



School Resource Officers (SROs)

February 2021

School districts may use School Resource Officers (SROs) to provide safety services in schools. The role of the SRO is determined locally, and may be specified in an agreement between the relevant law enforcement agency and the district.

What are SROs?

School Resource Officers (SROs) are sworn, licensed career peace officers with arrest powers who work full- or part-time in Minnesota public schools. SROs are also sometimes called School Liaison Officers. SROs are employed by municipal police departments and sheriffs' offices, and a district may contract with one or more law enforcement agencies to provide SROs to work in the schools in the district. Most SROs carry a firearm, badge, cell phone, and handcuffs and about half dress in full uniform.

SROs must comply with the [Minnesota Peace Officers Standards and Training Board requirements](#) in rule for all licensed peace officers ([Minn. Rules 6700.0700](#)); there are no additional statutory or administrative requirements for training or certification specific to SROs. No state agency specifically evaluates SROs or collects data regularly on SROs. In 2014, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) conducted a statewide survey of SROs entitled [Law Enforcement in Minnesota Schools: A Statewide Survey of School Resource Officers](#) to fill gaps in knowledge regarding SRO programs and explore whether Minnesota programs are consistent with recommended practices. Information from that survey appears in this publication.

What is the role of SROs?

The role of the SRO is determined locally. The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) recommends schools and law enforcement agencies use a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to clearly define SRO roles and responsibilities in schools. The agreement or MOU may state whether the SRO should play a role in student discipline, how the law enforcement agency will select an officer for the SRO assignment, the SRO's work hours, how the SRO's performance will be evaluated, how the law enforcement agency and school district share information, supervision and chain of command for the SRO, and any other provision the district and law enforcement agency wish to specify.

Proponents of SRO programs argue that SROs make schools safer by preventing crime, developing relationships with students, and responding to threats within the school, such as armed shooters. Others argue that SROs may make students feel less safe and that SROs contribute to racial disparities in student discipline and referrals to law enforcement or arrests for low-level offenses.

How many public schools have SROs?

The 2014 DPS survey showed Minnesota had about 315 full- or part-time SROs who generally are assigned to two or more public schools. SROs serve about 28 percent of all Minnesota public elementary, middle, and high schools. About half the SROs are assigned in the Twin Cities, serving larger numbers of students in fewer schools, and about half are assigned in Greater Minnesota, serving more schools with fewer students. The DPS survey reported the racial composition of Minnesota's student body was "considerably more diverse" than the SRO population.

According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), about 46 percent of traditional public schools in the United States, and 19 percent of charter schools, have an SRO at school at least once a week. In addition, some traditional public schools and charter schools have other sworn law enforcement officers present at school at least once a week. Charter schools are more likely than traditional public schools to have a security guard or other security personnel present at least once a week.

What funding is available to pay for SROs and SRO training?

There are generally three ways to pay for an SRO: (1) the district pays the cost; (2) the law enforcement agency pays the cost; or (3) the district and law enforcement agency share the cost. Federal or state grants have sometimes been available to districts or law enforcement agencies to pay the cost of SROs. A school district may use its general education revenue or safe schools levy to pay for school resource officers. A district also uses its general education revenue to pay for teachers and staff, instructional materials, and other operating costs. The safe schools levy under [Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.44](#), allows districts to levy a limited amount for many types of student and staff safety costs, including SRO costs. School violence prevention program providers under [Minnesota Statutes, section 145.958](#), may develop initiatives with police liaison officers to reduce and prevent violence among at-risk youth.

The School Safety Center, originally funded by a federal grant, was reestablished by the legislature in 2012. The Center provides SRO trainings and works with schools on facility security assessments, emergency plan reviews, active shooter procedures, and other school safety issues. In 2019, the legislature increased funding for the Center to increase staffing from three to five full-time employees.

How do SROs affect legal aspects of student discipline?

Legal issues related to student search and seizure, parental notification, student confidentiality, and data practices affecting student records, among other topics, can be more complex when an SRO is present. For example, the legal standard for a student search depends upon the specific circumstance. A “reasonable suspicion” standard applies when school officials search a student on school grounds. A higher “probable cause” standard applies when a law enforcement search occurs on school grounds. The type of search also dictates the type of warning a student receives. School officials must give students a *Tennesen* warning if they are investigating a disciplinary matter. Law enforcement officials must give students a Miranda warning if they are collecting criminal investigative data as part of a custodial interrogation.

What alternatives to SROs are available to districts?

Districts are not required to use SROs and have great flexibility to determine how they use SROs, if they choose to do so. Some districts opt to use other types of staffing to provide security services, whether in conjunction with SROs or instead of SROs, or to shift funding to student support services. Some districts contract with or hire security guards, safety coaches, or public safety support specialists. The School Safety Center has provided training to district staff who are not police officers but provide safety services.



Minnesota House Research Department provides nonpartisan legislative, legal, and information services to the Minnesota House of Representatives. This document can be made available in alternative formats.