



Value of a School Resource Officer Program

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1. History of School Resource Officer Programs
 - Started in the 1950s in Flint, Michigan with the focus on connecting with youth
 - Community policing era started around the early 1970s but was not widespread until the 1990s when the Community Oriented Policing Services office was formed within the Department of Justice
2. The role of a School Resource officer
 - Law Enforcer – promote safety, address crime and fear of crime
 - Informal Counselor – build relationships, reinforce positive behaviors, connect youth to needed services
 - Educator – teaches topics related to law enforcement
 - Emergency Manager – develops and implements comprehensive safety plans (COPS, DOJ)
3. Why are some cities moving away from School Resource Officer Programs?
 - Cut in Funding – Gainesville, Florida voted to put 900k into something else (Fludd, 2020). Defunding an SRO program is a movement away from the community policing philosophy and makes departments more reactive than proactive.
 - Perception of a “School to Prison Pipeline.” There have been very few social scientific studies about SROs, but the studies that have been conducted so far do not indicate that the presence of SROs creates a “school to prison pipeline” in which children are saddled with criminal records for behaviors that previously would only have resulted in a minor in-school discipline (Johnson, 2016).
 - The perception that School Resource Officers are punitive against minority students. “No empirical research evidence was found to suggest widespread actions by SROs in the U.S. to criminalize the minor behaviors of students in general or minority students in particular. SROs create the opportunity for school-aged children to have non-confrontational, non-enforcement contacts with law enforcement officers. that may contribute to more positive opinions of the police later in life (Johnson, 2016).
 - Popular video and news of an SRO being physically aggressive towards students. “Solely focusing on isolated incidents receiving national media attention is not a reasonable way to determine the effects of the thousands of SROs assigned to schools throughout the country (Johnson, 2016).”
4. 2016 Juvenile Justice SB367
 - This Juvenile Justice Reform bill implemented a requirement for a memorandum of understanding between local law enforcement agencies and school districts to reduce arrests in schools and divert more misconduct cases in schools to the administrative school processes. This was done to reverse a trend seen in other

states and a few school districts in Kansas where SRO's were expected to attend to minor acts of misconduct rather than school administrators.

Statement of Support

Kansas Law Enforcement administration strongly supports the use of school resource officers for a variety of reasons including safety, reducing the fear of crime, and facilitating positive relationships with students. Although scholars agree that more research needs to be done, data supports the idea that the relationship students form with their SRO increases their faith in, and trust of, the police and provides a resource that students can tap into when they need advice, help, or information (Duxbury and Bennell, 2018). Theriot (2009) found that SROs were not associated with an increase in total arrests when controlling for school poverty and that schools with an SRO had fewer arrests for weapons and assault charges. Such results are contrary to the criminalization hypothesis and may even signify that SROs have a positive impact on students.

Although there are some quantitative data to support School Resource Officers, the greatest value is found in qualitative data. Throughout Kansas SRO's receive credit from students for the positive impact, they had on the student's life. Many of these students fall into marginalized categories. One of many examples includes an SRO receiving a graduation invitation from a young lady that asked him to stand in for her father at the graduation ceremony, who had distanced himself from her. The young lady explained that he was the only positive male role model in her life. Students come to trust the SROs so much they report their abuse, abuse to others and many other criminal activities

Kansas law enforcement leaders recognize that it takes a special person and special training to be a successful school resource officer. Departments cannot "settle" on this personnel decision. SROs need additional training beyond patrol officer training to be successful in the academic environment and working with youth. We cannot allow isolated national incidents involving SROs' misconduct derail community policing efforts within Kansas communities.

Sources

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