



Tennessee Department of Education

Division of Resources and Support Services

Office of School Safety and Learning Support

Recommended Standards for the Eligibility, Qualifications and Training of School Resource Officers:

*Guidelines for Successful Partnerships between Schools Districts and Law
Enforcement Agencies*

March 15, 2007

Background

T.C.A. 49-6-42 provides that the Commissioner of Education working with the Commissioner of Safety recommend “employment standards for the eligibility, qualifications and training requirements for school resource officers.” Attached you will find employment standards for school resource officers. You will also find guidelines for effective partnerships between local education and law enforcement agencies. Both agencies have a long history of partnering together for the safety of students. Strong relationships strengthened the ability of both agencies to prepare for and respond to criminal and/or threatening incidents that occur in school settings. Well developed school resource officer programs provide the crucial link between school districts and law enforcement agencies in their continued efforts to establish and maintain safe and secure learning environments.

Defining School Resource Officers

In the process of developing employment standards, it was noted that there were varying definitions for school resource officers across the state. For purposes of this document, school resource officers are defined as uniformed, duly sworn, post-certified officers who are regularly assigned to a school setting. SROs are employed by local law enforcement agencies and act as liaisons between the police, the school and the community.

Acknowledgements

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Maury County Sheriff’s Department
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National Association of School Resource Officers
North Carolina Justice Academy
Office of the Attorney General of Florida
Rutherford County Sheriff’s Department
Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police
Tennessee Association of School Resource Officers
Tennessee Department of Education
Tennessee Department of Safety
Tennessee Highway Patrol (Dare Unit)
Tennessee School Boards Association
Tennessee Sheriff’s Association
United States Department of Justice (COPS)
University of Tennessee County Technical Assistance Service
Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

Goal 1: Establish Roles and Responsibilities that Support the Mutual Goals and Objectives of the School Resource Officer Program

Recommendation #1

- ***The Director of Schools and the Sheriff and/or Chief of Police should work together to define the goals of the program, the role of the school resource officer and the general framework under which the program will operate.***

Rationale: It is important that all parties have a clear understanding of the program goals. SRO programs vary in the extent to which officers are engaged in educational or mentoring activities. For example, many school resource officer programs use the triad plus one model to define the role of the SRO to include that of a teacher and counselor as well as law enforcement officer.

As a rule, school officials are responsible for all disciplinary matters, while the school resource officer will be responsible for responding to all criminal acts committed at the school. Determining what role each agent plays will prevent confusion and support the development of strong partnerships.

Recommendation #2

- ***Although school resource officers are employed, supervised and assigned by local law enforcement agencies, school administrators should be involved in the selection process. School personnel should have input in the decision to assign and retain a school resource officer.***

Rationale: Since a close working relationship is vital to the success of the school resource officer program, it is important that school administrators have confidence in the person selected for the position. Although school resource officers are hired by the local police department, the school district should have input in assigning SROs to a school building. School resource officers must also understand and respect the role that the principal plays as the building supervisor and physical plant manager.

Recommendation #3

- ***A written contract or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be developed to ensure that both the law enforcement agency and the school district understand the duties and responsibilities of each.***

Rationale: Successful partnerships require that all parties are involved in the planning process and have a clearly-defined role. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other written agreement helps clarify expectations and avoid operational problems. *(Examples of Memorandums of Understanding can be found under additional web resources)*

Recommendation #4

- ***Any funding for SROs provided to a law enforcement agency by the local board of education should be accomplished via an inter-local agreement.***

Rationale: Under the provisions of Tennessee Code Annotated (5-1-113), “The county legislative body of any county and the chief legislative body of any one (1) or more municipalities lying within the boundaries of the county are authorized and empowered to enter into any such agreements, compacts or contractual relations as may be desirable or necessary for the purpose of permitting the county and the municipality or municipalities to conduct, operate or maintain, either jointly or otherwise, desirable and necessary services or functions.”

The Department’s Office of Internal Audit recommends that if funds are going to be transferred between agencies that the following items be considered when creating an inter-local agreement:

- A description of each type of service to be provided
- A description of the location(s) the service will be provided
- A description of the unit to be used to measure or quantify each type of service for billing purposes
- The amount that will be billed per unit of service
- The supporting documentation, such as time sheets and other records, that should be prepared, submitted, and filed to support the costs of the program
- A description of the billing cycle
- The time period for which funding will be provided
- The maximum dollar amount that will be paid for the time period of the inter-local agreement
- If applicable, a description of how ancillary costs, such as travel, supplies, etc., are to be documented and billed

Goal 2: Select Qualified Candidates

Recommendation #1

- ***School resource officers must be post-certified, sworn officers of a law enforcement agency within the jurisdiction that includes the school community being served.***

Rationale: A school resource officer is first and foremost a law enforcement officer serving a jurisdiction that includes the school community. His or her specific “beat” is the school.

Recommendation #2

- ***School resource officers should have at least 2 years experience as a police officer or the equivalent.***

Rationale: Working in a non-traditional setting presents unique challenges. School resource officers need to have the expertise and experience of traditional police work to draw upon in performing their duties in a school setting. A seasoned officer is more likely to have developed the attributes needed to work in a school environment.

Recommendation #3

- ***Not only should school resource officers be selected based on specific qualifications, but also a genuine desire to work with youth.***

Rationale: Due to the nature of the position, school resource officers spend the majority of their time interacting with youth. Officers that have a sincere desire to work with students are promising candidates for the position. The ability of a school resource officer to connect with students and provide positive and enriching relationships is a very important trait and will have a positive effect on the school’s overall climate.

Goal 3: Coordinate Ongoing Partnerships and Trainings for School Resource Officers and School Officials

Recommendation #1

- ***School resource officers should receive 40 hours of specialized training provided by the Department of Justice, the National Association of School Resource Officers, or other appropriate and recognized entities.***

Rationale: The role of a school resource officer is significantly different than that of a traditional patrol officer. The position requires skills and knowledge that may not be addressed in traditional law enforcement training. Therefore, it is important for school resource officers to receive specialized training that will prepare them to work in a school setting.

Recommendation #2

- ***After the initial training, school resource officers should attend 16 hours per year of training specific to their school resource officer duties.***

Rationale: To ensure that school resource officers remain up-to-date with school related issues, trends, and best practices, it is important that ongoing training take place. This will provide the officer with the knowledge and ongoing professional development necessary to effectively do his or her job.

Recommendation #3

- ***School resource officers and school personnel should collaborate in planning and training for emergencies and school safety. Furthermore, both should take an active role in training school personnel regarding emergency management issues.***

Rationale: School resource officers should work closely with school officials in the development and implementation of school safety plans. These plans should include and engage other first responders in the community.

Recommendation #4

- ***Within the bounds of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the school district and the law enforcement agency should participate in an open exchange of information and resources to better serve the community and students.***

Rationale: To best serve both the school district and the law enforcement agency, it is important that lasting, long-term collaborations take place. In addition to the previously cited MOU, it may be necessary to formalize information-sharing procedures in order to address student confidentiality concerns.

Additional Web Resources

- National Association of School Resource Officers
www.nasro.org Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
www.cops.usdoj.gov
- Tennessee School Resource Officers Association, Inc.
www.tnsro.com
- Kentucky Center for School Safety
www.kycss.org/law/sro/
- The Center for Prevention of School Violence
www.ncdjjdp.org/cpsv/sro.htm (*Sample MOU*)
- North Carolina Justice Academy
www.jus.state.nc.us/NCJA/w-hs-srocert.htm
- Comparison of Program Activities and Lessons Learned among 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs
www.ncdjjdp.org/cpsv/Acrobatfiles/SRO_Natl_Survey.pdf
- The Virginia School Resource Officer Guide
www.dcjs.virginia.gov/forms/cple/sroguide.pdf (*Sample MOU*)
- Office of the Attorney General of Florida
www.myfloridalegal.com/pages.nsf/4492d797dc0bd92f85256cb80055fb97/25249121322a8d7a85256cca00575d2b!OpenDocument
- Tennessee School Safety Center
<http://www.tennessee.gov/education/learningsupport/index.html>
- Rutherford County Sheriff's Department
<http://www.rutherfordcounty.org/so/sro.htm>
- Maury County Sheriff's Department
www.maurycounty-tn.gov/sheriff/SRO.htm