host SRO programs found that the vast majority of the 108 administrators who responded rated their collaboration with both the SROs in their schools (79 percent) and with the participating law enforcement agency (81 percent) as “excellent.”

After Initial Skepticism, Most School Administrators Support the SRO Program

The vast majority of school administrators in the study support the continued presence of SROs in their schools. In fact, most administrators express concern or apprehension about possibly *losing* their officers.

Reasons administrators give for their ringing endorsement vary, but they include:

- more order in schools;
- a greater sense of safety from possible outside threats;
- having an authoritative helping hand in situations in which irate parents confront teachers or administrators;
- the benefits to students of having another adult role model in the schools;
- having a legal resource available to teachers and other staff; and
- having handy access to a knowledgeable resource for addressing staff misconduct.

In all jurisdictions, principals and assistant principals appreciated the marked improvement in police response time that having an officer on campus afforded. In a large new site, the superintendent of a somewhat rural school district mentioned that she rarely saw deputies on patrol before the SRO program began. She worried about how long it might take police to reach her schools in the event of a crisis or tragedy. In more than one site, administrators suggested that in the past whenever they had a disruption they had two options: call the police and perhaps wait all day for a response (depending on service needs in other parts of the jurisdiction) or handle the situation without law enforcement intervention, anticipating that the police would assign a low priority to their call. With an SRO working specifically in each school, administrators can access police assistance more quickly.

Many administrators believe that the presence of a police officer on campus has helped diffuse tense situations and prevented the escalation of problems. For just these reasons, administrators of two schools in a small new site threatened to quit if the SRO were not retained.

At least two school districts in the study “put their money where their mouth was” when budget constraints appeared to be about to end their SRO programs.

- When a sheriff’s department in a large new site could no longer pay for the SROs, four of the five school districts agreed to contribute 100 percent of their deputy’s salary for the nine-month academic calendar, with the department picking up the cost for the remainder of the year.
- When a sheriff in another large new site reported he could no longer fund the two SROs for one school district, the school superintendent informed the sheriff that her district would pay for maintaining one of the two full-time officers.

Ways of Gaining School Administrators' Support

There are a number of steps programs can take to prevent or minimize conflict with school administrators.

Collaboration Is the Key

The steps programs have taken to promote collaboration demonstrate above all that joint planning and open and frequent communication between the local police agencies and school districts at every phase of program development and implementation contribute to successful integration of SROs into the schools. The superintendent of one school district in a large new site played an active role in the SRO program from its earliest stages of development. Because the administrator previously had served in other districts with thriving SRO programs, she offered invaluable insight and experience to the applicant police agency during its proposal writing process. By involving her in the planning phase, the law enforcement agency gave her a sense of ownership for the program and, once the jurisdiction received COPS in Schools funds, allowed her to more readily explain and “sell” the program to school district principals and parents.

It is especially important for the police agency and school district—with the involvement of school principals and assistant principals—*to collaborate in establishing the SROs' roles and responsibilities*. As discussed in chapter 3, a number of sites learned that they could avoid many potential conflicts if the law enforcement agency and school district developed a *detailed* and *written* description of what the SROs would and would not be responsible for doing—for example, stipulating when the SROs may leave the campus. As many principals and assistant principals as possible should be included in this exercise. In addition to creating “buy-in” from all participants, a written list becomes a document to which SROs and administrators can refer when there is misunderstanding or disagreement over an SRO’s behavior or an administrator’s request to the SRO. It is important to redistribute the job description periodically because, as with similar documents in many professions, participants misplace them or even forget they exist. One assistant principal said she was not aware her jurisdiction had a memorandum of agreement (it did). Another principal in the same site said he knew one

existed but claimed she had never seen it. Turnover among school administrators also makes it necessary to keep circulating the job specifications.

In addition to collaborating in planning the program, there are two other significant program activities on which the law enforcement agency and the schools should work together:

- *Screening candidates.* Chapter 4 addressed the importance of involving school administrators in developing criteria for selecting SROs and screening them for suitability.
- *Supervising SROs.* This is another opportunity for collaboration that should be seized when the program starts (see chapter 5).

Collaborating in these areas has helped police supervisors to better understand the expectations and needs of each school in hosting an SRO.

Explain the Potential Program Benefits to Administrators

In any collaboration, all the parties have to have something to gain by working with the other groups. However, the benefits of an SRO program to administrators are not always self-evident. Even when the benefits are obvious, they may initially be overshadowed by the perceived negative aspects of the program. Despite the importance of making sure school administrators understand how the program can benefit them, *no site took the time to explain these advantages.*

Most administrators will recognize from the list below that they have something important to gain by having an SRO in their schools. Indeed, these benefits are not hypothetical—at least two principals or assistant principals in the 19 sites said they had personally experienced each of the benefits listed below.

- Many satisfied school administrators pointed out that principals and assistant principals gain the advantage of *an immediate response to an incident requiring police intervention* rather than calling 911 and waiting for a beat officer to appear. According to one school administrator, the immediate response by an SRO helps diffuse tense situations and in some cases prevents the escalation of problems. It also relieves administrators from having to hold and pacify an often agitated, accused student for long periods. Furthermore, as another administrator reported, “SROs can also respond globally right away to incidents that happen in

the school. For example, when a boy recently touched a girl in an inappropriate way, [the officer] held separate assemblies for the 6th grade, 7th grade, and 8th grade classes to speak about sexual harassment and immediately set parameters for their behavior.”

- Many administrators observed that *SROs can increase their—and their faculty’s and students’—sense of security and probably actual safety.*
- A principal in a large established site pointed out that *SROs can save principals considerable time.* “The SRO is another resource—administrators are drowning in paperwork, so he can do some of the work we would otherwise have to do as well as prevent incidents through mediation and talking with kids—which reduces the number of times administrators have to intervene.” Another principal reported that, because administrators can call on the SROs to handle underage smoking incidents, “This relieves me from handling them—and it’s more effective.”
- Several principals reported that they find *it is simpler to ask the SROs to arrange coverage for extracurricular student events* than coordinating coverage through the police or sheriff’s department. In addition, they reported, SROs are better able to prevent misconduct at school events than regular officers can. According to an assistant principal, “The SRO takes charge [at these events]. He knows the kids and where the other deputies should be stationed.”
- Administrators in a large established site and in several new sites said they like that they can *go to the SROs for legal information.*
- Several assistant principals reported they had discovered that *irate parents show more respect to SROs than to administrators.* Some administrators call in the SRO to mediate disputes between a furious parent and an assistant principal.
- SROs sometimes *take on special responsibilities that benefit administrators.* One SRO registers student and faculty cars so that, if there is a problem with a vehicle, administrators can go to him to find out whose car it is. When an assistant principal saw a shotgun in a car in the school parking lot, he asked the SRO to investigate. Using his registry, the SRO was able to learn in a matter of minutes that the student and his father had gone hunting together and had simply forgotten to remove the gun.
- Several SROs have helped school administrators to *prepare security assessments* and safe school plans, as well as collaborate in preparing emergency response protocols. SROs also practice preparedness drills with students and staff.
- SROs can help administrators *quash rumors.* One superintendent of schools religiously reads the SROs’ monthly reports not only to monitor the officers’ activities but also “because board members may call me about an incident at a school and ask for more information about it. For example, when drugs were

detected at a junior high school, there was a rumor that they were being distributed freely at a soccer field. I knew this wasn't true—just one kid was involved and he was arrested—because of what I read in the SRO's monthly report.”

Orient Administrators to the Program

As noted above, even though the chief or sheriff and the school superintendent agree on the value of the program and plan it together, programs cannot rely on school superintendents to orient these local school administrators—or even to expect them to have the leverage to motivate principals and assistant principals to collaborate with the program. Nevertheless, few programs in the study adequately oriented school administrators to the program. All the SROs in a large established program agreed that “We needed more orientation for administrators.” At the beginning of every school year in a large new site, local police administrators request an opportunity to address all the principals at a superintendent's districtwide summit to explain the overall goals of the program and to begin discussing how best to use the officers at each school. However, one year the school department denied the request. As a result, the lieutenant who oversees the SRO program reported that individual SROs had to “train” their principals as they worked together over time. While some SROs forged excellent relationships with administrators, others floundered or even dramatically clashed. Some principals called the lieutenant as late as March or April asking, “Just what is your officer supposed to be doing here?”

Orientation for school administrators (even after the program has been in existence for years) can reduce conflict and increase collaboration because ***most principals and assistant principals know little about the goals of the program or about how they can make the best use of the officers in their schools.*** If possible, one or two local school administrators should co-lead the training to give it added credibility. One large established program provides in-service training for school administrators whenever a new SRO joins a school. When a teacher in another site became an assistant principal, he sat down with the SRO for two hours to discuss what he felt were the officer's job responsibilities.

The orientation can focus on a particular issue in addition to the entire SRO program. Time should be devoted especially to *discussing the SROs' legal responsibilities and limitations* with regard to search and seizure and making arrests involving minors in the school setting. Few school administrators are aware of the tremendous discretion police officers have in terms of responding to criminal behavior—or of the circumstances in which officers have no discretion (e.g., when state statute makes an arrest mandatory for violating a civil order of protection). In a large established site, a police captain had to call a meeting with the principal and assistant principals at one junior high school to explain that the SRO has arrest discretion and the right to follow through. The school administrators had been insisting on making their own decisions about how to address criminal matters. The captain distributed a memo identifying when SROs could make an arrest and explaining why, if administrators did not want the SRO to make an arrest, the SRO still had the right to make one anyway once the officer had been brought in on the case. Although this memorandum comes close, no site sought to reduce conflict in these areas by distributing available guidebooks on school-related law before the program began.

School administrators should attend SRO training. Faculty and board members at a large established site were concerned that “uneducated SROs would be running down the corridors ‘kicking butt’.” As a result, the school district paid for—and the school board required—all school administrators to attend at least one 40-hour training offered by NASRO. Within two years, most had already attended.

Train SROs before They Go on the Job

Pre-service training may help SROs to appreciate the differences in organizational procedures and cultures that exist between law enforcement and educational agencies. A sheriff's deputy in a large new site who attended basic NASRO training before beginning his new assignment as an SRO reported that the training improved his understanding significantly of how SROs and administrators were meant to work together. The training helped him learn about the teaching component, communication with administrators, and relationships with the community. Moreover, meeting and talking with officers from

other SRO programs outside of class was as important as the curriculum itself for learning about how to interact with principals and assistant principals.

Because principals set the tone for leadership within their schools, SROs assigned to different campuses can end up working in different environments with different expectations. As a result, programs should orient SROs to the specific schools to which they have been assigned before their first day on the job. In many sites, SROs are placed in the schools with no introduction to their particular schools and principals, and must somehow attempt to integrate themselves with the administration, faculty, and students without any understanding of their cultures, habits, or perspectives.

Address Administrators' Concerns about SROs' Availability

Programs have used a number of approaches to ***address administrators' concerns about SROs' availability***. As the examples below illustrate, some solutions require flexibility on both sides (see the box “Both Sides Need to Be Prepared to Compromise”) because, on the one hand, there will be times when the SRO cannot be available but, on the other hand, there will be times when it is important that the SRO be close at hand.

- In a large established site, an SRO radios the civilian security staff and the assistant principal whenever he is going off campus. He always tries to be in school during lunch. If he is off campus and the assistant principal needs him, she can page him and he comes right back—for example, when a fight broke out just as he was beginning a computer training class.
- A large new site arranges for SROs to get their training in the summer to avoid pulling them out of their schools during the academic year.
- Administrators at a school in a large established site complained that, because the SRO was not staying on campus to teach, they were not sure they wanted to continue the program. The police captain replaced the SRO, assuring the administrators that “if an SRO is supposed to teach a class, he will be there to teach it.” The captain then held a mandatory meeting with all the SROs and told them they had to be in school—and to start checking in and out whenever they left campus, as well as timing in and out with the dispatcher when taking a student to the juvenile detention center.
- In another program, school administrators objected to the police department’s frequently calling out SROs for special assignments, for example, to participate in a fingerprinting exercise at a store or help provide security when the Governor or

a business exposition came to town. As a result, the captain issued an order to pull out the SROs last among all specialized officers for these special events—for example, pulling D.A.R.E. officers out of the schools before calling out the SROs.

- In a large established site, the importance with which the SROs regard their teaching responsibilities is illustrated every time they call for a beat officer to transport a student they have arrested to the juvenile justice center so they do not miss teaching a class they have agreed to conduct. (They go the center later to complete the paperwork.) An SRO who received a call on his pager from his captain during a class was observed returning the call only after class was over.
- A large established site avoided problems of availability by including language in a department general order that “this officer is considered an employee of the . . . [town] on special assignment to the school district, and the officer may not be used for other purposes by the police department except by mutual agreement between the principal of the assigned school and the Chief of Police. . . .”

Both Sides Need to Be Prepared to Compromise

A principal who relied on his SRO to keep the peace at athletic events wanted the other officers on duty to take orders from the SRO—regardless of rank—because the SRO knew the students personally and knew how to handle them. The principal met with the SRO supervisor in the sheriff’s department and got verbal agreement that, regardless of rank, the SRO would be in charge. This rankled a few ranking officers, but the SRO supervisor “took care of” their concerns.

In another large established site, school administrators objected to SROs taking vacation while classes were in session. While the police department observed that the SRO would need to be exempted from the collective bargaining agreement’s policy of letting regular officers pick their vacation times based on seniority, it eventually relented.

A principal in a large new site said he felt frustrated with his SRO’s early absences when the sheriff’s department needed her to testify or complete outstanding cases. The principal met with the SRO’s supervisors to discuss the problem but became convinced that he had no choice other than to accept that “county business comes first.”

The proposal to the COPS Office in a large new program called for all five SROs to serve their schools districts full time during the nine-month academic year but to remain available for other assignments by the sheriff’s office during school breaks. However, school administrators from two of the five school districts requested that their SROs work with them for the balance of the year to help with summer school, camps, and other vacation programs. The sheriff agreed to this change.

Accept—and Work with—the Likelihood of Some Initial Conflict

Realistically, even with close early collaboration and communication, there may still initially be conflict between law enforcement agencies and schools given their divergent cultures and the sensitive nature of sharing responsibility for a police officer on campus.

- Even with the significant efforts made by police in one large new site to include school representatives in the planning and screening phases of the program’s start-up, the officers all recounted feeling uncomfortable and alarmed by the inactivity and uncertainty of their early days. One SRO estimated that it took about six months for him to settle into the SRO role and for school staff to begin to trust him.
- Even though the sheriff’s office in another large new site made significant efforts to include school administrators in the grant application and SRO screening process, all five SROs recall the actual start-up of the program as a difficult and stressful experience. Four of the five started in their districts after the academic year had begun. This meant that students, teachers, and principals in their schools had already developed schedules and routines, making the SROs’ integration into the school even more awkward.
- Despite several efforts by ranking police officers in a large established site to explain the program to school administrators, the principals and assistant principals “still wanted to do things the old way—the school department way [of sweeping embarrassing incidents under the rug].”

Sometimes *school administrators need time to see that what they feared about the program is not going to happen and that SROs do have things to offer*. For example, administrators may not lose their concern about anticipated and real negative reactions from parents to having a police officer in the school until, with the passage of time, parents begin to report that they are *not* upset about the SROs’ presence and in fact *like* having a uniformed officer in the school—and a marked cruiser visible on campus. An administrator in a large new site reported that community acceptance grew as students began telling their parents, “Officer ----- teaches us and helps us.” All of this takes time. An eight-year veteran SRO reported, “It took me three years to get this school to work smoothly.”

In some instances the law enforcement agency has to take a hard line about what the SROs must do or cannot do. School administrators, if they accept an SRO onto their

campuses, must accept that there may be instances in which they may not control the officers' actions.

- In a large new site, the sheriff made it known that he was considering filing obstruction of justice charges against principal who withheld information about an alleged rape. The principal gave in.
- In a large established site, the police program supervisor radioed an SRO who was in the process of confronting a principal who would not let him arrest a student, “If the principal gets in the way of making an arrest, tell him you’ll arrest *him* for obstruction of justice—and do it.” The principal relented.

Similarly, there may be times when school administrators need to take a firm stance about what SROs cannot do—for example, provide certain types of “counseling” to students (see chapter 6).

While early and ongoing collaboration and communication may not prevent every problem between SROs and school administrators, these approaches are likely to prevent many difficulties from blossoming into brouhahas that delay or endanger the program’s effectiveness.

Gaining Support from Teachers

Gaining the support of teachers is essential for SROs to get invited to teach their classes.

Teaching, in turn, can be a critical SRO responsibility.

- Teaching classes offers SROs the opportunity to impart important information about criminal behavior and the criminal justice system that may discourage some students from committing offenses like fighting, shoplifting, vandalism, and bullying.
- Teaching enables SROs to improve students’ image of police officers.
- Teaching offers a golden “marketing” opportunity for *motivating students to seek out the SROs outside of class* when students are having problems they feel the officers can help with—or when they want to report misconduct by other students.

Teacher Concerns about the Program

Some teachers feel the SRO shifts the atmosphere and mission in the schools from one of education to one of fear and safety. When an SRO first came to her school, one teacher stated, “I found it hard to have him in my class with the gun because I want my room to

be a place for nurturing and sharing. An armed officer brings a different atmosphere.” In a small established site, the most daunting implementation issue was teachers’ refusal to allow SROs into the classroom because they did not understand the role SROs perform in the schools. Some teachers at a large new site worried that the SRO would interfere with their “time-tested” ways of dealing with discipline problems.

Ways of Gaining Teacher Support

Programs have gained teacher support in a variety of ways.

- ***Orient teachers to the program before it begins***—or as soon as possible thereafter. Arranging for local school administrators to join the SRO in gaining support from faculty can be especially helpful.
 - In a large new site, the principal and SRO dispelled many teacher concerns by attending staff meetings together to clarify that the officer’s roles in the school included being an educator and mentor as well as police officer.
 - In another large new site, school administrators early on asked teachers at faculty meetings to brainstorm about presentations the SRO might offer to students and teachers.
 - An assistant principal in a large established site arranged for the SRO to explain to faculty that, with their permission, he might occasionally walk into classes. Ever since, the SRO pokes his head in classroom doors if the door is open. Sometimes the teacher invites him in. While many teachers might find the interruption annoying, when the SRO was walking by a disruptive classroom being taught by a new teacher, he went in and calmed down the class. Later, the teacher told the assistant principal how much she appreciated the SRO’s help.
- ***Explain how SROs can benefit teachers.***
 - Most social studies, citizenship, and history teachers are attracted to teaching about law-related issues—especially, controversial ones—that most students enjoy learning about and that most SROs are prepared to teach. Driver education instructors like having the SRO explain driving while impaired laws to students. Physical education and health education teachers call on SROs to explain the effects of illicit drugs on the body and mind.
 - SROs can improve learning in other subject area classes by making the subject matter fascinating to students in a way that teachers often cannot.

In algebra classes, one SRO takes the class outside to look at “skid marks” that he draws with chalk and then has them calculate the speed of the cars by the length of the skid marks on grass and pavement. He teaches about dating violence in family and consumer science classes. In English classes, he explains the importance of a well-written police report—and gives tips on how to write one.

- Many teachers and students report they have a pervasive low-level fear that a “Columbine-like” incident could happen in any school. While most feel it is unlikely to happen in *their* schools, many report that having an SRO on campus can significantly reduce these fears. Program staff can remind teachers that students who are fearful may have difficulty learning. To the extent that an armed officer on campus reduces student fears, he or she may also improve student learning.
- The presence of a police officer or deputy sheriff can free teachers who are concerned about serious discipline problems from worrying about and taking the time to handle students who might become aggressive, because faculty know they can call on the SRO for help in these challenging situations.
- Most of the teachers in one small established program reported that they get a better response from students who have engaged in serious misconduct by sending them to the SROs than by sending them to the office.
- ***Go beyond the normal SRO responsibilities to help teachers.***
 - One teacher reported, “The SRO is a computer whiz. He helped me with some computer programming using photos with a digital camera.”
 - Teachers in several sites ask SROs personal legal questions, such as what to do with a child on drugs. One teacher approached an SRO for help with a daughter whose husband was battering her.
 - Several SROs deal with property crimes against school staff—for example, when a cafeteria worker’s car window was smashed during a drive-by, the employee went to the SRO, not the 911 system, for help.

Even with early planning, it can take months of persistently but patiently explaining the SROs’ role before officers get an invitation to teach. In one high school, teachers did not feel comfortable allowing the SRO into the classroom until halfway through the school year. However, the wait is worth it—many SROs report they get the most satisfaction from the position when they teach a class to eager students.

SROs must learn to work harmoniously not only with school administrators and teachers but also figure out how to interact with students and their parents—the focus of the following chapter.

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Chapter 7: Working with Students and Their Parents

Chapter Summary

Program coordinators, SROs, and school administrators all recognize the difficulty SROs experience trying to maintain authority as enforcers of the law while at the same time preserving a helping relationship with students as teachers and mentors. Walking this fine line plays itself out in two particular areas: counseling, and supportive interpersonal relationships with students.

Counseling

Especially when there is a poor or no relationship between the school guidance counselor and a student, the SRO often fills the gap. Indeed, some administrators and many students report that students lie less to SROs, whom they come to know and trust, than to school counselors.

However, in addition to the serious risk of giving poor advice, SROs are exposed to the criticism—and even civil liability—of practicing psychological counseling without a license when they help students with personal problems unrelated to the law. Some administrators and guidance counselors expressed concern about SROs getting involved in students' personal problems. However, the vast majority said they trusted the SROs' judgment to not overstep their bounds. ***The key is for SROs to know when to refer a student for professional help with a personal problem and perhaps involve the parents.***

Interpersonal Relationships with Students

Most familiarity between SROs and students is harmless, such as students using informal names to refer to the officers (e.g., “Officer Nancy” or “J.D.”) and SROs passing out free soda to students. However, in a few sites SROs and some students hug each other, opening the possibility for students to misconstrue the officers' intentions. There have been SROs who lost their positions because they flirted with students.

Programs have taken several steps to help SROs balance being supportive yet remain an authority figure.

- Establish specific guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
- Arrange to provide formal training for SROs on the topic.
- Instruct SROs to act defensively—for example, some male SROs never close their office doors when talking with a female student.

Working with Parents

Vocal parents can damage a program by complaining about it to the chief law enforcement executive or school board. Conversely, ***strong support from parents can provide important benefits.***

- Many parents who appreciate the program encourage their children to seek out the SRO for help—in effect, these parents are performing “outreach” for the SROs.
- In three different sites, support from parents and other members of the local community led city officials to reverse their plans to drop their SRO programs.

Some parents become concerned that an SRO’s presence in the schools suggests there must be a serious danger to their children. Occasionally, parents object to their child having been arrested. ***Programs that used PTAs, other community meetings, newsletters, letters, and newspaper articles to inform parents about the program before and as it began reported few or no such objections from parents.***

A basic dilemma for SROs is combining the role of enforcer of the law and resource to and supporter of students in need.

Walking the Fine Line

Program coordinators, SROs, and school administrators all recognize the difficulty SROs experience in trying to maintain authority as enforcers of the law along with maintaining a helping relationship with students as teachers and mentors.

- An assistant principal said, “SROs have to walk a fine line which can become a thick wall: being kids’ friend but enforcing the law.”
- Another assistant principal reported that “A few students become attached to the SRO and show up too often in his office, so I run them out and send them back to class. But the SRO is glad I do it: he walks a tightrope—he wants to maintain rapport with kids to get information, but he also needs to be firm with them—even arrest them.”
- A program supervisor confirmed that “The hardest thing for them [SROs] is that they have to be friends with everyone but never know if they will have to arrest them [students]—so SROs need to be friendly but not friends.”
- An SRO in a large new site who devoted most of his time to teaching and mentoring reported that at times he has felt genuinely “conflicted” when he has had to take punitive action against students. For example, when he learned about a New Year’s Eve party one year, he became heavily involved in the investigation that led to numerous charges filed against students for unlawful sexual activity and underage drinking. The SRO felt “embroiled” in these matters and had difficulty separating his emotions as a police officer and mentor.

The challenge of balancing the law enforcement role with the mentor role is exacerbated by the lack of contact many SROs have with other SROs and with patrol officers.

Historically, police have always had to balance how much discretion to exercise in any given encounter with the public, but officers usually look to peers for where the boundaries are on their behavior, for example, through gossip of what happened to police officers who stepped over the line. But, *because SROs are largely isolated from their peers—sometimes for days on end—they are left on their own when it comes to determining how to act.* Furthermore, SROs have taken on new roles and responsibilities for which beat officers—and even the SROs’ supervisors—may be able to offer little guidance.

Some SROs go out of their way to avoid casting themselves in a negative light to students (sometimes assisted by school administrators—see the box “Some School Administrators Help SROs Maintain their Mentoring Role”). “Because my position as an SRO requires me to build confidence and trust with students,” one SRO said, “I have tried to stay out of enforcement or suppression activities.” As a result, this SRO has chosen in certain instances to make school administrators aware of situations he has heard about from students rather than trigger a police investigation. Principals can then resolve the matter using the school disciplinary process. Another SRO reported that “I often find myself in a balancing routine of my own, weighing possible risks to school safety and security against potential risks to my reputation and rapport among students.”

On two separate occasions, SROs who had to arrest or verbally chastise students were observed making an attempt to maintain good rapport with the youngsters by affectionate but appropriate physical contact.

- After sending a student to be tested for drugs, an SRO swatted him with a rolled-up newspaper and squeezed his shoulder. Later, the SRO explained, “I don’t come down too hard on the kids so they will come to me later on [with their problems].”
- After sternly chastising an elementary school student privately in the corridor who had asked during class to see the SRO’s gun, the officer sent him back into class with a gentle tap on his shoulder.

Walking the fine line plays itself out in two in particular areas: counseling, and supportive interpersonal relationships between SROs and individual students.

Some School Administrators Help SROs Maintain their Mentoring Role

Two school administrators use a variation of the “good cop, bad cop” routine, in which the principal or assistant principal plays the “bad cop” meting out the punishment in order to protect the SRO’s role as the student’s confidant and mentor.

- According to an assistant principal, “We can play the good guy/bad cop routine, with me being the bad guy. The SRO calms the situation and the kids before I take over.”
- Another principal said that “He [the SRO] can play the good guy and I the bad guy. I’m very authoritarian—not a negotiator, ex-army. But the SRO has become friends with many kids—he jogs with the cross-country team and repaints the parking lot stripes with kids on his own time. I don’t want to jeopardize that relationship.”

Some administrators go even further in helping to shield the SROs from having to be too tough on students.

- In the rare cases when a student needs to be arrested, a district school superintendent instructs the SRO or principal to call a different law enforcement officer to make the arrest rather than have the SRO arrest the youth.
- When incidents rise to the level of criminal misconduct in a large new site, the SROs and school administrators follow an unwritten policy of having the SROs file only preliminary reports, turning over any further investigative duties to the department’s juvenile detectives. This “division of labor,” all parties say, helps the SROs maintain their positive rapport with students that they feel is necessary in order for the officers to remain effective teachers and mentors.

Counseling

Because SROs are trained to be problem solvers, they naturally fall into the practice of giving advice. Especially when there is a poor—or no—relationship between the school guidance counselor and a student, the SRO often fills the gap. Indeed, a number of SROs and school administrators agree that many students often lie less to SROs, whom they come to know and trust, than to school counselors or administrators. A student in a large established site reported, “Officer----- is totally trustworthy. We can go in at lunch and talk about anything. We don’t go to [a] counselor as often because they may call your parents.” SROs in a number of sites have been taken aback by the personal nature

of problems that students share with them. In one case, a student said that she would speak *only* with the SRO about the fact she was pregnant.

However, in addition to the serious risk of giving poor advice, SROs are exposed to the criticism—and even civil liability—of practicing psychological counseling without a license.

- In a large established site, an SRO got into trouble for talking with a girl about her sexual relationship with her boyfriend after a friend of the girl’s mother complained to the sheriff, who then called the SRO and the program supervisor into his office for an explanation.
- A principal in a large new site expressed concern about the amount of time the SRO spent counseling students rather than referring them. The principal became alarmed because the SRO was not a certified mental health care provider. Three students had revealed to the SRO their plans to attempt suicide.

As these vignettes suggest, while SROs may receive training on “law-related” counseling (e.g., explaining the legal consequences of a student’s behavior), many SROs attempt to help students with personal problems unrelated to the law.

SROs who get involved with students’ personal problems justify their involvement on a variety of grounds.

- Some SROs point out that if *they* do not at least listen empathically to these students, the alternative is not for the students to decide to talk with a counselor or administrator or even teacher—what they will do is *not tell anyone*. The SROs argue that at least *someone* learns about the problem before it is too late.
- One SRO reported that many counselors are too busy to counsel because “they are drowning in paperwork.”
- SROs and school administrators observe that the officers have more contact with students because SROs are constantly up and around, while school counselors are largely confined to their offices.

Although some administrators and guidance counselors expressed concern about SROs getting involved in students’ personal problems, the vast majority said they had a high level of trust in the SROs’ judgment not to overstep their bounds. Some administrators

said that they approved of the students' preference to share problems with SROs, adding that this trust in the SROs was beneficial to students and the school.

The key, of course, as several SROs and school administrators suggested, is *knowing when to refer the student for professional help with a personal problem and perhaps to involve the parents*. Some SROs seem to be able to know when and how to do this. For example, the SRO in a large established program brought a female student who was not getting along with her mother to the assistant principal because "I didn't know how far it would go in terms of getting into female problems." When a student gave him a suicide note from another student, he searched and found the girl in a bathroom. He then arranged for her parents come over immediately to take her to a mental health center. When a student will not seek needed professional help, one SRO shares the problem with the school counselor, who then tells the SRO what to tell the student.

Supportive Interpersonal Relationships with Students

There were many examples among the 19 sites of familiarity between SROs and students designed to develop or maintain rapport. In some cases, the familiarity at worst does no harm and at best results in students perceiving the SRO as a valuable and trustworthy source of support. For example, students in some schools—and faculty and administrators, as well—use informal names to refer to the SROs, such as their initials (e.g., "D.D.," "P.A.") or their first name preceded by "Officer," as in "Officer Nancy."

Several SROs keep small refrigerators stocked with soda that they pass out to students (and sometimes to parents), as well as pretzels and other "goodies." Local businesses give coupons to all the SROs in one large established jurisdiction to distribute to students for free products and services. One SRO alone gets 500 coupons each year. Some SROs give students money.

- In one large established site, students sometimes ask the SRO for small amounts of money, which he occasionally provides—"but," he says, "I always get it back."
- An SRO in another site lends some students small amounts of change, when they ask. In his case, however, "Some return it, others don't."

- The same SRO gives a few selected students significant amounts of money that he collects selling pizzas at the school during lunch. For example, he gave money to a student who had been invited to the National Junior Olympics because the boy could not afford to go. “Parents thank me for doing this kind of thing.”
- In another site, the SRO gives students his business card with 40 cents or a \$1.00 written on the back, which the students hand to the cashier at lunchtime. The SRO goes to the cafeteria every week to pay the total amount on the cards.

In a few sites SROs and students hug each other.

- In one large established site, the SRO hugs students several times a day—but so do some faculty and administrators. It is part of the school culture.
- Another SRO instituted a “hug-a-day program” for students he felt needed that kind of support. He told one student, “I’m putting you in my ‘hug-a-day’ program—I’m going to see you every day for a hug and, if I don’t see you, I’m going to find you.” Now that she is a junior in high school, whenever the SRO happens to run into her there, they still hug.
- A female SRO practices what she calls “assertive caring and support—make the kid [e.g., a bully] feel responsible for his or her behavior and then give the child a hug the next day.” When she visits the elementary schools, several children gleefully rush up to her in the corridors to hug her.

In no instance did the hugs that were observed appear to be unwanted behavior on the part of the students—indeed, in many cases it is the students who initiate them.

However, the potential for students to misunderstand the behavior exists. In addition, some SROs—like some teachers and school administrators—may have mixed motives in engaging in physical contact.

- According to a former school board member, “We made some bad choices for SROs at the beginning—one was tapping girls on the rear end to be their buddy—SROs can’t be a playmate; friendly, yes.”
- In two sites, SROs lost their positions because of allegations that they were flirting with female students.

Finding the Right Balance

To some extent, the limits on the extent and nature of SROs’ interpersonal relationships with students depend on such considerations as the school culture (e.g., the constant hugging with students by faculty and administrators in one school), the SROs’ motives

(which, however, can be easily misconstrued), the manner in which familiarity is expressed (e.g., allowing students to call the SRO by his or her first name or initials versus touching a female student's fanny), and the SROs' willingness to take risks (as long as no one but the SRO is in harm's way). In this latter connection, an assistant principal expressed concern about an SRO's exposing himself to criticism or charges of molestation after the officer drove a female student home alone. But the SRO feels, "If it's the right thing to do, do it. I need to take risks for these kids. I'm always taking kids home, but only if I have a personal relationship with them and I feel comfortable doing it."

One obvious solution to becoming inappropriately friendly with students is to avoid all physical contact and all discussions that could remotely be perceived as suggestive or extending beyond the SRO's realm of expertise. Most SROs in this study were more flexible because they know when things might be getting out of hand. For example, when a few students over the years have hinted to one long-term SRO that they would like to see him off campus, he has told them in no uncertain terms, "You have a bad idea," in order to confront the issue right away and "shut it down." Two different SROs were observed immediately "shutting down" students' efforts to talk about the officers' sidearms:

- A boy in an elementary school class the SRO was teaching asked to see her gun. The SRO immediately requested the teacher's permission to pull him into the corridor, where she lectured him grimly on not talking about her gun—"It offends me."
- A student in a middle school asked an SRO during class if he had ever used his gun. The SRO answered, "I don't like guns—and you can be expelled for a year if you get caught in school with a gun. The only thing I ever used it for was to break a window—and I hope that's all I ever do with it." End of discussion.

Programs have taken several steps to help SROs walk the fine line between being supportive yet remaining an authority figure.

- ***Establish specific guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behavior.*** For example, in a large established site the SRO procedures manual says a department Parental Permission/Waiver of Liability should be used whenever students are transported by officers in non-arrest or non-urgent situations.

- **Arrange to provide formal training for SROs on the topic.** Some SROs in a large new site pointed out the need for training in how to manage conflicts that sometimes develop between their role as student advocate and their role as law enforcer. The training should include a discussion of developmental issues among children and youth, especially in terms of *how youngsters can become confused about the meaning of adults' signs of affection* or be afraid of expressing objections to these displays.
- **Instruct SROs to act defensively.** A principal felt uneasy about a male SRO counseling female students with his office door closed. “Just because you have a gun and a badge doesn’t mean that you don’t have to cover yourself just like we do,” she observed. Another SRO always makes it a point to keep his office door open when he has a girl inside talking with him.

Working with Parents

While it is very important that parents not oppose the program, active parental support can benefit the program in several respects.

Why Working with Parents Is Important

Vocal parents can complain about the program to the chief law enforcement executive. Sheriffs, in particular, as elected officials, may be understandably reluctant to antagonize a significant constituency. Parents can also complain to the school board and to elected or appointed city officials. Parents in one large established site went to court to challenge the zero tolerance policy for fighting in the schools that SROs were enforcing by arresting all parties involved in a fight. Such complaints and lawsuits can cripple a program; at a minimum, they require program participants to divert valuable time and energy to “putting out the fires” that they could be spending on teaching and mentoring.

Conversely, ***strong support from parents can provide several benefits.***

- Many parents who appreciate the program encourage their children to seek out the SRO for help; some parents themselves contact the SRO for guidance in dealing with their own children. In effect, these parents serve an “outreach” function for the SRO by referring—or becoming—“clients.”
- When parents support the program, they are less likely to object when the SRO punishes *their* children.

- Support from parents and other community groups can save rescue a program that town officials plan on reducing or dismantling. In three different sites, city officials reversed their plans to drop their SRO programs because of widespread objections from parents and other members of the community.

Concerns Some Parents Have about the Program

When SRO programs first begin, some parents initially question the need for an officer in the school and wonder whether an SRO's presence suggests a serious danger they were not aware of or do not believe exists. Both initially and later on, some parents object to their child having been arrested—or because another student was *not* arrested. In a large established site, parents call the program supervisor three or four times a month, usually to ask that the SRO arrest a student who is allegedly bothering their children.

Addressing Parental Concerns

Many programs experienced opposition from parents in part because program coordinators and school administrators failed to orient them to the program before—or even after—it began.

- According to a school principal in a large established site, “Parents’ misperception of the SROs’ role was a major problem—cops on campus was unheard of. We needed to prepare parents on what the SRO does.”
- Program staff at a large new site reported they had made no effort to introduce the program to the community. Once on the job, however, the SROs realized the need to explain their goals and functions to parents. They gained permission to speak at various PTA meetings and at parent-teacher night.

Programs that took steps to inform parents about the program before and as it began reported few or no objections from parents.

- In a large new site, a principal reported that parents have never complained about the SRO program in general, or about his district’s assigned officer in particular.
 - The superintendent of schools had notified parents of the school district’s participation in the program ahead of time and explained his decision.
 - Each school sent letters to parents explaining the program.
 - Program organizers arranged for the high school newspaper and a districtwide newsletter to print favorable and comprehensive stories about the program.

- A school district in a large new site announced plans for the SRO program in a newsletter to area residents, held meetings with community groups, and had the SRO attend school functions and community events on a regular basis.
- A high school principal in a large new site called a parent meeting as the program was getting under way in order to introduce the SRO and explain the purpose of having an officer stationed among their children. The SRO outlined his communication-building and role-modeling responsibilities, which allowed parents to see him in positive terms as a proactive presence rather than as a response to “a problem at our high school.” The principal asked parents who attended to “spread the word” to others in the community, which he believes they did.

Even before the program began in one small established site, parents strongly objected to officers carrying guns on campus. The planning process was careful to address this concern. For example, in the beginning the officer drove his own car and did not wear a uniform or carry a gun. Most people in the community did not realize there was an officer working at the school for the first two years of the program’s existence.

Programs should implement several of these approaches to building support among parents because any one strategy is unlikely to reach all—or even most—parents. For example, because local parent organizations are few or nonexistent in some rural areas and small towns, meeting with PTAs is not a solution there.

Regardless of how effectively SROs appear to be working with administrators, teachers, students, and parents, for several reasons it is important to evaluate just how successful the program is—the focus of the following chapter.

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Chapter 8: Evaluating the Program

Chapter Summary

Despite the importance of evaluation, very few of the 19 programs included in the study conducted useful and valid assessments of their programs. However, ***program evaluation is essential*** for two reasons:

- to learn whether and how the program needs improvement and
- to provide evidence to funding sources of the importance of continuing the program (assuming the evaluation is positive).

To be most effective, evaluation needs to be a significant focus of the design and planning of the program so that baseline data can be collected with which to compare future data after the program has been running. However, evaluations conducted after the fact can also be useful.

The first step in any evaluation is to review the program's objectives and then ***decide what questions to ask about each objective***. For example, if a program's objectives include reducing truancy and improving kids' image of the police, the evaluation can ask:

- By how much have truancy rates changed since the program began?
- How have students' opinions of the police changed since the program began?

The second step is to ***identify the information to collect*** that will answer the questions (e.g., truancy rates for the past seven years; student responses to opinion surveys). The third step is to ***determine how to collect the information*** (e.g., school district records; focus groups with students).

The law enforcement agency and school system should collaborate on the assessment.

Several programs have involved their schools in evaluating program effectiveness, typically by interviewing or obtaining written assessments from principals and assistant principals. One school district conducts annual focus groups at each grade level at each of the five junior high schools that have an SRO asking about:

- student trust in the SRO and police in general,
- student perceptions of whether the SROs have reduced crime, and
- problems (e.g., bullying) that are still going on that the SROs need to address.

Program supervisors distribute the findings to the school board to bolster their case for continued funding and to each school to identify problem areas that need addressing.

Administrators of any program are often understandably reluctant to evaluate their efforts because they lack time or expertise, or have concerns about violating confidentiality.

They may also be apprehensive that the evaluation results will not show that they are doing a good job. However, ***program evaluation is essential:***

1. Without a formal assessment, it is very difficult to know ***whether the program needs improvement*** and, if so, what specific changes are needed.
2. Agency heads need the results of evaluations ***to provide evidence to funding sources of the need to continue the program***—and program staff need the results to convince their agency heads to continue to request funding for the program.

Despite the importance of evaluation, only one program included in this study conducted a useful and valid assessment of its programs.

Basics of Program Evaluation

To be most effective, ***evaluation needs to be a significant focus of the design and planning of the program.*** Without collecting baseline measures (e.g., assessing students' current level of fear), it is difficult to determine with certainty whether the program has achieved certain desired goals. In addition, program evaluation done as an afterthought typically is given short shrift and rushed because staff have decided to conduct an assessment quickly in response to a sudden outside demand—for example, from the agency head or a funding source—for evidence that the program is working.

The law enforcement agency and school system need to collaborate on the assessment.

- Typically, the law enforcement agency conducts a broad but formal evaluation of the SROs—for example, are they following department rules?
- School administrators evaluate the SROs informally but based on their day-to-day work in the school—for example, does the SRO act appropriately in breaking up a fight? Set a good example for purposes of mentoring? Arrive on time?

Examples of Program Evaluation

Evaluations should be designed to determine whether the program's goals were achieved. Therefore, the first step in any evaluation is to review the program's goals and then ***decide what questions to ask about each goal.*** For example, if a program's goals include reducing truancy and improving kids' image of the police, the evaluation can ask:

- By how much have truancy rates changed since the program began?
- How have students' opinions of the police changed since the program began?

The second step is to *identify the information to collect* that will answer the questions (e.g., truancy rates for the past seven years; student opinions of the SRO). The third step is to *determine how to collect the information* (e.g., school records; focus groups).

The National Assessment’s mail survey of 322 programs found that there is little consistency among programs in terms of the data they collect. This proved to be true among the 19 programs studied for this report. This inconsistency in part may reflect differences in the programs’ goals, but even programs with similar goals collected different data. The box “Sample SRO Program Evaluation Data that Programs Can Consider Collecting” lists the types of information an SRO program can think about collecting depending on the program’s goals (and, of course, availability of the data).

Sample SRO Program Evaluation Data that Programs Can Consider Collecting

Qualitative Data

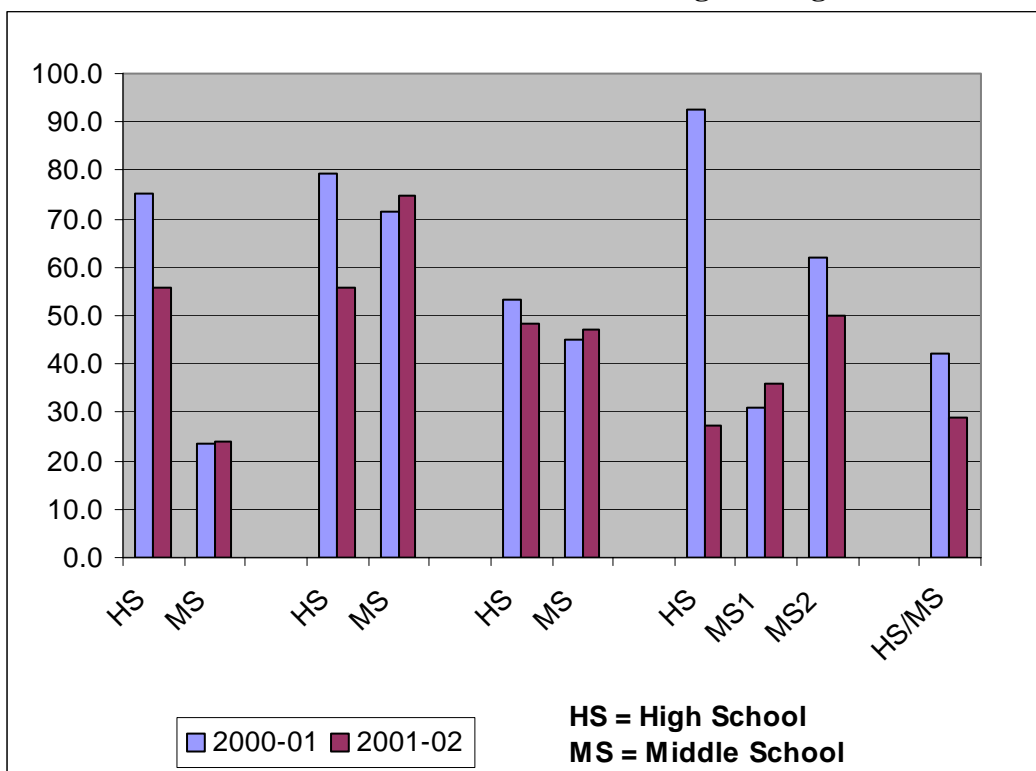
Meeting agendas, notes
Memorandums of Agreement/contracts
Training or technical assistance provided to SROs
SRO activity logs or reports of activities

Quantitative Data

Number of students SRO advised
Number of students SRO taught
Police calls for service
Arrests and citations
Weapons and drugs seized
Number and types of safety or disorder problems solved
Crime incidents in school by type of incident (e.g., fights, bullying)
Crime incidents in vicinity of school
Noncriminal disorder incidents in school
Noncriminal disorder incidents in vicinity of school
Victimization in school and in vicinity of school
Truancy
Suspensions (in-school and out-of-school) and expulsions
Student tardiness
Student levels of fear
Student satisfaction with the SRO

Research conducted for this cross-site report illustrates four examples of the types of data that can be collected that can help assess whether a program’s goals were achieved. For example, if reducing *student misbehavior* is a program goal, the program can compare the number of disciplinary actions by school by year, starting with a few years before the SRO program began. The bar chart below shows that disciplinary actions in one large new site declined in 6 of 10 schools after the SRO program began.

Disciplinary Actions per 100 Students at 10 Middle and Senior High Schools before and after the SRO Program Began



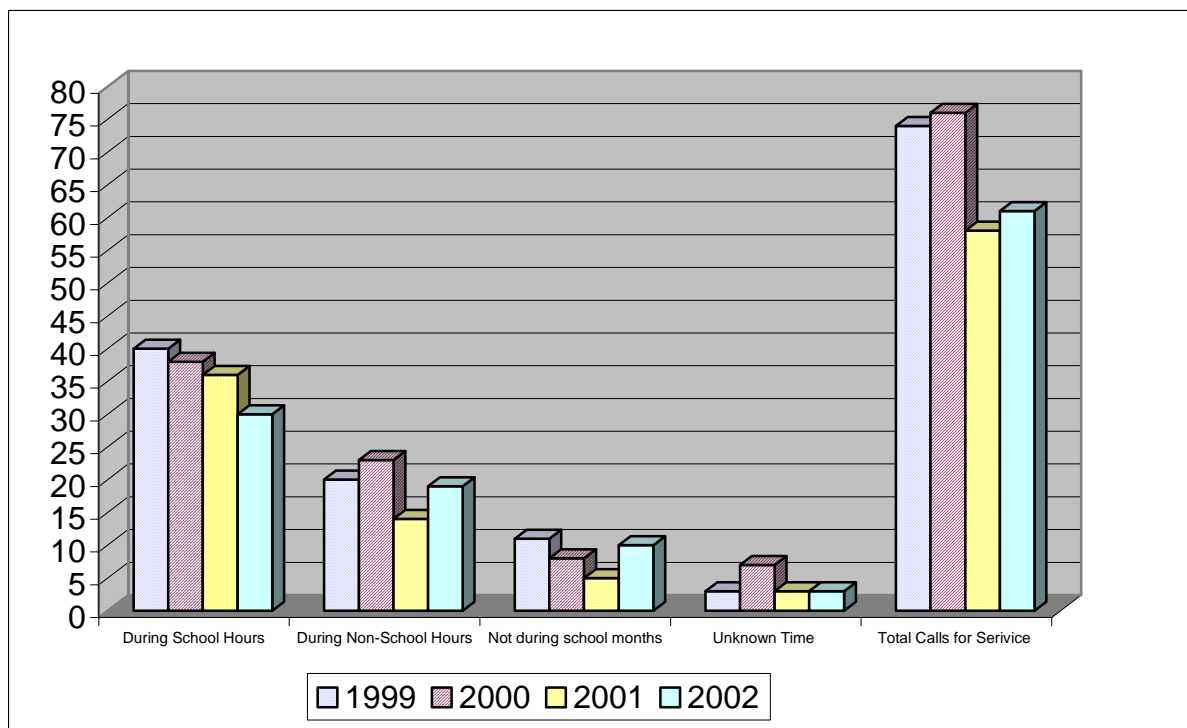
If a program goal is to *reduce truancy*, supervisors can compare graduation rates before and after the program began. The table below shows the graduation rates before and after program implementation at a large new site.

Graduation Rates for Five School Districts before and after Implementation

| Year | School District | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------|
| | #1 | #2 | #3 | #4 | #5 | |
| Pre-SRO | 1996 | 70.4 | 74.8 | 74.2 | 74.1 | 82.8 |
| | 1997 | 86.0 | 85.4 | 83.5 | 82.6 | 81.4 |
| | 1998 | 90.3 | 88.5 | 88.7 | 76.2 | 87.2 |
| | 1999 | 81.8 | 81.4 | 87.9 | 88.5 | 86.4 |
| 4 year average | 82.1 | 82.5 | 83.6 | 80.4 | 84.5 | |
| Post-SRO | 2000 | 90.6 | 78.5 | 85.8 | 90 | 90.1 |
| | 2001 | 92.0 | 87.5 | 91.1 | 87.3 | 86.7 |
| | 2002 | 90.5 | 91.6 | 94.5 | 89 | 92.7 |
| | 2003 | 92.0 | 90.8 | 96.6 | 89.1 | 94.5 |
| 4 year average | 91.3 | 87.1 | 92 | 88.9 | 91 | |

Several SRO programs were developed in part *to reduce the burden on beat officers who have to respond to repeated calls at the schools*. Programs can assess whether they have freed up these officers to perform other vital patrol functions by examining the number of calls for service at each school before and after program implementation. The figure below shows how calls for service from one school district’s high school and its surrounding areas declined steadily after the program began in 2000.

Trends in Calls for Service within a Six-Block Radius of the High School



Finally, as partial evidence of program effectiveness a police chief kept records showing that the number of *incidents involving firearms* at one school had declined from 18 to 1 over the program's three-year life to date.

Of course, programs may have to limit the data they collect in light of feasibility, need to preserve confidentiality, time, and cost. In addition, some data may be readily available but not useful. For example, because two schools in a small new site did not need SROs for purposes of preventing crime since they already had such low rates of disorder, the programs' success could not be measured in terms of reductions in crime—the level was already extremely low. An alternative in such a community might be to measure the reduction of student and parent concern about school security and safety. The program could also measure program effectiveness in terms of teacher, student, and administrator satisfaction with the program.

Programs need to interpret their data carefully.

- The data may initially show increases in the number of incidents as SROs detect and report misbehavior that previously went unnoticed or unreported. For example, in one small new site reported incidents rose significantly with the introduction of the SROs. However, both the police and the schools interpreted the increase as the result of the additional surveillance provided by the SROs—evidence that the program was in fact working.
- There are frequently other events taking place around the time the SRO program is begun or after it has become established that could also account for any positive evaluation findings that are identified. For example, student smoking in a school in a small new site almost completely ceased due in part to the SRO but probably more importantly due to security cameras installed outside restrooms and smoke detectors installed inside. Other events that could be responsible for part or all of any positive evaluation results range from a new and stricter principal to the introduction of student uniforms.
- In assessing changes in student and parent perceptions of danger in the schools, programs need to distinguish between student and parent fear of *crime*, on the one hand, and concern about *security and safety*, on the other hand. Programs should also distinguish between student and parent fear of “*normal*” *crime* (e.g., vandalism, fighting, theft) versus their fear of *exceptional events* along the lines of the Columbine tragedy.

- As with all program evaluations, simple comparisons of aggregated data may not reveal or may even mask program effects. Issues such as timing of the program, levels of student involvement, and unanticipated outcomes may influence overall program effects.

Involving the Schools in the Evaluation

Several programs have found that *it is valuable to involve the schools in evaluating the program's effectiveness*, typically by interviewing principals and assistant principals or by asking them to provide written comments on the SROs' performance. A summary of some performance reviews from one site illustrates the types of information a program can obtain when it involves school administrators in the evaluation.

- One high school principal reported that “the program works better than I thought it would, and it works *differently* than how I thought it would work.” While he originally conceived of the program in terms of providing increased security and a sense of safety at the school, he now understands the proactive role the SRO plays, as well. He had not anticipated the level of trust that the SRO would foster among the students. He sees now that, because the deputy has formed positive relationships with many students, the kids get to know him “as more than just a cop.” This particular principal also appreciated the close relationship that the SRO has with many of the high school's teachers and staff. He believes that they have confidence in his judgment and handling of sensitive matters. The administrator summarizes that the SRO is “a member of our team.”
- A high school assistant principal reported that the SRO has helped him and other staff members respond to potentially dangerous situations as they arise. He specifically mentioned a bomb scare and an incident in which a student brought a knife to campus and threatened suicide. In the latter incident, the SRO's crisis intervention skills helped diffuse the danger until the school secured professional psychiatric care for the child.
- Another high school principal observed that students had begun to see police officers in a more positive light because of the SRO's regular presence in their lives. The principal feels that young people have begun to accept the SRO as more than “just another institutional employee”; the SRO acts as an intermediary with delinquent students, helping them to think through their decisions and accept responsibility for their actions
- A school superintendent said she had observed a behavior change in students because of the SRO's presence. Although police and incident reports may have increased in her schools during the program's early history due to greater responsiveness and awareness on the part of the SRO, she noted that truancy had become less of a problem for administrators. She suggested that students were

more likely to come to school on their own now because they knew that truancy violations were enforced.

- The principal in a large new site reported that the SRO's arrest powers had dramatically affected student behavior for the better. He is certain that there have been fewer fights at his school.

One must, of course, be cautious in evaluating “testimonials” from individuals who have a stake in the program. Some school administrators (as well as law enforcement participants), because they believe in and support the program, may report more benefits than problems. However, programs can obtain more objective information. For example, one school district in a large established site has conducted annual focus groups at each grade level at each of the five junior high schools that participate in the program. The groups include a random sample of 10 seventh graders, a random sample of 10 eighth graders, and a group selected by the principal, assistant principal, and SRO of about 10 combined seventh and eighth graders who have dealt with the SRO personally. School guidance counselors moderate the groups, which include a significant focus on the SRO program. A review of the results for the school years 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 suggests that the focus group participants generally found the program helpful. The students participating in the 2000-2001 focus groups said that they—and their parents—overwhelmingly liked have an SRO in school and felt safer because of the officer's presence.

As explained above, the purposes of conducting an evaluation are both to identify how the program needs to be improved and to help convince funding sources to continue to support the program. This site was unusual in using evaluation findings successfully for both purposes.

- The school district gives the focus group results to each school for purposes of improving the program's operation. For example, when the early focus groups showed that students saw the SROs as law enforcers, the program coordinator reminded the SROs of the need to spend more time building relationships with students. Because the focus groups also indicated a need to address bullying and sexual harassment, the SROs added these topics to their classroom offerings.
- Program administrators submit the focus group findings to the school board every year to bolster their case for continued funding.

The focus groups were discontinued after the 2001-2002 school year because they had served their purposes of pointing out weaknesses in the program to the SROs when they were new at the job and convincing the board of the program's value. In addition, the process and logistics for conducting the focus groups are arduous. However, the school district may resume them for the 2004-2005 school year because there will be two new SROs.

Precisely because good evaluations can be costly and time consuming, programs can reach out to local universities for help in designing and implementing a program assessment. Professors in departments of criminal justice, political science, government, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines are often only too happy to supervise graduate students in conducting an evaluation—and giving them a publishable article—with little or no cost to the program.

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