

Providing Safe & Healthy Schools in Ohio & the Role of School Resource Officers (SROs)

Introduction – A National Issue

Schools remain largely safe places for children; nevertheless, given concerns about threats of violence and school safety, schools have increasingly looked to SROs and other law enforcement as part of a safe schools strategy.¹ Nationwide, there was a 38% increase in SROs between 1997-2007; in Ohio, about 75% of Ohio's more than 600 school districts have at least one SRO.²

While research concerning the general impacts of SROs is mixed,³ the U.S. Department of Justice⁴ and the U.S. Department of Education⁵, in addition to others such as the Council of State Governments Justice Center,⁶ have offered guidance to help ensure effective school-police partnerships. Engaging in a collaborative process to develop written agreements, often referred to as MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding), that clarify SRO/law enforcement roles and expectations is among the key recommendations.

Ohio's Focus on Student Success, Safety & SROs

Ohio's creation of a SRO MOU is the result of significant stakeholder input and collaboration. In Ohio, supporting student success in school emerged as a priority of Governor Kasich's Ohio Communities 4 Kids (OC4K), an initiative to keep children in their communities on a positive path and out of the juvenile justice system. OC4K feedback concerning exclusionary school discipline practices and the role of SROs, along with the reports and guidance from several national agencies and groups noted above, helped to inform the process of creating a model SRO MOU for Ohio school districts. The Schubert Center for Child Studies, together with the Ohio Attorney General's Criminal Justice and Mental Health

Task Force Juvenile Justice Sub-Committee, the Dublin Division of Police and members of the Ohio SRO Association (OSROA), developed a Sample MOU for SROs and law enforcement in 2016.

The goal of the Sample MOU is to assist school districts and their law enforcement partners in the development of their own MOU's regarding their district's SRO program. A copy of the Sample MOU can be found at: http://artscimedia.case.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2017/04/06095939/O_SROAs-Sample-MOU-Final-12-16.pdf.

The Value of a Written Agreement Concerning SROs

All school districts have a fundamental interest in ensuring that their schools are safe places where students can flourish academically, socially and developmentally. Successful school and law enforcement partnerships are built on a set of shared goals and objectives.

School administrators recognize that SRO programs play an important role in fostering a safe school environment. Having a MOU in place helps to ensure that the SRO's role is in line with the existing school policies and procedures regarding discipline and in school interactions between students and law enforcement.

A MOU between school districts and their law enforcement partners provides a framework for the parties to use in order to strike a thoughtful balance between having a school that is safe, and also continues to be an inviting space for students to learn and grow.

Key Features of the Ohio Sample SRO MOU – Supporting Positive School Climate & Student Success

The Sample MOU notes that the MOU “clarifies roles and expectations and formalizes relationships between the participating entities to foster an efficient and cohesive program that will build a positive relationship between police officers, school staff, and the students, promote a safe and positive learning environment and decrease the number of youth formally referred to the juvenile justice system.”

The mission of the SRO Program is “to promote school safety by building a positive school climate in which everyone feels safe and students are supported to succeed.”

Key features of the Sample MOU include:

1. A clearly defined set of goals for the SRO program.
2. Background requirements or suggested expertise for employing law enforcement in a school setting, including an understanding of child and adolescent development.
3. Professional development, including training requirements that focus on age-appropriate practices for conflict resolution and developmentally

informed de-escalation and crisis intervention methods, in addition to other child and youth development related topics.

4. Clearly defined roles, responsibilities and expectations of the partners involved, including SROs, law enforcement, school administrators, staff and teachers. Specifically, an understanding that routine discipline matters and truancy is the responsibility of the school administrators. The MOU establishes a protocol for how suspected criminal activity versus school discipline is handled so that SROs, administrators, teachers, parents and students have a clear understanding of the school’s disciplinary process.
5. The need for coordinated crisis planning and updating of school crisis plans.
6. Creating partnerships with behavioral health and other care providers in the community for student and family support.

The Ohio Sample MOU is designed to serve as a starting point for local school districts to use in developing their own MOU in partnership with their local law enforcement partner and school community.

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Indicators of School Crime and Safety (2014).

² Children’s Defense Fund Issue Brief, SROS: Recommendations for Maximizing School Safety and Minimizing Risks to Ohio Children (August 2013), p.3.

³ James N. and McCallion, G., School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools, Congressional Research Service, (June 2013). Retrieved at: <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>

⁴ Fact Sheet: Memorandum of Understanding for School-Based Partnerships, USDOJ COPS (September 2014).

⁵ [U.S. Department of Education Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#) (January 2014).

⁶ Morgan, E., Salomon, N., Plotkin, M., and Cohen, R., The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014). Retrieved at: https://csqjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/The_School_Discipline_Consensus_Report.pdf