



# The value of carefully selected, specially trained school resource officers

A well founded school resource officer (SRO) program is one of the best school security investments a community can make. The return on that investment, however, goes well beyond school security.

## What an SRO is

By federal definition, an SRO is a career, sworn law enforcement officer (LEO) employed by a police department or other law enforcement agency in a community oriented policing assignment to work in collaboration with one or more schools. A key part of this definition is that an SRO is a commissioned police officer, with all the training, equipment, and authority of any LEO. This definition distinguishes SROs from retired officers and non LEO security guards.

The work of an SRO, however, is a specialized field within the law enforcement profession, akin to the specialties of special weapons and tactics, hostage negotiation, crisis intervention, and others. Like other specialties, SRO work requires specialized training, above and beyond that which law enforcement academies initially provide to new officers.

## Appropriate SRO roles

The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) recommends a triad approach to school policing, in which every SRO serves the school community as: (1) a mentor/informal counselor, (2) an educator/guest lecturer, and (3) a law enforcement officer. The former two roles assist the latter role. Developing positive relationships with students enables SROs to gather valuable information that helps them intervene before violence occurs.

School resource officers should not be involved in disciplinary issues normally handled by teachers and administrators. NASRO believes that wide acceptance of both its triad concept and its recommendation against involvement in discipline help explain a decrease in rates of juvenile arrests that occurred throughout the U.S. during a period when the proliferation of SROs increased.'

In their law enforcement role, SROs are the first lines of defense when unpreventable violence occurs. SROs can and have ended school violence, including shootings, thus mitigating the effects of such incidents. As any sworn law enforcement officer does, SROs regularly practice their tactical skills. NASRO trains SROs to move directly toward any threat to neutralize it as quickly and efficiently as possible.

## The benefits of an SRO

In addition to improving security, carefully selected, well-trained SROs bridge gaps between youth and law enforcement, creating positive impressions that transcend the school environment. These officers also help troubled youth change behaviors that might otherwise lead to involvement with the criminal justice system. An SRO is a school community's resident expert on emergency planning and response. As such, an SRO aids in the creation of effective emergency plans and the exercises of those plans.

Researchers at Ottawa's Carleton University conducted a two-year study of an SRO program in the Regional Municipality of Peel. In their 2018 report, they concluded that for every dollar invested in the program, a minimum of \$11.13 of social and economic value was created."

## Funding what's truly important

Like any law enforcement activity, school resource officer programs are not inexpensive. Communities usually find ways, however, to fund that which is truly important to them. Every school can benefit greatly by having at least one carefully selected, specially trained SRO on campus.

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<sup>1</sup> *Protecting Education: The Role of School Resource Officers in Preventing and Responding to Crises*, National Association of School Resource Officers, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Assigning Value to Peel Regional Public School Resource Officer Program*, Carleton University, 2018.