

## Law Enforcement Resources

In 1998, an off-duty officer in a large Ohio city happened to be in the right place at the right time to catch a fleeing suspect wanted in six bank robberies. “This is what we live for” the officer told a reporter. “Every officer lives for getting a felony.”

Later in Toledo a young mother was brutally murdered. The police had few clues, and the city was in shock over the senseless killing. Eventually a fifteen-year-old boy was arrested for the murder.

Two felonies. Two arrests. The first happened by chance: an off-duty officer just happened to be in the area. The second arrest was made much more quietly. It occurred because a School Resource Officer received a tip from a student on his beat.

# school resource officers

## Ohio Law Enforcement Executive Planning Guide



OHIO OFFICE OF  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES

Bob Taft, Governor  
Maureen O'Connor, Lt. Governor  
Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services

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*Single copies of this School Resource Officer Planning Guide are available free of charge from the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services as long as supplies last. Please mail or e-mail requests to OCJS at the address listed above. For a copy of the full SRO study, please call the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services.*

## About the Study

In January of 1996 the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) began working with the Toledo Police on a major evaluation of community policing in the city. A 37-item survey instrument was designed to test the working assumptions of Toledo's COP strategy, which included School Resource Officers. The first SRO survey was administered in late 1996 and early 1997.

The second Toledo School Resource Officer survey administered in late 1998, was based on a 39-item survey instrument and included some 1,421 school respondents: students (1,290); teachers (98); administrators (15), and other school staff (18) in nine of Toledo's seventeen public junior and senior high schools. The responses represented 72% of the 1,980 surveys disseminated in November and December of 1998. All nineteen of the Toledo School Resource Officers also completed the survey.

With heightened concern and increased awareness of school safety issues, the OCJS research has generated a great deal of interest both in Ohio and nationwide.

*Jeffrey Knowles, Project Evaluator*

**OHIO OFFICE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES**

## Foreword

Crime is at its lowest rate in years, yet youth remain one of the most victimized and highest offender populations. Why?

A tremendous challenge facing the criminal justice system is to maintain the issue of crime on the radar screen of local officials. While funding is vital to keeping communities safe, law enforcement must work smarter than ever before, using available resources to prevent problems before they escalate into full-blown crimes. Law enforcement in schools not only seems like a wise investment but has been shown, through the three-year study of School Resource Officers conducted in Toledo, to work.

Charged by Governor Taft and Lieutenant Governor O'Connor to actively assist law enforcement and communities with criminal justice issues at the local level, the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services recently completed a statewide Juvenile Justice Needs Assessment as well as the SRO Study. Both assessments share a similar bottom line: the continuing need for prevention and intervention initiatives to enable every Ohio child to succeed.

Scan for yourself the following results and use them to design a School Resource Officer strategy that best fits your community, based on local needs and interests. Through the SRO initiative, we will truly be building a safer future for Ohio.

*Domingo S. Herraiz, Director*

**OHIO OFFICE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES**

## SRO Success Strategy

- Educate all elements of the community in the need for School Resource Officers and the importance of crime prevention.
- Assist in developing the Safety Plan for the school district.
- Maintain proactive, effective and innovative school programming.
- Work in problem solving partnerships with law enforcement, schools and community officials.
- Effectively communicate with the school community, parents, and the media.
- Participate in school in-service training for staff and parents.
- Be well-read and knowledgeable about available resources.
- Conduct ongoing security surveys to determine both the external physical environment as well as internal climate of the school.
- Provide effective leadership.
- Monitor federal, state and local legislation that may affect SRO activities or funding.
- Promote teamwork and synergy among all associated with the SRO initiative.
- Be open to new ways of thinking.
- Create sustainability of the SRO initiative.
- Evaluate: show what works and why.
- Market success.

National victimization studies have consistently identified school populations—and teenagers in particular—as the most victimized of all age groups. Based on Uniform Crime Report data, Ohio's serious crime arrests peak during the high school years.

Today, the SRO initiative is reversing that disadvantage in Ohio and nationwide. Not only does the SRO concept seem to be working, but it's been tested over a three-year period in Toledo junior and senior high schools. This study is being looked to by the country as one of the most comprehensive evaluations to date on the effectiveness of School Resource Officers as they reduce and prevent crime in the school community.

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The single most important finding from the comprehensive study of Toledo School Resource Officers was that SRO succeeds to the extent that both officers and the school population view the school as a community in which the SRO practices the principles of community policing. Relationship counts for more than regulation.

School populations proved remarkably open to the idea of an officer on full-time assignment in their hallways, and gave higher responses to the SRO acceptance in the school rather than to the immediate impact of the officers' presence on actual safety results.

#### SUMMARY OF SELECTED FINDINGS

- Two-thirds (64%) of school respondents said they felt safer with a police officer present.
- A large majority (73%) of all school sub-populations affirmed the conviction that the school resource officer seems as natural a part of the school as the teachers and students.
- In 1996, 57% of respondents viewed gang problems in Toledo schools as serious or moderate. In 1998, only 38% perceived gang problems as serious.
- Large variations separated student opinions from that of adults in school: while 61% of students agreed that most students they knew would not tell the SRO about a school crime, the figure slipped to 26% among teachers, and only 7% for administrators.

#### WHO BENEFITS?

- **Students:** schools are safer, students have an additional resource available to them, and they are exposed to positive role models.
- **Parents and Guardians:** children learn in safer school environments.
- **Teachers and School Administrators:** improved working conditions, with an ongoing partnership with law enforcement.
- **Law Enforcement:** more effective way to serve and protect youth and neighborhoods surrounding schools.
- **Criminal Justice:** time and money is economized through prevention instead of only enforcement.
- **Taxpayers:** tax dollars are invested more effectively for long-term prevention efforts.
- **Community:** the community is brought together to address issues of youth violence and crime in comprehensive, successful ways.

Suppose that as the Chief Executive Officer of your law enforcement agency you were guaranteed that your officers could be positioned in the mainstream of the most challenging crime problems and justice issues in your jurisdiction. Officers would be available to identify potential problems, respond rapidly, and even witness crimes as they occurred. Wouldn't you consider this an effective use of patrol resources?

In hundreds of Ohio communities, chiefs, sheriffs and law enforcement CEOs are seizing the opportunity to place their best officers in the center of the most victimized and greatest offender population: youth.

School Resource Officers are sworn law enforcement officers assigned to schools as their beat. Everyday these officers interact with students in school communities, complete with their own structure, rules, citizens, and crime. Imagine locations that daily draw thousands of youth and school personnel together, never having law enforcement as part of their everyday routine.

Until recently, schools have been largely off-limits to law enforcement. Officers came into schools only in response to some extreme or tragic situation. Law enforcement was at an extreme disadvantage, screened away from the very individuals who, more than any other group, affected crime in their jurisdictions.

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### WHAT IS IT?

A School Resource Officer program places officers in schools in an effort to create and maintain a safe learning environment for youth. Officers are first and foremost law enforcement officers whose primary purpose is to keep the peace in the school community so that students can learn. Officers are also counselors in the sense that they provide guidance to students and act as a link to support services both inside and outside the school. Finally, officers are teachers who provide the schools with additional resources by sharing their expertise in the classroom.

### WHAT DOES IT PROVIDE?

The SRO initiative is a mechanism by which safe learning environments can be created and maintained. It provides communities with a streamlined, effective youth-focused initiative, and saves money because the concept and its components are founded in prevention.

### WHO PAYS?

In most states, School Resource Officers are employees of local law enforcement agencies and agreements between school systems and law enforcement describe in detail the partnership and related duties and responsibilities. In Ohio, law enforcement has traditionally funded the entire cost of an SRO, then later shared the cost with school districts once the community realizes the benefit of having officers working in their schools.

- Nearly universal support was noted from teachers, administrators and other school staff for the SRO: 86% of administrators and 70% of teachers believed that the SRO's presence had positively impacted student behavior.
- Two-thirds to three-fourths of respondents supported the continuation of the SRO program, to make it a permanent part of the school community.
- An overwhelming 90% of School Resource Officers said they receive more information tips from students than they would from citizens on a regular beat, and 90% stated they had made good neighborhood contacts during their assignment.
- A majority (67%) of officers felt that in their role as SROs they should be responsible for coordinating other police programs that may be offered in the schools.

Community Oriented Policing (COP) is a way of policing that allows law enforcement and residents to collectively identify and address crime and disorder concerns in the community, and develop ways to reduce and prevent problems from occurring in the future.

The principles of community policing begin and end with the community in mind. Partnerships among law enforcement, residents, businesses, and agencies are essential to the long-term success of community policing and safe communities. Whatever else community policing may be, it always includes a positive, working partnership between law enforcement and the community.

The extensive surveys conducted during the Toledo study indicate that it is this very same kind of partnership in the school community that makes the SRO effective:

- 48% of respondents agree that students feel at ease talking to the officer about lots of problems, not just crime (24% *disagreed*)
- 69% of students said their parents or guardians like the idea of an SRO at school (4% *disagreed*)
- 58% believed the SRO was well-liked by the students (16% *disagreed*)

While evidence of positive or promising relationships does not guarantee the success of an SRO, schools provide the ideal environment for practicing the proven principles of community policing with chronic problems like juvenile delinquency and crime.

The Toledo study highlights the importance of viewing schools as communities, and the value of placing officers in the school environment.

As a law enforcement executive you are in a pivotal position to determine how to best utilize law enforcement resources. Consider the following issues to effectively plan for a School Resource Officer program in your community:

- **Priority:** your officers will intuitively sense whether or not the community policing philosophy and SRO initiative is real. Officers willing to take on the challenges of an SRO school assignment need and want to know that they are fully supported by the school and their law enforcement agency.
- **Logistics:** SRO is a new way of rethinking crime and delinquency issues, with a focus on prevention. SRO assignments are far more than extensions of routine patrol assignments or temporary special duty jobs. Assignments should be given careful consideration, with officers selected on the basis of their problem solving abilities and genuine interest in making a difference.
- **Procedure:** Agency procedures should reflect the unique function of the SRO, with the creation of a job performance evaluation that more accurately measures the duties and responsibilities of the SRO.