



SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AND SAFE SCHOOL PLANNING

School Resource Officers (SROs) can play an important role in a school's safe school planning efforts. The components of safe school planning include the physical, social, and academic environments of a school as well as a component identified as parent involvement. An SRO can contribute to the ways in which a school addresses each of these components.

The physical environment of a school refers to its grounds and buildings, surveillance support including the use of personnel and technology, and policies and procedures which pertain to movement on the school's campus. The social environment of a school refers to the atmosphere of the school. Is it one characterized by mutual respect and freedom from fear and intimidation? The academic environment of a school references the programs and curriculum available for students. And parent involvement alludes to parental and community support for the school.

When SROs are assigned to schools as their permanent beats, they become part of the school community and quite logically can be used in any safe school planning that takes place. The mere assignment of an SRO to a school represents an attempt to improve the school, and including the SRO in a school's improvement actions makes sense. The SRO, because of his/her law enforcement training and experience, has expertise that can be used specifically when considering improvements to the safety and security of the school. The special training an SRO undergoes further enhances his/her ability to contribute to such improvement.

SROs can contribute quite naturally to improving the safety of the physical environment of a school. SROs can assess the school's structure to determine where potential problems exist. Multiple, uncontrolled access points, for example, may make a school susceptible to trespassers. SROs are able to determine if the physical environment of the school might be contributing to the occurrence of such a problem and can then help develop plans to eliminate it. SROs can also help implement plans which address problems which may occur because of the way students and staff move about the campus. SROs can help identify the best ways to implement surveillance plans and can help make decisions concerning how to best use personnel and technology in plans which address the physical environment of a school.

SROs can also help address the social environment of a school. By their very presence, SROs add another figure of authority and respect to this environment. They can communicate this to students through the actions they take when dealing with students. Setting high expectations for behavior and making clear that consequences for inappropriate behavior exist become important. SROs can contribute to a school's efforts in setting high expectations and in making certain that students understand that certain behaviors will not be tolerated. SROs can contribute to the development of codes of conduct by relaying to school staff what constitutes unacceptable behavior from a legal standpoint. They can also help measure the school's social environment by employing school climate surveys which measure the safety and security concerns of students and staff. From these surveys, plans which focus upon these concerns can be developed with the ultimate goal being improvement of the social environment of the school.

SROs can contribute to plans which address the academic environment of a school as well. Through their roles as law-related counselors and law-related education teachers, SROs can supplement programs and curriculum offered by counselors and teachers. SROs are often involved, for example, with peer mediation and conflict management programs and with teaching law-related topics in classrooms. SROs can offer suggestions about these programs to other members of a school's safe school planning team and can be instrumental in carrying out these plans.

Finally, SROs can help with plans which are directed at increasing parent as well as community involvement in a school. SROs carry the philosophy of community policing into the school environment. A central principle of community policing involves the creation of partnerships between law enforcement and members of the community. SROs can help establish links to community resources. They can be part of a school's efforts to increase parent involvement, for example, by being willing to talk to parents about concerns they may have about their children's safety and security. By being a willing participant in the school community, the SROs can help plan and then carry out strategies which will create a sense of community ownership of the school and will increase community involvement in the school.

Because of what they bring to the school environment, SROs can be instrumental in their schools' safe school planning efforts. They are a resource which can be drawn upon by the schools to which they are assigned. They can contribute to plans directed at any of the identified components of safe school planning. By doing so, they can increase the safety and security of these schools in ways beyond the mere fact that they are present on a school campus.