

Best Practices for School Resource Officer Programs

As school districts and law enforcement agencies throughout the state of Wisconsin enter into and renew contracts for School Resource Officer Programs, there is a critical balance that school administrators and law enforcement agencies must achieve so that each party receives necessary support and training, and the presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) in school buildings does not result in unnecessary contact with the criminal justice system. School administrators and SROs strive to provide an educational environment centered around student learning and safety. In their dual roles, SROs serve school districts and the greater community. SROs have the challenge of balancing competing interests because they may be called to serve in a law enforcement or SRO capacity during the school day. However, their role as a SRO differs from their role in law enforcement. As a SRO, their focus is also on providing redirection and guidance, and engaging in educational and relationship building activities. The fluid nature of these roles may contribute to confusion about roles and responsibilities. For this reason, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin Department of Justice have developed a joint model of best practices. The model is based on factors stakeholders should consider when entering into this type of partnership. Stakeholders include students, families, law enforcement, school staff, and community partners. The following information is not legal advice and only serves as guidance for School Resource Officer Programs.

Role of a School Resource Officer

Stakeholders are encouraged to:

1. Use a root cause analysis to identify if a Student Resource Officer Program is needed in a school, and if so, for what purpose. This should be determined before a program is developed.
2. Identify the knowledge, skill, and disposition criteria for SRO candidates, and obtain input from stakeholders during the selection process.
3. Discuss and define the role and responsibilities of SROs through a collaborative process.
4. Identify under what circumstances a SRO will respond to an incident involving a student.
 - a. It is essential that both parties are able to distinguish between disciplinary misconduct, which is typically handled by school administrators, and illegal conduct, which may be handled by law enforcement.
 - b. To the extent possible, SROs should not be used to enforce student discipline.
 - c. While it may be necessary for a SRO to get involved in an incident, it does not mean infractions must result in tickets and/or being taken into custody.

5. Distinguish between the role of a SRO from the role of a school security officer if both work in the same building.
6. Develop an organizational chart to identify how the work of SROs and school administrators are aligned in relation to other positions within both agencies.
7. Identify the school property within the control of a SRO.
8. Identify the community outreach and educational components of the SRO's role.

Training

Stakeholders are encouraged to:

1. Identify who will receive training.
 - a. School staff (such as administrators, teachers, and pupil service staff) and SROs should receive training to increase their level of competency. To the extent possible, collaborative training is encouraged and efforts should be made to ensure training is a supplement rather than a repeat of what they already know.
2. Identify the content of the training. These areas may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. school values and mission
 - b. child and adolescent development
 - c. cultural competency
 - d. federal and state disability, anti-discrimination, and special education laws
 - e. seclusion and restraint policies
 - f. positive behavioral supports, strategies and interventions
 - g. restorative justice practices
 - h. trauma informed practices
 - i. de-escalation strategies
 - j. the responsibilities of SROs/law enforcement as told by them and shared with school administrators
 - k. mental health
 - l. AODA
 - m. mandatory reporting
3. Identify the minimum number of hours, frequency, and other requirements needed to complete training.

4. Identify resources available to SROs and school staff, some of which may be from state and national organizations that facilitate professional development opportunities.
5. Identify what content school staff and SROs are expected to know or be able to do at the conclusion of their training.

Accountability

Stakeholders are encouraged to:

1. Maintain regular and frequent communication, especially between school administrators and SROs.
2. Identify building-level and/or district-level contacts for SROs, as well as law enforcement agency contacts for school administrators.
3. Identify how school administrators will provide support and oversight to the SRO program.
4. Discuss the expectations that SROs and school administrators have of one another.
5. Identify how the performance of SRO programs will be evaluated, by whom, and how often.
6. Identify how data will be used to inform any evaluations.
7. Identify the process someone may take to file a formal complaint against a SRO.

Data

1. The SRO program is encouraged to collect, maintain, and share data as requested on the following:
 - a. The number of students arrested or ticketed by a SRO or other member of law enforcement on school property. That information may include the:
 - i. Type of offense and if the case was referred for charging.
 - ii. Demographic data such as the student's age, gender, race, disability if known, and name of school.
 - b. Information on the daily interactions a SRO has with students and school staff.
 - i. The data should capture activities that describe what a SRO does on a typical day. This information may be used to evaluate programming.
 - c. Results of school and community climate surveys that contain questions related to the SRO program.

2. The SRO program should identify the system, which will be utilized to document and share information.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

Please refer to the *'Model of Memorandum of Understanding for School Resource Officer Program'* document for further guidance.

1. Determine who will be a part of drafting the document.
2. The MOU should be in place before a SRO works in a school building.
3. The MOU should be reviewed on at least an annual basis.