



## National Organizations Call for Rigorous Training and Appropriate Use of School Resource Officers

Our nation is navigating two major public health crises that have uncovered long-standing social injustices and racial inequities. As a nation and as individuals, we are in the midst of navigating singular vicarious and collective trauma resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others. As national organizations, we are committed to ensuring the overall safety, well-being, equitable treatment, and educational success for all students. Thus, we acknowledge the critical need to continually examine the policies and practices that contribute to systemic inequities within our educational communities.

Any decision regarding physical security measures, including the use of school resource officers (SROs) and other law enforcement in schools must be locally determined and collaborative, and it must specifically include input from students, parents, families, educators, school leaders, and the wider community. The undersigned associations—which contributed to the [Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#) and supplemental materials—advocate for school safety efforts that balance physical and psychological safety. Part of these efforts has included promoting a clearly defined and appropriate role for school safety staff, including SROs. Recent events related to our country's history with police brutality and systemic racism have led to calls for the removal of all law enforcement, including SROs, from schools. As organizations that represent the professionals and parents tasked with creating, leading, and implementing school safety efforts, we acknowledge and strongly oppose the harm that inappropriate use of force and inappropriate role in school discipline efforts by untrained or undertrained law enforcement in schools can cause, particularly for students of color and students with disabilities. However, it is critically important to recognize that carefully selected and specially trained SROs differ from other law enforcement officers and security personnel assigned to schools who have not received adequate preparation to work with children, adolescents, and in a school environment.

To date, there is little rigorous research on the effects, positive and negative, of SRO programs, and the existing literature is contradictory and fraught with methodological weaknesses. Part of our commitment to examining policy and practice includes supporting efforts to evaluate any school-wide program, including the use of SROs. Based on available empirical and anecdotal evidence, carefully selected and specially trained SROs, when used appropriately, can make positive contributions to the school community and help foster trusting relationships between youth and the community. SROs can contribute to the safe-schools team by ensuring a safe and secure campus, educating students about law-related topics, and mentoring students as informal advisers and role models and can help prevent and mitigate acts of school violence. As such, our organizations believe that the only law enforcement officers who have received additional training to function as an SRO should be in schools. It is wholly inappropriate and dangerous to utilize police in schools without the proper training and role definition, as we outline below. Furthermore, we believe that the decision to have an SRO must be a local and collaborative one, with input from families, students, and educators, based on the unique needs of the school community and weighing the risk of harm with potential benefits. At a minimum, there should

be a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of the SRO program, that are rooted in school-wide and community data. These goals must be independent of school disciplinary practices. If a school community with stakeholder input determines the need for or if a school is required by statute to utilize SROs, we offer the following recommendations:

### **Standards and Training**

- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clearly defines the role of SROs, necessary training, proper accountability, and protection of student rights. The MOU should clearly dictate that school discipline situations are the responsibility of administrators and that an SRO should not be involved in classroom management issues or school discipline of any kind from a law enforcement perspective. The MOU must also include an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the SRO program by collecting and reviewing data that can be disaggregated by race and gender to address disproportionate rates in contact.
- Ensure that principals are directly involved in the interview, hiring, and ongoing professional evaluation process for SROs and have the opportunity for meaningful input about candidates for open positions to ensure that they are a good fit for the school's culture and climate.
- Ensure that school resource officers are carefully selected and specially trained in accordance with NASRO standards. SROs should be knowledgeable about child development, including development of students with disabilities, positive discipline, trauma-informed practices, implicit bias, intersectionality, and culturally responsive education. They should have skills in evidence-based intervention strategies, including restorative practices, youth mental health first aid, Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training, and conflict deescalation.

### **School Administration, Teachers, and Staff**

- Adopt effective discipline policies and practices (e.g., positive behavior interventions and supports, restorative practices) that teach and reinforce prosocial behaviors and reduce the overreliance of punitive and harmful discipline such as suspension and expulsion. SROs can play a positive role in supporting student behavior, but they should not be involved in application of discipline.
- Educate and empower teachers and school staff by providing strategies to build their skills to effectively manage classroom behaviors. Specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) have the skills to provide the necessary professional development and support for teachers and school staff to instill trauma-informed, restorative approaches to manage classroom behavior.
- Educate teachers and other staff about when it is appropriate, and when it is not appropriate, to request assistance from the SRO. Include education about the role of implicit bias when teachers choose to give students “benefit of the doubt” and when they choose to call for law enforcement assistance. Provide additional training as needed for staff who attempt to engage SROs in routine discipline. Consideration should be given to providing joint training among SROs, educators, and SISP to develop relationships and shared understandings of each other's roles and strengths.

### **Collaboration**

- Ensure SROs regularly communicate and collaborate with members of the school climate/school safety team—including school administrators, teachers, school-employed mental health

professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers), parents, and students (as appropriate).

- Maintain ongoing professional development for all staff, including SROs, regarding cultural and gender-responsive communication, school safety, bullying, student mental health, effects of historical trauma, cognitive development, and other issues impacting the school community.
- Provide training to school leaders that outlines their discipline management responsibility versus the law enforcement responsibilities of an SRO, as well as the legal boundaries for SRO action and investigation in schools.
- Partner with all stakeholders to ensure transparency and responsible dissemination of information regarding school safety, and the role of the SRO in the building, and the impact of the SRO program on students' physical and psychological safety.

### **Addressing Disproportionality and Equity**

- Routinely assess the needs of the school community and invest in programs, initiatives, and staff to address those identified needs.
- Increase funding for school-based mental health teams to work collaboratively with SROs, and for administrators to meet the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of students.
- Maintain data collection systems that allow for the review of disciplinary data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and disability status.
- Regularly review the district's code of conduct, in conjunction with district-wide discipline data, to determine if certain offenses disproportionately impact specific student groups (e.g., disrespect, insubordination, dress codes) and if exclusionary discipline is applied at disparate rates. Create a plan to immediately examine and remedy any disparities.

### **Evaluation**

- Regularly administer school-wide culture or climate surveys to students, parents, and school personnel, including SROs. The climate survey should measure the degree to which the well-being and safety of everyone in the learning community is intentionally fostered and nurtured, including relationships, collaborative leadership, ethics, equity, wellness, and communication.
- Annually evaluate the impact of the SRO program on the educational community to include assessment of overall feelings of safety, equitable treatment of students in relation to interactions with SRO on campus, and other key metrics necessary to promote a safe and supportive school environment. If the SRO program is not contributing to a safe school environment, or if the presence of an SRO is viewed as harmful by staff, students, or families, then schools must work to address these issues.

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