

Cops in Schools: A Passing Grade?

Barbara Raymond

POP Conference

November 2, 2009

Overview

- **What do we know about SROs?**
- **How can we improve school safety?**

School Resource Officers are a Growing Trend

- **17,000 officers assigned full time to schools**
- **1/3 of sheriffs' offices and 1/2 of municipal police departments have officers in schools**
- **Nearly 1/2 of all public schools have assigned police officers**

Why SROs?

- **School principals: national media attention**
- **Police chiefs: grant funding**

(Since 1999, the COPS Office has awarded over \$750 million, resulting in the hiring of more than 6,500 SROs)

Why SROs?

- **School principals: national media attention**
- **Police chiefs: grant funding**

Schools are relatively safe places

SROs Programs are Popular But it is not Clear How Effective They Are

- **Most school administrators and parents are satisfied with their SRO programs**
- **But there is a gap in the research**
 - **Most research is descriptive: what SROs do on a daily basis, typical traits of SROs, and perceptions of people involved with SRO programs**
 - **There is a lack of evidence as to whether SROs actually make schools safer**

Social Science Research is Often a Challenge

- **SRO programs often do not collect important process and outcome evaluation data**
- **Most participating police chiefs indicate no formal evaluation systems in place, and few SRO programs are subjected to independent evaluations to assess whether program goals have been met**

**More impact evaluations are needed
to establish SRO effectiveness**

What Is Known – Changes in Crime and Violence?

- **Outcome studies: mixed results**
 - some studies show an improvement in safety and a reduction in crime; others show no change
 - methodology problems with studies

What Is Known – Changes in Perceptions of Safety?

- **As in communities, police presence can make people feel safer**
 - **faculty, parents, and students feel safer when there is a police officer present in the school**
- **People feel SROs can be a positive deterrent to incidents and violence**
- **Corresponds with poll that 65% of public believe that an officer in school would reduce school violence**

What Is Known – Changes in Perceptions of Police?

- **Conflicting evidence:**
 - some say SROs have unique access to students, teachers, and parents, and can affect their perceptions of police
 - but a study of in Missouri suggests that the presence of SROs in schools does not change student views of police in general
- **It is possible that negative contact that young people have with police supersedes any positive impact**

What Is Known – Other Effects?

- **Benefits**
 - police can learn more about the concerns and fears of local youth
 - police can learn about the educational concerns of community members
 - encourage young people to join other police activities
 - indirect police recruiting tool
- **Potential negative effects**
 - constant presence of an officer can give the impression that something is wrong at the school or generate fear among staff, parents, and students

***Police Can
Improve Safety in Schools***

A Success Story in the U.K.

- **U.K. Safer in Schools Partnership (SSP) has looked at specific outcomes**
- **Lessons:**
 - **comprehensive community + school**
 - **many interventions and partners**
 - **SROs just one component of an overall youth plan rooted in the community**
 - **best when SROs are incorporated into neighborhood policing, not isolated at a school**

A Success Story in the U.K.

- **Reduced offending behavior and victimization**
- **Reduced truancy rates and total absences**
- **Safer school environments and safer routes to and from school**
- **Students and staff felt safer**
- **Improved educational attainment**
- **Improved multi-agency problem solving**
- **Improved relations between young people and the police**
- **Increased respect of young people for fellow students**

You Can Reduce

- **Graffiti**
- **Theft from lockers**
- **Bullying in schools**
- **Probably truancy**
- **And more**

Doing It Right

- **Highly targeted interventions – pick one problem**
- **Use data – what can I learn about this one problem**
- **Know the evidence about what works (popcenter.org)**

Success Looks Like

Thefts in parking area	Limit access to property; develop enforceable parking policy; patrol parking area; involve students in reporting suspicious activities
Fights in cafeteria	Increase SRO presence during lunch periods; adjust schedule and pattern of cafeteria entry and exit and seating arrangement
Thefts from locker rooms	Increase frequency of patrol during periods that larcenies occur; install surveillance cameras
Smoking or drug use	Increase surveillance of area; work with property owners to post <i>No Trespassing</i> signs; enforce trespassing violations

Data Is (are) Your Friend

- **School data: incident reports, disciplinary reports and referrals, and suspension and attendance records**
- **Police data, including field contacts, calls for service, and crime and arrest reports**
- **Student, school staff, and parent surveys**
- **Community crime and violence data**
- **Benchmark to other schools like yours**

Be Specific

- **Location: cafeterias, hallways, outside**
- **Time of day**
- **Age groups**
- **Participants**
- **Types of behavior**

Get a school map

<http://www.schoolcopsoftware.com/>

Your Job: Be the Safety Expert

- **SROs are not there for discipline**
- **SROs need to advocate for outcome-based strategies**
- **Be the expert on what works**
- **Link all of your activities to the safety goal**

Your Job: Be the Safety Expert

- **SROs are not there for discipline**
- **SROs need to advocate for outcome-based strategies**
- **Be the expert on what works**
- **Link all of your activities to the safety goal**

Does teaching advance the safety goal?

Some Challenges for SROs

- **Different cultures of police departments and schools**
- **Police are focused on public safety, schools on education**
- **SROs often have to navigate between school and police cultures**
- **May need specific training**
- **Turnover and reassignment**

Skills SROs Need

Selection

work effectively with students
work with parents
work with principals and teachers
knowledge of school-based legal issues
knowledge of school resources
knowledge of social service resources
understanding of child development
understanding of CPTED
teaching skills
public speaking skills
knowledge of school safety technology

Training

community policing in schools
problem solving
legal issues
cultural fluency
child development
mental health intervention
teaching classroom management
safe school preparation

An SRO is Not the Only Solution

- **problem-solving partnerships**
- **situational policing, including physical barriers, security technology, and access control**
- **holistic efforts to decrease risk factors or increase protective factors at the individual, family, school, peer, and community levels**
- **TA to focus on safety planning, crisis response planning, threat assessment, and security and safety audits**
- **sponsorship of youth activities and periodic in-school trainings and presentations**

Getting Your Money's Worth

- **An SRO can cost almost \$100,000 in salaries and benefits**
- **What's your ROI?**
- **Have specific goals and match activities to these**
- **Assess progress to course correct if necessary**
- **Do more than count activities and events – look for safety outcomes**

Measuring Success

Reduce crime and disorder in and around school	Crime incidents in school by type of incident, e.g., fights, bullying Crime incidents in vicinity of school Non-criminal disorder incidents in school Non-criminal disorder incidents in vicinity of school Victimization in school Victimization in vicinity of school
Develop positive relationships with students, parents, and staff	Number of students advised Nature of counseling Parent and child counseling sessions Perceptions of relationships among students, police officers, school staff, parents, school neighbors, etc.
Improve overall school performance	Graduation rates Academic proficiency Delinquency rate Severe discipline rate

Conclusion

- **Whether SROs make schools safer remains an open question**
- **But you CAN do things:**
 - **Doesn't have to be a cop in school**
 - **Know the safety needs and respond to those**
 - **Be creative, flexible and focused**

Barbara Raymond

Director, Innovations

The California Endowment

braymond@calendow.org

916-558-6763