

BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAMMING: THE TRIAD MODEL

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HANOVER RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Alexandria City Public Schools' (ACPS) School-Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) Subcommittee is a joint city council, school board, and law enforcement partnership whose purpose is "to promote continuous improvement and collaboration on the responsibilities of school resource officers (SROs)." As a first step, the SLEP Subcommittee aims to review common structures of SRO programs across K12 districts and best practices for policing in schools. To support this process, Hanover Research (Hanover) provided the Subcommittee with best practice research conducted during the 2022-23 school year to support the original SLEP Committee's efforts in refining the current memorandum of understanding (MOU) governing the work of SROs in the district. From that effort, the SLEP committee and Hanover identified the triad model as a promising model to explore further. Hanover has prepared the following report reviewing best practices for SRO roles and responsibilities, drawing on guidance from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), and the U.S. Department of Justice, as well as the academic literature around school resource officers. This report includes the following sections:

- **Section I** reviews best practices for SRO roles and responsibilities aligned to the triad model and spotlights districts that have successfully implemented SRO programs aligned to best practices.
- **Section II** reviews best practices for districts and law enforcement agencies to support SROs, including supervision and professional development.

KEY FINDINGS

The three core functions of the SRO role as outlined through the triad model – educator, law enforcer, informal counselor – are interrelated and can be utilized in specific situations to maximize effectiveness. The DCJS identifies the law enforcer role as the primary role for SROs in schools, but combining this role with the educator and informal counselor roles maximizes the effectiveness of SROs. For example, an SRO would initially respond to an assault on school property in their law enforcer role but could promote greater safety moving forward by using the educator role to discuss what actions constitute criminal violations and what the consequences of these violations are while using the informal counselor role to help students identify more appropriate conflict resolution strategies.

Districts implementing best practices for SRO roles and responsibilities aligned to the triad model report positive outcomes. For example, Fairfax County Public Schools reported that the number of arrests by SROs declined by a total of 56.8% in the first two years following the adoption of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) aligned with SRO best practices. A series of case studies published by the U.S. Department of Justice finds that, in several cases, students reported potential threats to SROs who were able to respond and prevent violence, suggesting that the positive rapport SROs build with students through their role can improve safety outcomes.

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SROs need professional development focused on the unique aspects of policing in the school context. The role of SROs draws on a community policing model that differs substantially from the traditional reactive policing model, suggesting that SROs need focused professional development to understand their role. A study of SROs and school administrators in Virginia finds that SROs and administrators most frequently identify a need for additional professional learning in the areas of:

- Working with students with special needs
- Mental health issues in childhood and adolescence
- Dangerous and threatening students
- Bullying
- Establishing effective working relationships with parents

The MOU should clearly explain the responsibilities of law enforcement agencies and school divisions. It is essential that there are clear policies and procedures for SROs' involvement in the full range of disciplinary activity. MOUs should define the SRO's role and specify roles and responsibilities related to law enforcement action, including a clear statement that the SRO will not be involved in administering school discipline. Law enforcement agencies are required by Virginia state law to designate a law enforcement liaison for the school-law enforcement partnership and are responsible for the supervision of SROs within their regular chain of command.

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SECTION I: BEST PRACTICES IN SRO ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section draws on best practices around key roles and responsibilities for SROs, including a focus on the three essential components research describes as promising practices for SRO programming. This section begins with a general overview of the school policing theory of action. This overview is followed by a review of the three essential components of the SRO role, which the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) conceptualizes as the triad model: law enforcer, informal counselor, and law educator, before discussing the duties performed by SROs within each role in greater detail.

School policing strategies are generally built on the theory of action outlined in Figure 1.1. This theory rests on the idea that the presence of SROs and a focus on their relationship building with students and staff will reduce the number and severity of disciplinary incidents, building an environment which is more conducive to student learning. However, empirical research on models for school policing is limited. A 2021 report by the National Institute of Justice notes that existing research on school policing is subject to methodological limitations and concludes that "the research evidence does not, as a whole, yield support for school policing as an effective strategy to improve safety and security."[1] A systematic review of empirical research on SRO programs finds a slight negative effect of school police programs on outcomes related to crime and discipline issues, although some studies within this review found positive outcomes.[2] A more recent study, published in 2021, finds that the presence of SROs in schools is associated with lower rates of violence not involving a firearm but higher rates of violence involving firearms, which may partially reflect increased detection of firearms. The study also finds that schools with SROs rely more heavily on exclusionary forms of discipline, with disproportionate effects on Black students.[3] Yet, individual school districts, including those discussed in the spotlights within this report, have experienced positive outcomes through implementing the best practices of SRO roles and responsibilities reflected in the triad model. The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) also endorses the triad model in its **School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide**.[4]

[1] "FY 2021 Report to the Committees on Appropriations," Op. cit., p. 2.
[2] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., pp. 38–40.
[3] Sorensen, L.C. et al. "The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing across the U.S." Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, October 2021. p. 5. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=school+resource+officer&ft=on&ff1=dtySince_2018&id=ED616763
[4] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., pp. 40–41.

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Figure 1.1: School Policing Theory of Action



Source: National Institute of Justice[5]

When implemented with fidelity, the triad model aligns with general best practices for implementing SRO programs. SLEPS are most effective when SROs exercise their roles collaboratively with school administrators and other constituents. In this framework, SROs serve as members of an interagency team focused on improving outcomes for students, an approach consistent with best practices in law enforcement and child welfare systems.[6] The U.S. Department of Justice identifies the guiding principles for SRO programs listed in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Guiding Principles for SRO Programs

- Operating an SRO program is a local decision that should be made with significant community input.
- Law enforcement agencies should have a fully executed MOU with the school district(s) where SROs are assigned.
- SROs should not be involved in school disciplinary incidents that would normally be handled by teachers, administrators, and other school staff.
- SROs should detain, arrest, or use force only as a last resort.
- Law enforcement agencies should have a collaborative selection process for SROs that includes specialized qualifications and traits.
- Law enforcement agencies should develop systems of evaluation and supervision for SROs that are tailored to their duties and expectations.
- Law enforcement agencies should develop systems to track SRO duties and activities that are as transparent to stakeholders as the law allows.
- Law enforcement agencies should ensure that SROs receive specialized training that is unique to their role in promoting school safety and distinguishes SRO duties from the duties of general law enforcement officers.
- School staff should be trained in the operations of SROs and the SRO program.
- Law enforcement agencies and school districts should regularly engage in outreach to students, families, and school staff to solicit feedback and collectively problem-solve to address student or community concerns.
- SRO programs should be reviewed no less than annually to ensure that they are meeting expectations.

[5] Chart contents adapted from: McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., p. 36.
[6] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., pp. 16–17.

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- When possible, SROs should have fixed duty assignments with one or a limited number of schools.
- Law enforcement agencies should provide SROs with opportunities to interact with peers and national networks.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice[7]

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE TRIAD MODEL

The triad model, developed by NASRO, identifies three essential components of an SRO's responsibilities, presented in Figure 1.3.[8] The U.S. Department of Justice identifies four roles for SROs: law enforcer, educator, informal counselor, and emergency manager, a role which encompasses the development and implementation of school safety plans.[9] However, the emergency management functions identified by the Department of Justice align with Law Enforcer functions in the triad model.

Figure 1.3: Essential Components of the Triad Model



Source: National Association of School Resource Officers and Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[10]

[7] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs." U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. pp. 1–16. https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2022ProgramDocs/chp/SRO_Guiding_Principles.pdf

[8] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools." National Association of School Resource Officers, 2012. p. 23. https://www.nasro.org/clientuploads/About-Mission/NASRO-To-Protect-and-Educate-nosecurity.pdf

[9] "Supporting Safe Schools." U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. https://cops.usdoj.gov/supportingsafeschools

[10] Chart contents adapted from: "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., pp. 24–27. [2] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 41.

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The DCJS emphasizes that these roles are interrelated rather than discrete. For example, if a student commits assault and battery on campus, the SRO will initially respond within the law enforcer function but can promote greater safety moving forward by using the educator role to discuss what actions constitute criminal violations and what the consequences of these violations are and use the informal counselor role to help students identify more appropriate conflict resolution strategies.[11] Similarly, the positive and trusting relationships SROs develop with students through their roles as informal counselors may make students more willing to report sexual abuse to an SRO, enabling the SRO to implement a law enforcement response.[12] In some cases, SROs report switching between roles on a minute-to-minute basis or performing multiple roles simultaneously.[13] SROs should be prepared to apply the roles of the triad model flexibly to meet the needs of specific situations. In many instances, an educational or counseling response to student behavior will be more appropriate than a law enforcement response, for instance.[14]

LAW ENFORCER ROLE

NASRO notes that SROs operating according to the triad model typically spend most of their time fulfilling the law enforcer component of the model, including traditional law enforcement activities such as arresting students selling drugs and monitoring school entrances, as well as school safety activities such as consulting with school leaders in the development of a school safety plan.[15] In their daily work, SROs typically patrol the campus, investigate complaints, and monitor the school for any potential safety concerns.[16] The DCJS' model MOU for SROs defines the law enforcer role as presented in Figure 1.1. As conceptualized by the DCJS, the law enforcer role includes three main components: providing direct law enforcement services, leveraging the SRO's crime prevention expertise to reduce the risk of crime, and leveraging the SRO's support around school safety planning.

Figure 1.1: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services Law Enforcer Role Definition

As a sworn law enforcement officer, the primary role of an SRO in a school is as a law enforcement officer. SROs assume primary responsibility for responding to requests for law enforcement assistance from school administrators and coordinating the response of other law enforcement resources to the school. SROs should work with school administrators in problem-solving to prevent crime and promote safety in the school environment. In all cases, the SRO's role as a law enforcement officer should take precedence over any other roles performed by the SRO.

Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[17]

LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICES

The law enforcer role includes providing direct law enforcement services, including investigations and arrests, on school property. SROs monitor the school to respond to any crimes that occur on campus and address 'spill-over' incidents in which an off-campus crime or emergency threatens the security of the campus. SROs patrol the school during the school day and after-school activities such as dances or athletic events. As appropriate, SROs may also respond to off-campus emergencies involving students to serve as

[11] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide." Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, 2022. p. 40. https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/law-enforcement/files/vcscs/va_s-lep_guide-print_2_2023_.pdf

[12] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., pp. 22–23.

[13] McKenna, J. and A. Petrosino. "School Policing Programs: Where We Have Been and Where We Need To Go Next." National Institute of Justice, February 2022. p. 26. https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/school-policing-programs-where-we-have-been-and-where-we-need-go-next

[14] "FY 2021 Report to the Committees on Appropriations: Research on School Resource Officer Programs." National Institute of Justice, February 2022. p. 2. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=resource+officer&ft=on&id=ED624302

[15] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 23.

[16] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., p. 24.

[17] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Virginia Model Memorandum of Understanding." Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, August 2022. p. 3. https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/law-enforcement/files/vcscs/slep_model_mou_5.pdf

"a familiar face."[18] Procedures for these services should be clearly documented in writing. Law enforcement services are most effective when SROs fulfill the responsibilities listed in Figure 1.2.[19]

Figure 1.2: Law Enforcement Services Activities of SROs

- Assumes primary responsibility for handling all calls for service from the school and coordinates the response of other police resources to the school.
- Serves as a liaison between the school and the police and provides information to students and school personnel about law enforcement matters.
- Is advised of all situations where other units within the law enforcement agency have provided services to the school.
- Provides information to the appropriate investigative units of crimes or leads that come to the attention of the officer.
- Is kept advised of all investigations by other units that involve students from the assigned school.
- Ensures school administrator safety by being present during incidents that may involve weapons, controlled dangerous substances, or in such cases that the student's emotional state may present a serious risk to the administrator.

Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[20]

According to NASRO, SROs can perform these functions more safely and efficiently than other staff members, such as non-sworn school safety officers (SSOs) or school administrators, due to their law enforcement training. For example, an SRO can confiscate a weapon as safely as possible because they have law enforcement training in conducting searches and neutralizing weapons.[21] A 2020 Department of Justice report drawing on case studies of incidents in which SROs prevented school violence concludes that immediately notifying SROs or other law enforcement officers of any threats or suspected weapons is essential because attempts by administrators to investigate these incidents independently can delay the response and increase the risk of a negative outcome.[22]

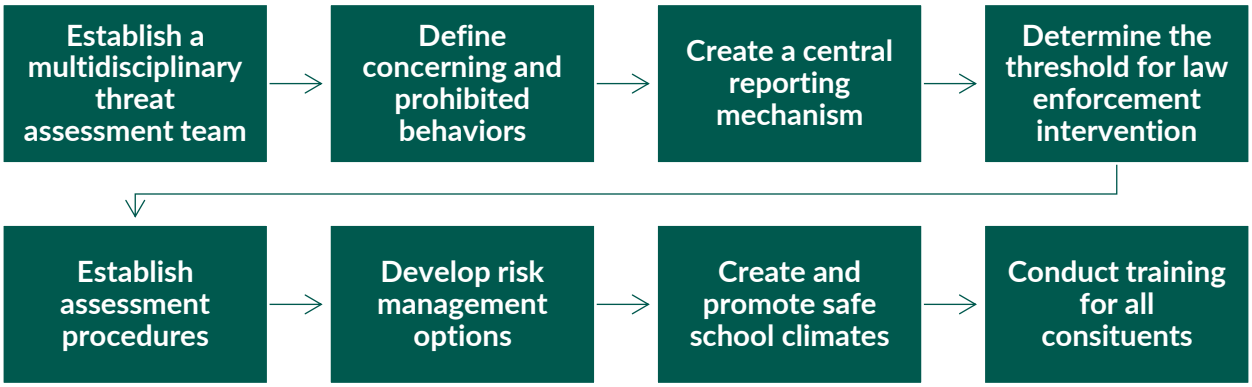
In addition to directly enforcing laws, law enforcement services include SROs' roles as members of threat assessment teams.[23] Threat assessment teams refer students who may be a threat to themselves or others to appropriate individualized mental health services.[24] Research finds that integrating a behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) system into a school's system of mental health supports and adhering to best practices makes it more likely that students who utter threats receive appropriate referrals to

[18] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 22.
[19] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 43.
[20] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.
[21] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 24.
[22] Allison, J., M. Canady, and F.G. Straub. "School Resource Officers: Averted School Violence Special Report." Article. U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Policing Services, January 1, 2020. p. 27. https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=
[23] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 43.
[24] "K-12 School Security: A Guide for Preventing and Protecting Against Gun Violence, Second Edition." United States Department of Homeland Security, 2018. p. 8. https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/K12-School-Security-Guide-2nd-Edition-508.pdf

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counseling services and less likely to receive exclusionary discipline. Some research also suggests that using a BTAM system aligned with best practices reduces racial disproportionalities in the outcomes of the threat assessment process.[25] If schools already have a BTAM system in place, the SRO should be included as a member of the threat assessment team (TAT). If a BTAM is not already in place, safety teams and SROs can use the process outlined in Figure 1.3 to create a BTAM aligned with best practices identified by the United States Secret Service.[26]

Figure 1.3: Process for Creating a BTAM System



Source: United States Secret Service[27]

When implementing a BTAM system, school safety teams should take care to ensure that the process is equitable and protects students' rights. Team members should be aware of any implicit biases that may influence threat assessment decisions and regularly review threat assessment data for disproportionalities among racial or ethnic groups. Training should address the areas of federal regulation for students with disabilities listed below, as well as any relevant state or district policies, and ensure that the threat assessment process is never used to replace an individualized education planning (IEP) process.[28]

[25] "Behavior Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) Best Practice Considerations for K–12 Schools." National Association of School Psychologists, 2021. p. 1. https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/threat-assessment-at-school/behavior-threat-assessment-and-management-(btam)-best-practice-considerations-for-k%E2%80%9312-schools

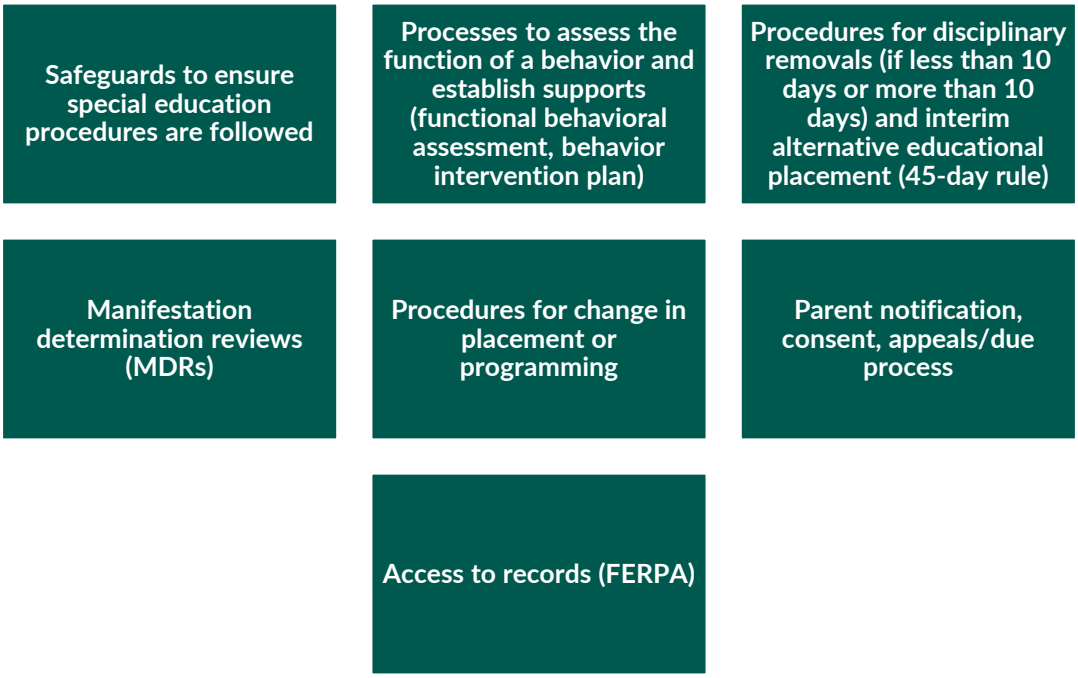
[26] Alathari, L. et al. "Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence." United States Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, July 2018. https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2020-10/USSS_NTAC_Enhancing_School_Safety_Guide.pdf

[27] Resource adapted from: Ibid., pp. 1–22.

[28] "Upholding Student Civil Rights and Preventing Disproportionality in Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)." National Association of School Psychologists, 2021. pp. 2–3. https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/threat-assessment-at-school/protecting-students-rights-in-btam

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Figure 1.4: Considerations for Students with Disabilities when Implementing a BTAM Systems



Source: National Association of School Psychologists[29]

It is essential for SROs to avoid enforcing school rules or discipline. School discipline is the responsibility of school administrators and should not be conflated with the law enforcement role of SROs.[30] SROs' only involvement in the disciplinary process should be providing school administrators with factual information about incidents they have observed or data they have collected.[31] If SROs become involved in school discipline beyond reporting data, they may escalate the situation, leading to a student arrest for infractions that could be addressed more appropriately through the school's disciplinary procedures. Involving SROs in school discipline may also lead administrators to pursue more punitive responses to student behavior instead of emphasizing educational responses that address the root causes of misbehavior. In some cases, involving SROs in school discipline may violate students' rights.[32] NASRO recommends that SROs who observe students violating school disciplinary policies take these students to a school official who can administer disciplinary sanctions without further involving the SRO.[33]

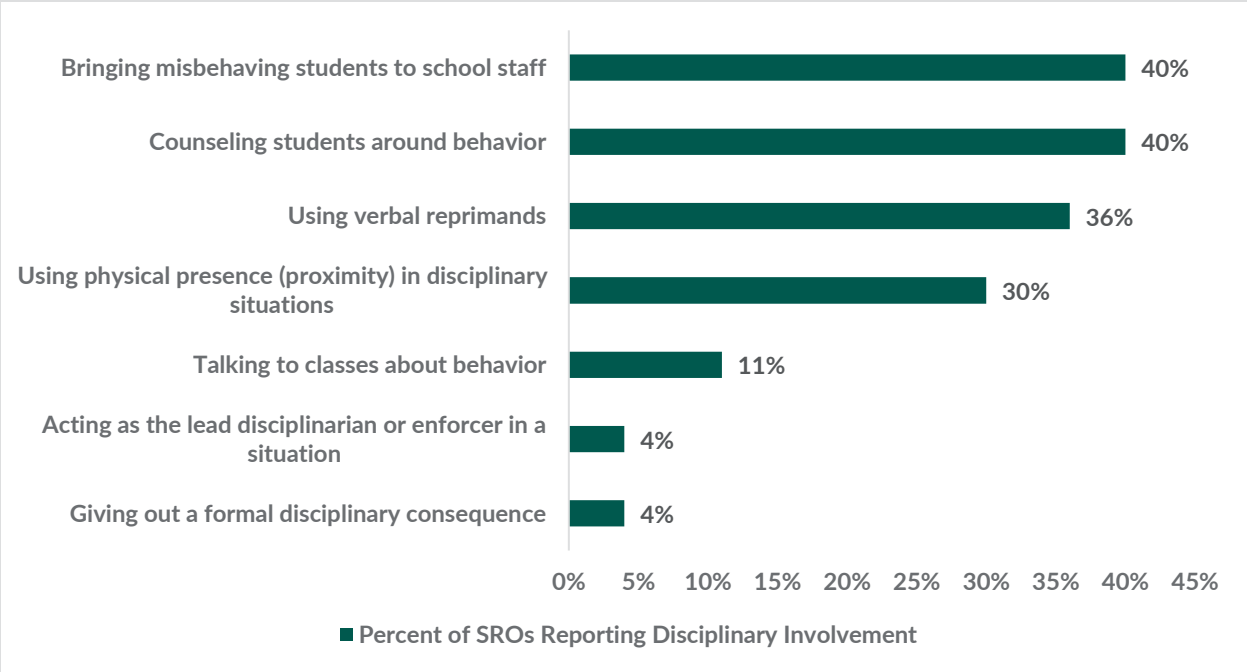
Although NASRO and DCJS agree that enforcing school discipline is an inappropriate role for SROs, research suggests that SROs frequently become involved in school discipline as a result of their work in schools.[34] A 2019 study uses data from interviews and focus groups with SROs and school staff to examine the role of SROs related to school discipline in 50 schools across two districts in the southeastern United States. This study finds that 79% of SROs do not consider school discipline to be part of their role in schools, reflecting the MOUs for these districts, and only four percent of SROs reported assigning formal disciplinary

[29] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 3.
[30] "NASRO Position Statement on Police Involvement in Student Discipline." National Association of School Resource Officers, August 14, 2015. https://www.nasro.org/aboutnasro/nasro-position-statement-on-police-involvement-in-student-discipline/
[31] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 15.
[32] Curran, F.C. et al. "Why and When Do School Resource Officers Engage in School Discipline? The Role of Context in Shaping Disciplinary Involvement." *American Journal of Education*, November 1, 2019. p. 35. https://219751e2-9443-42c7-8c01-a1083bc8150f.filesusr.com/ugd/46d76f_198726efd38d49ddb92f2b3ffb81d330.pdf
[33] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 23.
[34] "NASRO Position Statement on Police Involvement in Student Discipline," Op. cit. [2] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 15.

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consequences to students. However, SROs did report performing the roles related to discipline listed in Figure 1.5. In many cases, these activities were consistent with SROs' roles as law-related educators or informal counselors, such as meeting one-on-one with students to discuss behavioral issues or delivering presentations to classes about behavior. However, some principals reported that SROs took a punitive approach with students, such as threatening students with arrest or ordering students to in-school suspension (ISS). The authors find that variation in SROs' approach to student behavior reflects both their personal attitudes and the context of their school. For example, some SROs reported being pressured by school administrators to take a more active role in student discipline.[35] The authors conclude that, although MOUs specified that SROs were not to be involved in formal discipline, there was no clear guidance about the appropriate role for SROs in more informal disciplinary contexts such as issuing verbal reprimands for misbehavior they observed, leaving SROs to negotiate their involvement on an individual basis. The authors recommend that SLEPs develop clear policies and procedures for SROs' involvement in the full range of disciplinary activity, including reporting misbehavior, issuing verbal corrections, and being present during administrative discipline.[36]

Figure 1.5: Discipline-Related Activities Reported by SROs



Source: American Journal of Education[37]

Crime Prevention

SROs work to prevent crime on school property through a collaborative problem-solving process that engages diverse constituents in planning and implementing strategies to reduce the risk of crime. In support of this role, NASRO cites a 2009 study that finds that arrests for assault and weapons possession in a sample of 13 middle and high schools with SROs were lower than in a control group of 15 schools without SROs.[38] Figure 1.6 lists potential partners for SROs to engage in crime prevention planning. Specific crime prevention strategies may engage both SROs and school partners. For example, a strategy to reduce fights in the

[35] Curran et al., Op. cit., pp. 44–47.
[36] Ibid., pp. 57–58.
[37] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 45.
[38] Theriot, M.T. "School Resource Officers and the Criminalization of Student Behavior." *Journal of Criminal Justice*, May 1, 2009. https://www.scinapse.io/papers/2134108239 Cited in: [2] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 25.

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cafeteria may involve SROs increasing their presence during lunch periods and administrators changing lunch schedules or procedures.[39]

Figure 1.6: Potential Partners to Engage in Crime Prevention Planning



Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[40]

SROs should meet with school staff regularly to support crime prevention. NASRO recommends that SROs meet with their principal each morning to exchange information on potential safety threats, such as drug activity and spill-over threats that they have obtained through reports from community members or monitoring social media.[41] NASRO also notes that SROs can coordinate information sharing among schools and other organizations, such as juvenile justice and social services agencies, to monitor students' behavior across settings and identify emerging threats.[42] Likewise, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) notes that sharing information among all the systems with which individual students engage, such as juvenile justice, mental health, and child welfare agencies, is essential for service providers to have a complete understanding of students' needs.[43]

School and Public Safety Expertise

In addition to helping plan strategies to prevent crime, SROs leverage their expertise in school safety and public safety to support administrators in developing plans to respond to a variety of emergencies. Activities such as developing a comprehensive safety plan and conducting tabletop exercises ensure that everyone in a school, including the SRO, knows their role in the event of an emergency.[44] As SROs are likely to be the first responders on the scene during an emergency, their participation in safety planning and preparation is essential. The federal government's guide to developing school emergency operations identifies SROs as core members of the emergency planning team.[45] SROs can support emergency preparation through the activities listed in Figure 1.7.

[39] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 43.
[40] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.
[41] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 22.
[42] Ibid., p. 24.
[43] "School Resource Officers Navigating Information Sharing." *Community Policing Dispatch*, June 2013. https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/06-2013/sros_and_information_sharing.asp
[44] "Emergency Planning." Federal School Safety Clearinghouse. https://www.schoolsafety.gov/emergency-planning
[45] "Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans." Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center, June 2013. p. 6. https://rems.ed.gov/docs/School_Guide_508C.pdf

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Figure 1.7: SRO Emergency Preparedness Activities

- Conducting school safety and security assessments
- Practicing protocols regularly using tabletop exercises and practice evacuations and lockdowns, then critiquing performance and refining protocols as needed
- Conducting drills and related staff training to prepare staff for emergency response
- Coordinating emergency response plans with other emergency responders

Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[46]

EDUCATOR ROLE

SROs are uniquely positioned to support schools in providing law-related education, defined by federal legislation as "education to equip non-lawyers with knowledge and skills pertaining to the law, the legal process, and the legal system, and the fundamental principles and values on which these are based."[47] **In the context of K-12 education in Virginia, law-related education includes education focused on the knowledge and skills students need to participate in the democratic process, as well as personal safety training required for physical education classes serving students in Grades 7-8**. The model MOU for SROs defines the law-related educator role of the SRO, as shown in Figure 1.8.[48]

Figure 1.8: Law-Related Educator Role of SROs

As resources permit, SROs should strive to assist with presentations to school personnel on law-related topics such as law enforcement practices, changes in relevant laws, crime trends, crime prevention, school safety strategies, and crisis response procedures. SROs may also deliver law-related education to students using lessons/curricula approved in advance by the school district.

Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[49]

Nationally, law-related education provided by SROs often focuses on drug and alcohol abuse and crime prevention.[50] SROs can also work with teachers and other law enforcement officers to integrate law-related education across the curriculum, such as by recruiting a crime scene investigator to deliver a presentation to science classes.[51] NASRO identifies the potential topics for law-related education listed in Figure 1.9 and notes that SROs' law enforcement training positions them to provide more comprehensive and engaging instruction than regular classroom teachers.

[46] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 44.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Virginia Model Memorandum of Understanding," Op. cit., p. 4.
[50] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., p. 24.
[51] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 22.

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Figure 1.9: Potential Topics for Law-Related Education



Source: National Association of School Resource Officers[52]

Law-related education typically takes place during scheduled classroom instruction. SROs should share information about presentations they can offer with teachers toward the beginning of the school year to ensure that all teachers are aware of the potential for law-related education to enhance instruction in their content areas. SROs should also be prepared to deliver law-related education in response to events that affect the school, such as an alcohol-related car accident involving students or a crime in the community. Virginia has also developed a statewide law-related education curriculum, Virginia Rules, which includes lessons SROs can deliver as part of law-related education. Figure 1.10 presents a sample of topics addressed by Virginia Rules.[53]

Figure 1.10: Virginia Rules Sample Lessons

Topic	Description
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Marijuana	Virginia laws and legal penalties associated with underage alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana possession and use, health and safety risks of underage drinking, and strategies for staying safe and sober.
Bullying	What bullying is and the crimes associated with bullying, understanding the harm of bullying, and what teens can do if they or someone they know is bullied.
Civil Law Basics	What civil law is, what torts are, parents' liability in Virginia, and contracts and who can make them in Virginia.
Crimes Against Persons	Types of crimes involving physical harm or force applied to another person and penalties for these crimes.
Criminal Law Basics	How crimes are defined in law, categories of crimes, penalties for violating the law, and legal and hidden consequences for committing a crime.
Dating Violence	What dating violence is and its forms, warning signs for dating violence, what teens can do, and assistance available
Drugs - Overview	The laws governing the use and possession of drugs, including prescription drugs and household products, and the penalties involved.
Family Relationships and the Law	What the law says about the relationship between teens and their parents, the authority, responsibilities, and liability of parents, how Virginia law defines Children in Need of Supervision and Children in Need of Services, and child abuse and neglect.
Gangs	How gangs are defined in Virginia law, other laws addressing gangs, gang-related crimes, recognizing gangs, reasons people join gangs, and strategies for resisting gang involvement.
Introduction to a Virginia Courtroom	Roles and responsibilities of persons in a Virginia courtroom.
Introduction to Juvenile Justice in Virginia	Why there is a juvenile justice system, how the juvenile system differs from the adult system, the juvenile justice process, types of hearings, when a juvenile can be detained, and consequences of committing a crime.
Introduction to Laws in Virginia	Why there are laws, where laws come from, how laws are made, and how citizens can have a role in making and changing laws.

[52] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 27.
[53] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., pp. 44–46.

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Topic	Description
Introduction to Virginia's Judicial System	How courts are organized in Virginia, what the different courts do, how cases are brought to and heard in local courts, and how judges are appointed in Virginia.

Source: Virginia Office of the Attorney General[54]

SPOTLIGHT – LOUISA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Louisa County Public Schools in Virginia provides an example of a school division with a structured law-related education curriculum. The Louisa County Sheriff's Office launched its Learn and Win (LAW) program as part of the SRO program in 2009. The LAW program now includes instruction for students and staff across Grades K-12. SROs teach all classes and include handouts that students can share with their families to explain what students are learning at school and prompt conversations at home.[55] Although the LAW program provides lessons for K-12 students, Figure 1.14 highlights the topics covered at the secondary level where SROs are typically present in Virginia.

Figure 1.11: LAW Program Components

Audience	Summary	Topics Covered
Middle School	The middle school program consists of 6, 1-hour lessons with two lessons at each grade level.	▪ Student Responsibilities and Intro to Juvenile Justice (Grade 6) ▪ Internet Safety and Vehicle Safety (Grade 7) ▪ Gang Awareness and Drug Awareness (Grade 8)
High School	The LAW high school program is less structured than middle and elementary school programs. Topics are taught through a combination of classroom discussion, hands-on training/demonstrations, and guest speakers.	▪ Survive the Drive ▪ Traffic Stops 101 ▪ Vehicle Maintenance 101 ▪ IDrive ▪ ScanEd ▪ Internet Safety/Sexting ▪ Search and Seizure ▪ Student Rights ▪ Virginia's Court System ▪ Gang Awareness ▪ Substance Abuse
Faculty and Staff	Faculty and staff are an integral part of the school community. As such, they play an important role in keeping our students safe. To prepare faculty and staff for this critical responsibility, SROs and/or other select law enforcement personnel provide training.	▪ Critical Incident Response ▪ Know the Signs ▪ Gang Awareness ▪ Drug Awareness ▪ Staff Talks (short discussions on select issues)

Source: Louisa County Sheriff's Office[56]

[54] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Virginia Rules." Virginia Office of the Attorney General. https://virginiarules.org/
[55] "Learn and Win (LAW)." Louisa County Sheriff's Office. https://www.louisacounty.gov/449/Learn-Win-LAW
[56] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.

INFORMAL COUNSELOR ROLE

SROs' location in schools positions them to serve as role models and informal mentors for students. Surveys of SROs find that around 86% report providing students and their families with informal counseling related to behavior and discipline issues, crime, or school safety in general. In some cases, SROs provide more general mentoring and access to student resources, with some SROs describing their role as akin to a "surrogate parent" or "social worker."[57] NASRO recommends that SROs maintain an open door policy so that students can come to them for help with personal challenges as needed and work to establish a positive personal rapport with students.[58] The informal counselor role of SROs includes communicating positive verbal and nonverbal messages to students and supplementing schools' social and emotional learning curricula. The model MOU for SROs defines the informal counselor role of the SRO, as shown in Figure 1.12.[59]

Figure 1.12: Informal Counselor Role of SROs

Students often seek approval, direction, and guidance from adults in the school setting about various problems. Through formal and informal interaction with students, SROs serve as role models and informal mentors. SROs are expected to communicate clearly to students about acceptable and unacceptable behavior, set a positive example in handling stressful situations and resolving conflicts, show respect and consideration for others, and express high expectations for student behavior. Students who may need additional assistance shall be referred to a school-based resource.

Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[60]

SROs can use a variety of specific activities within their role as an informal counselor to improve student outcomes. For example, SROs may coordinate community service activities for students or programs to provide students with resources such as school supplies and holiday gifts, lead summer and after-school programming, or recognize students who demonstrate leadership skills.[61] SROs should also be prepared to refer students to more specialized supports, such as social services or legal aid agencies, as needed.[62] Figure 1.13 presents activities the VDCJS recommends that SROs perform in their interactions with individual students to support the informal counselor role.

Figure 1.13: Counselor Activities for SROs

- Setting clear limits for acceptable behavior
- Providing a positive example of SEL skills
- Providing accurate information about behavioral risks
- Treating students with respect
- Providing students with resources
- Providing information on crime prevention

Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[63]

[57] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., pp. 24, 26.
[58] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 27.
[59] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., pp. 47–48.
[60] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Virginia Model Memorandum of Understanding," Op. cit., p. 4.
[61] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., pp. 22–23.
[62] Ibid., p. 27.
[63] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 48.

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Research suggests that integrating the informal counselor role into SROs' daily work can improve outcomes for SLEPs.[64] For example, a 2017 qualitative study of SROs finds that SROs are more likely to use alternatives to arrest, such as counseling referrals, to address student misconduct when they emphasize the informal counselor role in their work than when they view their work exclusively in terms of the law enforcement role.[65] Several surveys of SROs, school staff, and students cited by NASRO find that respondents report that the positive relationships SROs form with students in their informal counselor roles improve safety by increasing crime reporting and reducing dangerous behaviors such as fighting and marijuana use.[66] SROs stationed in schools may also be more willing to use alternatives to arrest, such as juvenile diversion programs, than on-call officers because they have developed positive working relationships with students.[67]

A 2020 Department of Justice report presenting case studies of incidents in which SROs prevented school violence includes several incidents in which students notified an SRO of another student's plans to commit violent crimes, suggesting that developing a positive rapport through the informal counselor role can increase reporting of potential threats and enable SROs to save lives. The report concludes that "it is essential that every student have at least one adult in their school community that they trust enough to share concerning behavior with."[68]

SPOTLIGHT – LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) provides an example of a Virginia school division recognized for its SRO program's success and implementation of SRO best practices. The division's SRO program began in 1996 and was recognized as the NASRO Model Agency of the Year in 2018 for its exemplary implementation of SRO programming.[69]

An important best practice is the thoughtful creation of a memorandum of understanding. LCPS' School-Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) is governed by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by LCPS, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office (LCSO), and the Leesburg Police Department LPD. This MOU is designed to accompany the Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide and reuses substantial language verbatim from the model MOU, including the definitions of law enforcement, education, and counseling roles of SROs reflected in the triad model. The MOU also describes the role of school security officers (SSOs), non-law enforcement employees who supplement the role of SROs, and identifies responsibilities of the school division, school administrators, and law enforcement partners. In addition to the roles of SROs specified in the model MOU, LCPS' MOU specifies that SROs are expected to provide patrol coverage of the school throughout the day, assist school administrators in emergency planning, and serve as members of their school's threat assessment team.[70]

Another best practice employed at LCPS is attention to the proper training for SROs. The LCSO and LPD are responsible for recruiting and training SROs and ensuring that all middle and high schools in LCPS are regularly staffed with an SRO. All SROs are required to receive initial training as aligned with best practices

[64] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., p. 27.
[65] McKenna, J.M. and S.R. White. "Examining the Use of Police in Schools: How Roles May Impact Responses to Student Misconduct." *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 43:3, September 1, 2018. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12103-017-9426-2 Cited in: [2] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., p. 27.
[66] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., p. 25.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Allison, Canady, and Straub, Op. cit., p. 27.
[69] "School Resource Officers." Loudoun County Sheriff's Office. https://www.loudoun.gov/4719/School-Resource-Officers
[70] "Memorandum of Understanding between the Loudoun County School Board and The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and the Leesburg Police Department." Loudoun County Public Schools. pp. 2–4. https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/files/CQUSHR6FA774/$file/Item%201%20School%20Resource%20Officer%20Memorandum%20of%20Understanding.pdf

for SROs, with the SLEP, and with the standards of the DCJS, including the trainings listed in Figure 1.14.[71] LCPS also conducts annual safety audits to ensure safety practices align with DCJS standards.[72]

Figure 1.14: LCPS SRO Required Initial Training

- A DCJS approved basic SRO course
- LCSO/LPD approved training in crisis intervention techniques
- LCSO/LPD approved training that includes cultural competence
- LCSO/LPD approved training that includes implicit bias awareness

Source: Loudoun County Public Schools[73]

Responsibilities of LCPS include providing SROs with a designated work area that facilitates secure document storage, communications technology, and private interviews. LCPS is required to provide school administrators with training on the role of SROs, focusing on the importance of addressing school discipline without involving SROs inappropriately, and to communicate the goals and role of SROs to division constituents.[74] Individual school leaders are responsible for reviewing the MOU with the SROs in their school every year and recommending operational and communications procedures.[75]

SPOTLIGHT – LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) in Kansas provides an additional example of an exemplary SRO program that aligns with the best practices mentioned above. The district's SRO program received the NASRO Model Agency Award for 2023.[76] Figure 1.15 summarizes SRO roles identified by the City of Lawrence.

[71] Ibid., p. 3.
[72] Ibid., p. 9.
[73] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 2.
[74] Ibid., p. 4.
[75] Ibid., p. 7.
[76] Tafoya, J. "School Resource Officers Recognized with 2023 Model Agency Award." WIBW TV, June 19, 2023. https://www.wibw.com/2023/06/19/school-resource-officers-recognized-with-2023-model-agency-award/

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Figure 1.15: Lawrence Public Schools SRO Roles

Educator

- School Resource Officers present law-related curriculum to students, faculty, and parents. These presentations are offered by the School Resource Officers available to speak to classes and parent groups, and often provide information on an individual basis.

Resource Provider/Problem Solver

- School Resource Officers provide informal, law-related counseling to students, teachers, and parents. This counseling can range from mediation of student conflicts to guiding students and parents to appropriate community services. School Resource Officers work closely with school social workers, counselors, and administrators to ensure students have access to all available resources.

Law Enforcement

- School Resource Officers provide a positive law enforcement presence in the school community. Uniformed officers present a deterrent to violence, gang activity, vandalism, and theft. They also act as a positive role model for students. Officers investigate crimes which involve the school district or students and work closely with school administrators as a liaison between the school and the police department.

Source: City of Lawrence, Kansas[77]

The MOU between LPS and the Lawrence Police Department (LPD) follows the best practice of clearly defining the SRO role, providing more detailed information about the activities SROs are expected to undertake. Figure 1.16 lists responsibilities for SROs and the LPD identified in the MOU, which also identifies responsibilities for the school district and procedures for conducting law enforcement activities. Notably, this MOU includes clear language specifying what activities related to school discipline are inconsistent with the SRO's role.[78] These activities not only reflect best practices for SROs, but this MOU also clearly defines the triad role of SROs and how they should interact with their school and local community.

Figure 1.16: Responsibilities of Lawrence Public Schools SROs and the Lawrence Police Department

- LPD shall recruit, train, and assign certified law enforcement officers to serve as SROs in each LPS middle and high school. SROs will be visible, active, and professional in the LPS schools they serve.
- SROs will provide leadership in addressing tobacco, alcohol, and drug issues; preventing and diffusing violence; and enhancing safety in the LPS school community.
- SROs will serve as communication liaisons between law enforcement agencies and the LPS schools, sharing basic information concerning students as necessary and appropriate.
- SROs will build rapport with LPS students and staff, and between those students and staff and the LPD.
- SROs will present programs to LPS parents and the community on issues related to tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, violence prevention, and safety.
- SROs will provide information for LPS staff on issues related to drugs, violence, gangs, safety, and security.

[77] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "School Resource Officers." City of Lawrence, Kansas. https://lawrenceks.org/police/sro/

[78] "Memorandum of Understanding ('Agreement') Between The City of Lawrence, Kansas - Lawrence Police Department and Lawrence Public Schools - Unified School District 497 for the School Resource Officer Program." Lawrence Public Schools, 2023. https://lawrencekstimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/USD-497-LPD-SRO-MOU-2023.pdf

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- SROs will gather information regarding potential problems such as criminal activity, gang activity, and student unrest, and identify particular individuals who may be a disruptive influence to LPS schools, staff, administrators, or other students.
- SROs will share information regarding potential problems and threats with appropriate school staff and administrators.
- SROs will take appropriate steps, consistent with their law enforcement officer duties, when a crime occurs.
- SROs will maintain a current list of referral services and provide LPS students and/or their families' information about resources for possible assistance when a need is determined.
- SROs will attend off-campus LPS-sponsored and related meetings and activities – including staff in-services and parent group meetings – as requested by LPS administrators and approved by the Program lieutenant.
- SROs will respond to off-campus criminal activities that are determined or believed to be related to LPS students.
- SROs will NOT be responsible for lunchroom supervision, hall monitoring, or bus duties. SROs will NOT function as school disciplinarians, nor make recommendations regarding student discipline. However, if an LPS school principal believes an incident involves a crime, the principal may contact the SRO to determine whether law enforcement action is appropriate.
- SROs will take a report as necessary when an incident occurs.
- SROs will generally be available to LPS students and staff during regular school hours, and will provide advance notice to their assigned school, when possible, if they will be away for more than a half day at a time. Regardless, SROs will respond to emergency law enforcement activities and court appearances as required, whether or not they are related to LPS.
- SROs will direct any media representatives who contact them to the SRO Program supervisor or other appropriate LPD supervisor.
- LPD acknowledges that when its SROs are provided access to or allowed to inspect any student records maintained by LPS, the release of such records and any information gleaned from them is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and it agrees the SROs will abide by FERPA.

Source: Lawrence Public Schools[79]

[79] Chart contents taken verbatim with very minor alterations from: Ibid., pp. 3–4.

SECTION II: SUPPORTING SROS IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In this section, Hanover reviews strategies school districts and law enforcement agencies can use to support SROs. NASRO recommends that school divisions and law enforcement agencies align their support for SROs with the administrative recommendations presented in Figure 2.1. In the remainder of this section, Hanover reviews specific best practices for supervising SROs and providing SROs and school staff with professional development.

Figure 2.1: Administrative Recommendations for SRO Programs

Recommendation	Description
Definition of the School Resource Officer	The School Resource Officer (SRO) is a carefully selected, specifically trained, and properly equipped full-time law enforcement officer with sworn law enforcement authority, trained in school-based law enforcement and crisis response, assigned by the employing law enforcement agency to work in the school using community-oriented policing concepts.
Purpose of the School Resource Officer	The purpose of a successful School Resource Officer program is to build positive and trusting relationships between law enforcement and students. This purpose is best accomplished by using NASRO's SRO TRIAD Model: Law Enforcement Officer, Public Safety Educator, and Informal Counselor/Mentor.
Program Support	For the School Resource Officer program to be successful, the law enforcement agency head and the superintendent of the school district should understand and support the School Resource Officer Program.
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a similar contractual document should be established between the operating law enforcement agency and the school district. This document will assist in developing program goals and evaluating the program to assess the success in meeting identified goals. It is recommended that MOUs are regularly reviewed.
Chain of Command	The School Resource Officer should abide by the law enforcement agency's policies pertaining to the chain of command.
Uniform	The School Resource Officer should be clearly identified as law enforcement. The uniform apparel and law enforcement equipment should be defined by the agency policy.
Weapons Storage	Normal duty gear is defined by the School Resource Officer's agency's policies. In the event additional weapons or gear is utilized, the cost and storage of these items can be determined by the law enforcement agency.
Use of Less Lethal Tools	The School Resource Officer should abide by agency policies pertaining to the use of less lethal devices. If there is a desired deviation from the agency's policies, the cost, storage, and use can be addressed and agreed upon.
Sharing of Information	The School Resource Officer and school personnel can share information in accordance with their respective state laws. Access and use of school camera footage, body-worn cameras, student database information, and any other information-sharing practices should be addressed and agreed upon.
Documentation and Reporting Requirements	The School Resource Officer should be under the immediate supervision and direction of their law enforcement agency. The agency's policies should identify the documentation and reporting procedures to be used. Any law enforcement documentation requested by school personnel should be addressed and agreed upon.
Expenses	The salary (including overtime), benefits, and equipment costs, office, and supplies can be addressed and agreed upon.
Office Space and Office Supplies	A clearly defined location should be established for the School Resource Officer to conduct confidential school and law enforcement business. It is recommended that the School Resource Officer's office/space and who will provide office supplies such as paper, a printer, computer, etc., be addressed and agreed upon.
Hours on Campus	Expectations of the School Resource Officer's campus hours and responsibilities that may require the officer to be away should be addressed and agreed upon.

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Recommendation	Description
Day-to-Day Duties	It is recommended that the School Resource Officer utilize the NASRO SRO TRIAD Model: Law Enforcement Officer, Public Safety Educator, and Informal Counselor/Mentor in their day-to-day duties. It is recommended that the School Resource Officer not be assigned to specific locations or duties on a daily basis, but rather have flexibility to be available to assist teachers, administrators, and students when requested and is consistent with their roles as a law enforcement officer, public safety educator, and informal counselor/mentor.
Extracurricular Activities	There are demonstrated benefits to the School Resource Officer's involvement in extracurricular activities. Such involvement by the School Resource Officer allows the officer to demonstrate their commitment to building positive relationships with students, staff, and parents. It is recommended that the expectations of extracurricular attendance and compensation should be addressed and agreed upon.

Source: National Association of School Resource Officers[80]

SUPERVISING SROS

Partner law enforcement agencies are responsible for the supervision of SROs within their regular chain of command and are required by Virginia state law to designate a law enforcement liaison for the school-law enforcement partnership. Depending on the size of the district and the number of SROs employed, the law enforcement liaison may also serve as the SRO supervisor, or law enforcement agencies may designate separate supervisors and coordinators. The DCJS recommends that SRO supervisors have prior experience as SROs and identifies the standards for SRO programs presented in Figure 2.2.[81]

Figure 2.2: Law Enforcement Agency Standards for SRO Programs

The SRO Program employs an effective recruitment and retention program to attract and retain effective SROs, reduce turnover, and provide redundance in coverage in case of SRO absence or vacancy.

The SRO Program engages in a selection process designed to ensure that officers who become SROs are well-qualified and effective.

The SRO Program provides qualified supervisory guidance that facilitates successful implementation and operation of the SRO Program.

The SRO Program ensures that SROs are appropriately trained and have opportunities for continuing professional development.

The SRO Program establishes an SRO performance evaluation and recognition system for SROs that includes a review of information from multiple sources, supervisory observation, and a mechanism for collecting feedback from students, families, peers, and school administrators and staff.

Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[82]

Law enforcement agencies in Virginia are also responsible for recruiting and selecting SROs. The National Institute of Justice recommends that law enforcement agencies consider the roles of SROs within the triad model and the goals of the specific SLEP when recruiting and selecting SROs to ensure that SROs are well-

[80] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Best Practices: School Resource Officer Program Recommendations." National Association of School Resource Officers, 2021. pp. 6–8. https://www.nasro.org/clientuploads/NASRO_BestPractices21.pdf

[81] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 14.

[82] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.

suited to their positions.[83] NASRO recommends that the SRO selection process incorporate the components listed in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: NASRO Recommended Selection Process Components for SROs

Component	Recommendation
Law Enforcement Qualifications	It is recommended that the selected law enforcement officer has at least three (3) years of law enforcement experience. This level of experience will help the selected law enforcement officer obtain credibility among the school faculty, students, and parents. This level of experience will also allow the selected law enforcement officer to have a greater understanding of the local agency's policies and procedures.
Experience in Youth Development	It is recommended that the selected law enforcement officer has demonstrated their willingness to engage with youth to develop positive relationships.
Communication Skills	The selected law enforcement officer should have excellent verbal and written communication skills. The selected law enforcement officer will be communicating, both written and spoken formats, with a variety of audiences. The selected law enforcement officer should be capable of presenting their information in several formats to meet the varying circumstances when communicating to the school community.

Source: National Association of School Resource Officers[84]

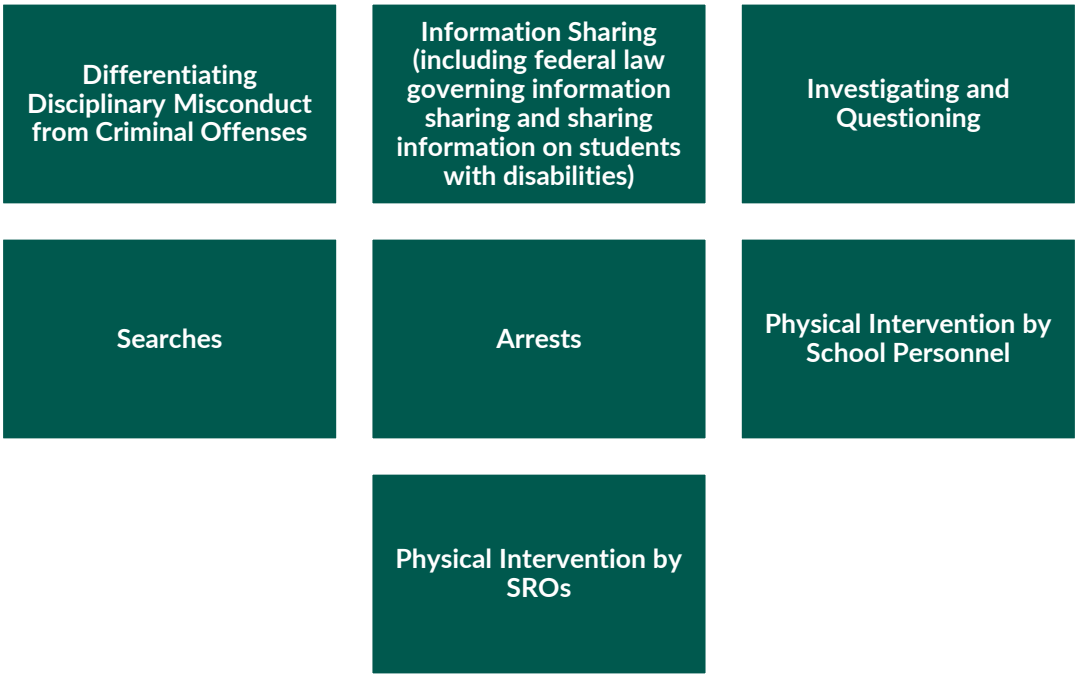
Although the school division does not directly supervise the SRO program, school divisions in Virginia are responsible for designating an administrator to serve as the point of contact for the law enforcement agency. Typically, divisions assign the district-level official responsible for school safety or student discipline as the point of contact.[85] School-level administrators are responsible for collaborating with SROs to develop policies and implementation strategies that meet the specific needs of the individual school site.[86]

School divisions and law enforcement agencies clarify expectations through a mutually agreed-on MOU. An effective MOU identifies roles and responsibilities for SROs, school divisions, and law enforcement agencies, and specifies the operational procedures listed in Figure 2.4.[87] MOUs should define the SRO's role as aligned with the triad model and specify roles and responsibilities related to law enforcement action, including a clear statement that the SRO will not be involved in administering school discipline.[88] The DJCS has developed a **Model MOU** that addresses each of these procedures and can be used as a template for MOUs developed by school divisions and law enforcement agencies in Virginia.[89]

[83] "FY 2021 Report to the Committees on Appropriations," Op. cit., p. 4.
[84] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Best Practices: School Resource Officer Program Recommendations," Op. cit., p. 10.
[85] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 15.
[86] Ibid., p. 17.
[87] Ibid., p. 5.
[88] "Best Practices: School Resource Officer Program Recommendations," Op. cit., pp. 6–7.
[89] "Virginia Model Memorandum of Understanding," Op. cit.

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Figure 2.4: Operational Procedures to Address in MOUs



Source: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services[90]

SPOTLIGHT – FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) provides an example of a school division in Virginia that has developed a comprehensive MOU with their local police department. The district created an MOU with the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) in July 2018.[91] The MOU, available in full here, specifies roles and responsibilities for FCPS, the FCPD, school principals, and individual SROs. The MOU groups responsibilities for SROs explicitly using the three categories of the triad model while emphasizing that these responsibilities are interrelated.[92] FCPS also emphasizes that the law enforcer role precedes the educator and informal counselor roles, consistent with Virginia state policy.[93] Figure 2.5 summarizes SRO responsibilities outlined by the MOU.

Figure 2.5: Summary of FCPS SRO Responsibilities

Domain	Responsibilities
Law Enforcer	▪ Adhere to federal, state, and FCPD guidelines for protecting schools from violence. ▪ Train school staff to address crisis situations. ▪ Use alternative conflict resolution strategies as alternatives to arrest where possible. ▪ Develop positive relationships with students

[90] Chart contents taken verbatim with minor alterations from: "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., pp. 17–19.
[91] "School Resource Officers." Fairfax County Public Schools. https://www.fcps.edu/node/36803
[92] "Memorandum of Understanding between The Fairfax County Public Schools and the Fairfax County Police Department For the School Liaison Commander and the School Resource Officer Program." Fairfax County Public Schools, June 2018. pp. 4–10. https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/2018%20FCPS-FCPD%20SRO%20MOU_0.pdf
[93] "School Resource Officer Annual Program Review, School Year 2019-20." Fairfax County Public Schools. p. 2. https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/SRO%20MOU%20Assessment_1.pdf

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Domain	Responsibilities
	▪ Document any criminal activity
Educator (Note that the MOU specifies that law enforcement duties take precedence over classroom instruction)	▪ Assist school staff in presenting on law-related topics ▪ Deliver law-related lessons to students (curricula must be approved by the SRO supervisor) ▪ Serve as a guest lecturer in elective courses ▪ Provide presentations to school and community-based meetings such as parent-teacher associations (PTAs) (presentations must be approved by the SRO supervisor) ▪ Coordinate with other sections of the FCPD that provide programs in schools
Informal Counselor	▪ Model handling stress, conflict resolution, and demonstrating respect for others ▪ Clearly communicate high standards for acceptable and unacceptable behavior ▪ Refer students who need additional support to school-based resources

Source: Fairfax County Public Schools[94]

SROs are selected and trained by the FCPD, which assigns a school liaison commander (SLC) to manage the SRO program and serve as the point of contact between the FCPS and the FCPD. Individual SROs report directly to an SRO supervisor, who reports to the SLC and liaises with FCPD district commanders.[95] All SROs are required to receive the training listed in Figure 2.6 once within their first six months in the SRO role and once every two years thereafter. For the 2021-2022 school year, FCPS added training addressing cybersecurity, restraint and seclusion, risk assessment, and the FCPS Trust Policy, which relates to protecting the privacy of immigrant families.[96]

Figure 2.6: FCPS SRO Required Training

- Mental Health Specific Training and Crisis Intervention Training in accordance with established and certified state standards
- Disability awareness training
- Implicit bias/racial bias training outlining attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner
- Restorative justice techniques and the Alternative Accountability Program as outlined in General Order 605, Juvenile Procedures
- Cultural Competency Training that is provided to FCPS staff
- Threat assessment training

Source: Fairfax County Public Schools[97]

[94] Chart contents adapted from: "Memorandum of Understanding between The Fairfax County Public Schools and the Fairfax County Police Department For the School Liaison Commander and the School Resource Officer Program," Op. cit., pp. 7–9.
[95] Ibid., pp. 4–10.
[96] "School Resource Officer Annual Program Review, School Year 2021-22." Fairfax County Public Schools. p. 3. https://www.fcps.edu/node/46705
[97] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.

The MOU also requires FCPS to evaluate the SRO program annually using the data sources presented in Figure 2.7.[98] The 2019-2020 school year evaluation reports that the number of arrests by SROs declined by a total of 56.8% in the first two years following the adoption of the MOU, while the number of students referred to juvenile diversion programs increased.[99] Data from the most recent program evaluation, covering the 2021-2022 school year, are not directly comparable to the previous year's data due to remote learning associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this evaluation reports that 90% of FCPS principals surveyed agreed that the SRO program effectively met its goals.[100] FCPS and the FCPD plan to develop a new MOU that more closely aligns with the state's model MOU in the near future.

Figure 2.7: FCPS SRO Program Evaluation Data Sources



Source: Fairfax County Public Schools[101]

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SROS AND SCHOOL STAFF

SROs need initial training and ongoing professional development to fulfill the essential components of effective programming. **The role of SROs draws on a community policing model that differs substantially from the traditional reactive policing model, meaning that SROs need focused professional development to understand their role**.[102] SROs also need training that provides them with information on the specific needs of children and adolescents, including adolescent mental health and juvenile law. Without this training, SROs may respond inappropriately to student behaviors in a school setting.[103] The National Institute of Justice recommends that all SROs receive training focused on working in the school environment and the specific context of the school and district in which they will be working, including initial training and ongoing professional learning.[104]

Research on police officers in schools finds that these officers often receive a low degree of specialized training relative to their authority in schools.[105] A 2021 study draws on surveys, interviews, and focus groups with SROs and school administrators in Virginia to identify professional development needs for SROs. SROs and school administrators identified the areas listed in Figure 2.8 as priority areas for additional training. However, the percentage of SROs who identified working with dangerous and threatening students as an area where they needed additional training was significantly higher than the percentage of school administrators who identified this area as a priority for SRO training.[106] NASRO identifies training on working with students with special needs as essential to ensuring that SROs understand how the needs of these students differ from those of other students. Training should include information on laws and policies

[98] "Memorandum of Understanding between The Fairfax County Public Schools and the Fairfax County Police Department For the School Liaison Commander and the School Resource Officer Program," Op. cit., p. 2.
[99] "School Resource Officer Annual Program Review, School Year 2019-20," Op. cit., p. 6.
[100] "School Resource Officer Annual Program Review, School Year 2021-22," Op. cit., p. 5.
[101] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Memorandum of Understanding between The Fairfax County Public Schools and the Fairfax County Police Department For the School Liaison Commander and the School Resource Officer Program," Op. cit., p. 2.
[102] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 7.
[103] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., pp. 30, 33.
[104] "FY 2021 Report to the Committees on Appropriations," Op. cit., p. 4.
[105] Javdani, S. "Policing Education: An Empirical Review of the Challenges and Impact of the Work of School Police Officers." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 63:3–4, June 2019. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6597313/
[106] Lawson, G. et al. "An Investigation of School Resource and Safety Programs Policy and Practice in Virginia." U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, January 2021. pp. 9–10. https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/investigation-school-resource-and-safety-programs-policy-and-practice-virginia

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related to special education, including the role of individualized education plans (IEPs) in specifying school responses to behavioral challenges for students with disabilities.[107]

Figure 2.8: Priority Areas for Additional SRO Training



Source: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs[108]

The DCJS provides initial training workshops for SROs and school administrators. All SROs assigned to schools in Virginia are required to complete this course, and registration is also open to school administrators seeking to improve their ability to collaborate with SROs.[109] The DCJS also links to training videos developed by the National School Safety Training Center.[110] A series of focus groups examining SROs conducted by the National Institute of Justice finds that available trainings typically consist of one-time workshops or presentations, and SROs need additional job-embedded professional development to support the implementation of best practices.[111] After completing basic training, SROs may benefit from more specialized professional development focused on issues associated with the SRO role, including those listed in Figure 2.9. SROS may also benefit from participating in the same professional development as teachers to ensure mutual understanding.[112]

[107] "NASRO Position Statement on Police Involvement in Student Discipline," Op. cit.
[108] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Lawson et al., Op. cit., p. 9.
[109] "School Resource Officer and School Administrator Basic Course." Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/training-events/school-resource-officer-and-school-administrator-basic
[110] "School Resource Officers." Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/school-resource-officers
[111] McKenna and Petrosino, Op. cit., p. 30.
[112] "Virginia School-Law Enforcement Partnership Guide," Op. cit., p. 38.

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Figure 2.9: Potential Additional Topics for SRO Training



Source: National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention[113]

NASRO identifies specific professional development needs aligned to best practices for SRO roles and responsibilities. Figure 2.10 lists professional development needs identified by NASRO as necessary for SROs to perform their duties as law enforcers, law-related educators, and informal counselors.[114]

[113] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Thomas, B. et al. "School Resource Officers: Steps to Effective School-Based Law Enforcement." National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, September 2013. p. 11. http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/NC%20Brief_School%20Resource%20Officers--Steps%20to%20effective%20school-based%20law%20enforcement.pdf

[114] "Best Practices: School Resource Officer Program Recommendations," Op. cit., pp. 10–11.

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Figure 2.10: SRO Professional Development Needs

Law Enforcement

- Constitutional and State law
- Armed response
- Crime prevention and mitigation
- Interview and interrogation techniques
- Investigations
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- Patrol operations
- Advocacy within the juvenile justice system
- Mandatory reporting

Education

- Crime prevention
- School safety
- Social media
- Victimization
- Law pertaining to students
- Safe traffic stops
- Driver safety
- Law enforcement careers
- Decision making

Informal Counseling

- Mentoring
- Crime prevention
- Empowering youth
- Resiliency and overall wellness
- Adolescent brain development
- Social and emotional development
- Supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Improving youth decision-making skills
- Trauma-informed practices

Source: National Association of School Resource Officers[115]

[115] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.

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