

A Brief for Parent Centers about School Resource Officers

A briefing paper from the
Center for Parent Information and Resources
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org>



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Read This Brief If... | ...the school system in your community, district, or state places (or is *considering* placing) sworn law-enforcement officers in public schools as part of building a safe learning environment for students.

This Brief Expands Upon... | OSEP's Dear Colleague Letter on the Use of School Resource Officers (SROs) in Schools, released September 8, 2016, and available online at:
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/160907.html>

About the Dear Colleague Letter | The Secretary of Education released this Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) to express the Department's increasing concern that school discipline is being administered by school resource officers (SROs), who are law-enforcement officers based in schools. There are many reasons for the Department's concern, including:

- the potential for violations of students' civil rights;
- the unnecessary citations or arrests of students in schools; and
- the unnecessary and harmful introduction of children and young adults into a school-to-prison pipeline.

Call to Action

Secretary King states: "As education leaders, you can empower schools, educators, and staff with the skills and capacity to ***avoid relying on SROs in the first place*** (*emphasis added*) and also eliminate SRO-related school discipline policies and practices that may harm young people and needlessly contribute to their involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems."

Basic Facts about SROs

Federal definition of an SRO | A school resource officer (SRO), by federal definition, is a career law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is deployed in community-oriented policing and assigned to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations to fulfill specific duties.¹

Appropriate duties of an SRO | Included in the federal definition of an SRO are such duties as:

- educating students in crime and illegal drug use prevention and safety;
- developing or expanding community justice initiatives for students; and
- training students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime and illegal drug use awareness.²

Three main roles of an SRO emerge from this list, which the National Association of School Resource Officers summarizes as: **educator** (i.e., guest lecturer), **informal counselor/mentor**, and **law enforcement officer**.³

How many SROs are there? | No one really knows how many SROs are working in our schools, but best estimates are between 15,000 and 20,000.⁴ Data from 2014 indicate that approximately 30% of public schools have at least one full- or part-time SRO. That’s roughly 29,550 schools in the country.⁵

SROs and Students with Disabilities

Disproportionate disciplinary practices | Current data are clear that exclusionary discipline practices—including suspension, expulsion, and arrest—are disproportionately applied to students with disabilities (and to students of color).⁶ This DCL on SROs adds to the resources already issued by the U.S. Department of Education regarding discriminatory practices in how students with disabilities are disciplined at school. The U.S. Department of Education has repeatedly cautioned school systems against such practices, most notably in ED’s January 2014 Dear Colleague letter (available in English and Spanish)⁷ and in the School Discipline Guidance Package of 2014.⁸

What SROs need and most often lack | Research shows that most SROs have received little or no training in many issues that disability and legal advocates see as essential to their role in schools.⁹ Among these are: how to work with young people, cognitive differences between juveniles and adults, techniques for defusing a volatile situation, and alternatives to physical intervention and other exclusionary practices. The list is longer when considering how to interact appropriately and legally with students with disabilities. SROs need training on how student behavior can be affected by various disabilities; the rights of students with disabilities under IDEA, the ADA, and Section 504; and the protections that these laws provide.

Recommendations and How-To’s

There are numerous experts who can speak to best practices in (a) deciding whether to use SROs as part of creating a positive school climate, and (b) establishing an effective program for school-based policing. We list three such resources on the next page.

From OSEP’s Dear Colleague Letter on SROs

“School districts that choose to use SROs should incorporate them responsibly into school learning environments and **ensure that they have no role in administering school discipline** (emphasis added).

The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice |

Safe School-based Enforcement through Collaboration, Understanding, and Respect (SECURE)

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/support.html#tools>

The SECURE Implementation Rubrics are designed to help school districts, schools, and law enforcement agencies determine the type of school-police partnership that will be most effective in their community and, where appropriate, to incorporate SROs into the school learning environment. There's a local implementation rubric and a state and local policy rubric. Parent Centers can and should be involved in the local and state policy discussions and decision-making process.

National Association of School Resource Officers | *To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools*

<https://nasro.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NASRO-To-Protect-and-Educate-nosecurity.pdf>

In discussing best practices in school-based policing, NASRO makes four main assertions: (1) A Clear and Concise Memorandum of Understanding is Essential; (2) SROs Must Receive Training Regarding Special Needs Children; (3) Use of Physical Restraint Devices is Rarely Necessary; and (4) NASRO Offers Support to Policymakers. Both law officials and schools should explore the cost-benefits of NASRO's Basic SRO [training classes](#) offered in various locations around the country. There are also [state chapters](#) of this association. Parent Centers may find NASRO's report particularly useful in preparing to be part of any SRO discussions and decision making in the local community or state.

School Safety Net | *Role of the School Resource Officer Tutorial*

<http://cte.jhu.edu/courses/ssn/sro/index.html>

This free online tutorial can help users understand the role of SROs and their responsibilities; the issues related to researching, developing, and implementing an effective SRO; and the importance of the partnership between the school administrator and the SRO in maintaining a safe school environment.

Additional Readings

School Discipline Consensus Report | Council of State Governments

The School Discipline Consensus Report draws on real-world strategies and research to promote truly multidisciplinary approaches to reducing the millions of youth suspended, expelled, and arrested each year while creating safe and supportive schools for all educators and students.

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/school-discipline-consensus-report/>

School Discipline Consensus Report Highlight Video

8-minute video

https://youtu.be/51qVdggp11k?list=PLvoZLdtBgik3v9rjEP2BD2_QYOh5wEy-C

Schooling the Police: Race, Disability, and the Conduct of School Resource Officers.

A detailed examination of current data, legal imperatives and court cases, disability protections under the law, the history of SROs in our schools, and recommendations for needed training.

<http://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=mjrl>

School Resource Officers: Safety Priority or Part of the Problem?

<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/01/30/are-school-resource-officers-part-of-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-problem>

Why So Few School Cops Are Trained to Work With Kids

Only 12 states mandate that school resource officers receive student-specific preparation.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/11/why-do-most-school-cops-have-no-student-training-requirements/414286/>

What We Know About the Effectiveness of Assigning Police Officers to Schools

Despite their popularity, few studies are available that have reliably evaluated the effectiveness of SROs.

http://www.popcenter.org/responses/school_police/3

Deciding Whether and How to Assign Police Officers to Schools

http://www.popcenter.org/responses/school_police/4

REFERENCES

¹ The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, 20 U.S.C. § 7161 (2012). Definitions are online at: <http://law.justia.com/codes/us/2014/title-20/chapter-70/subchapter-iv/part-a/subpart-4/sec.-7161>

² Ibid.

³ National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions*. Hoover, AL: Author. Online at: <https://nasro.org/frequently-asked-questions/>

⁴ James, N., & McCallion, G. (2013, June). *School resource officers: Law enforcement officers in schools*. Congressional Research Service [7-5700]. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Online at: <https://fas.org/spp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>

⁵ National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions*. Hoover, AL: Author. Online at: <https://nasro.org/frequently-asked-questions/>

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014, March). *Data snapshot: School discipline* (Issue Brief No. 1). Washington, DC: Author. Online at: <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>

⁷ U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. (2014, January). *Dear colleague letter on the nondiscriminatory administration of school discipline*. Washington, DC: Authors. English version online at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.pdf> | Spanish version online at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi-sp.pdf>

⁸ The *School Discipline Guidance Package 2014* is available online at: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/fedefforts.html#guidance>

⁹ Merkwae, A. (2015). Schooling the police: Race, disability, and the conduct of school resource officers. *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 21(1), 146-181. Online at: <http://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=mjrl>