



Research Brief

School Resource Officers

Question: What is the effectiveness of School Resource Officers?

In a Nutshell

An effective School Resource Officer (SRO) program can educate the school community about drugs, alcohol, weapons and gangs. The presence of the SRO can also prevent problems from occurring and serve as a calming influence on campus. They can quickly intervene in situations where appropriate. An SRO can also be a role model for students and community, which in turn can contribute to an environment focused on student success.

Summary of Findings:

School Resource Officers (SRO's) have been a presence in public schools since the 1950's when they were first introduced in Flint, Michigan. Florida expanded this program in the 1960's and 1970's, but SRO's were not common nationwide until the 1990's when events such as school shootings, increased use of drugs and the presence of gangs become more prevalent. SRO programs are most common at the secondary level. Currently, all states have some form of an SRO program, while Florida and North Carolina have full-fledged state supported programs (Gulen, 2010; Mayer, 2008; School Safety Net, n.d. *What is a school resource officer?*; Uchida, 2002).

Three Roles for SRO's

First and foremost, the SRO's are law enforcement officers trained in that function. While in a school, SRO's usually assume three different roles. The specific role of each SRO varies and is dependent on the agreement between the school district and the local law enforcement agency. One role SRO's do not assume is responsibility for school discipline.

1. *Law Enforcement* - They can:

- provide a safe and secure environment
- assist with the school's and district's emergency preparation and safety programs
- be a visible presence on the campus
- deal with trespassers
- identify controlled substances
- intervene in possible weapons violations
- investigate legal infringements

2. *Law Related Counselor* - They can:

- work with the school counselor to help students with conflicts and mediation
- assist in providing education and guidance in the areas of drug, alcohol, weapons and gangs
- be available to talk with and listen to students

3. *Educator* - They can:

- speak in classrooms
- compliment and support the different content curricula
- describe how the criminal system operates along with its consequences
- provide drug, alcohol, weapons and gang awareness



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(Finn, P., Shively, M., McDevitt, J., Lassiter, W. and Rich, T. 2005; Montgomery County Police Department, n.d., School Safety Net, n.d. *What is a school resource officer?*; School Safety Net, n.d. *The role of an SRO*)

Research

Research on the effectiveness of SRO programs is limited and is based primarily on opinion surveys. A review of the literature identified several benefits from the presence of SRO's.

- SROs tended to be viewed favorably and were valued highly by school staff and parents
- Students, in general, viewed the officers positively. Middle school students were more comfortable approaching the SRO than high school students.
- Students and staff felt safer after the SRO's arrival. However, females in urban areas did not feel as safe as those in suburban areas
- Students and staff felt less safe in areas where students assemble and where staff would not be present (i.e. restrooms, hallways, etc.)
- Fights decreased
- There were fewer reported cases of bullying and marijuana smoking
- Teachers said that gang, drug and classroom disruptions declined with SRO presence
- Assisted with traffic safety and enforcement
(Mayer, 2008; Montgomery County Police Department, n.d.; Schuiteman, 2000; Uchida, 2002)

Recommendations

If your district or school is considering having an SRO on campus, several recommendations emerge from the literature.

- Determine how the SRO will assist and support the school's climate
- Work with all stakeholders to develop a plan for use of the SRO
- Agree on funding for the SRO
- Establish a memorandum of understanding between the district and the police agency employing the SRO
- Develop a project team with the school system, police agency and community to implement and evaluate the program
- Provide resources and support to the SRO
- Educate the students, staff and school community about the SRO program
- Evaluate the program yearly and readjust as appropriate
- Meet yearly with the SRO and the police agency, community representatives, students, staff and parents to monitor and adjust the program as appropriate.

(Gulen, 2010; Mayer, 2008; School Safety Net, n.d., *Building a foundation: SRO program development*; School Safety Net, n.d., *Introducing the SRO to the school*; Uchida, 2002)



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Online Resources:

- Center for the Prevention of School Violence. (n.d.). “Promising” strategies for schools: School Resource Officer programs. Retrieved online http://www.ncdjdp.org/cpsv/sro/promising_strategies.html
An overview of the role of an SRO and the SRO program are briefly provided in this piece.
- Center for the Prevention of School Violence. (n.d.). School Resource Officer. Retrieved online http://www.ncdjdp.org/cpsv/school_resource_officer.html
This site is sponsored by North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and has active links to numerous articles and helpful resources about School Resource Officers.
- Farris-Berg, K. (2009, June). The Milwaukee School Resource Officer program is not working. But students know how it could. Retrieved online <http://map150.org/sso/pdf/Students-Speak-Out-in-Milwaukee.pdf>
This is a report about a meeting of high school students, their concerns about the SRO program and ways it could be improved to help the students.
- Finn, P., Shively, M., McDevitt, J., Lassiter, W. and Rich, T. (2005, February). Comparison of program activities and lessons learned among 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) programs. Retrieved online http://www.ncdjdp.org/cpsv/pdf_files/SRO_Natl_Survey.pdf
This is an extensive comparative report on the many different components that go into an SRO program.
- Gulen, E. (2010, March/April). School Resource Officer programs. Retrieved online <http://www.lemitonline.org/telemasp/Pdf/volume%2017/vol17no2.pdf>
Background about SRO programs and results of research are reported in this bulletin.
- Gunderson, D. (2008, June 10). Police learn best ways to handle school shootings. Retrieved online <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/06/10/schoolshoottraining/?rsssource=1>
Reasons for training SROs to be the first responders in a school if there is a shooting are given in this article.
- Mayer, M. (2008, November). Fact sheet #5: School Resource Officers. Retrieved online http://www.preventschoolviolence.org/resources_assets/CPSV%20Fact%20Sheet-5-School%20Resource%20Officers.pdf
Information on School Resource Officers, their role and the minimal amount of research that has been conducted are provided in this succinct fact sheet.
- Montgomery County Police Department. (n.d.) School Resource Officer program. Retrieved online <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/poltempl.asp?url=/content/pol/districts/FSB/EFOs.asp>
A brief description of the SRO program is given in this piece.



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- School Safety Net. (n.d.). Building a foundation: SRO program development. Retrieved online http://cte.jhu.edu/courses/ssn/sro/ses2_act1_pag1.shtml
Four main considerations for developing a program are described.
- School Safety Net. (n.d.). Introducing the SRO to the school. Retrieved online http://cte.jhu.edu/courses/ssn/sro/ses2_act3_pag1.shtml
The information that should be in a memo of understanding is introduced. There are links to sample memos from several states.
- School Safety Net. (n.d.). The role of an SRO. Retrieved online http://cte.jhu.edu/courses/ssn/sro/ses1_act3_pag1.shtml
Succinct descriptions of the three roles SROs play in a school are provided.
- School Safety Net. (n.d.). What is a school resource officer? Retrieved online http://cte.jhu.edu/courses/ssn/sro/ses1_act1_pag1.shtml
A very brief definition of a school resource officer is given in this piece.
- Schuiteman, J. G. (2000, June 16). The Virginia model SRO program. Retrieved online <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/cple/grants/sro/sroPoliceChiefs.pdf>
A summary of the SRO program and evaluation result from 1999 in Virginia are provided in this piece.
- Uchida, C. D. (2002, January). Measuring the performance of School Resource Officers. Retrieved online <http://www.jssinc.org/publications/JSS-043-1.pdf>
This provides a summary of the SRO programs in five Colorado High Schools in 2000-2001.

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