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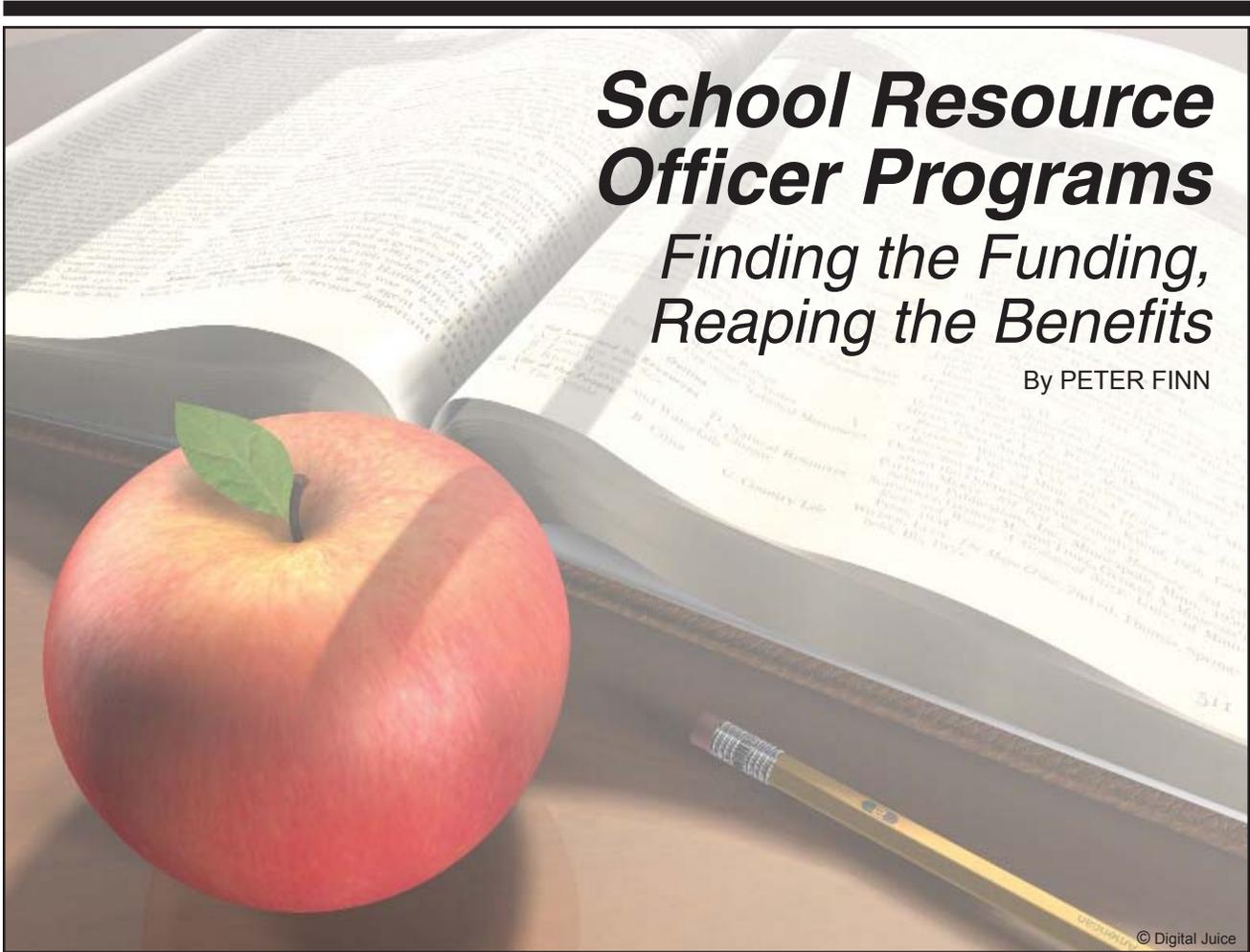
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# **School Resource Officer Programs**

## *Finding the Funding, Reaping the Benefits*

By PETER FINN

**“W**e pay for the [SRO] program because, by assigning officers to the schools, we free up manpower on the street. Before we had SROs, we were constantly sending patrol officers to the schools. It makes sense from a deployment point of view to have officers in the schools, rather than send over patrol officers whenever there is a problem. The high school has 2,300 kids and 200 staff; it’s a small town.”<sup>1</sup>

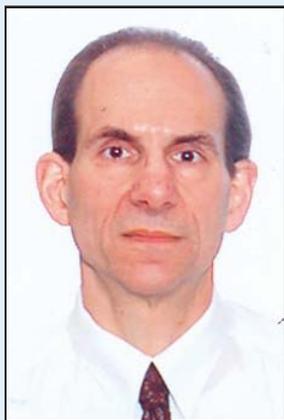
Interest has grown in placing sworn law enforcement

personnel in schools to improve school safety and relations between officers and young people. During 1999, 30 percent of local police departments, employing 62 percent of all officers, had about 9,100 full-time school resource officers (SROs) assigned to schools.<sup>2</sup> In 1997, an estimated 38 percent of sheriff’s departments had a total of 2,900 deputies assigned full time as SROs.<sup>3</sup>

In the accepted school resource officer model, SROs engage in three types of activities: law enforcement, teaching,

and mentoring. However, the relative emphasis devoted to these duties varies considerably from SRO to SRO and from program to program. Often, efforts begin with an initial focus on law enforcement that evolves into a more balanced approach with increased teaching and mentoring.<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge about SRO programs within the law enforcement community varies also. Some police departments and sheriff’s offices are unfamiliar with the programs, while others know about them but believe



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they provide few, if any, benefits, and still other agencies feel that they do not have available funding to pay for a program. However, numerous law enforcement agencies have gained substantial benefits by operating an SRO program. Furthermore, while departments frequently have difficulty finding program funding, many have managed to pay for SROs by sharing costs with other groups. The author presents information he collected as part of two reports prepared for the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office), and the National Institute of Justice to demonstrate how SRO programs have benefitted several law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve, as well as how these departments have funded their efforts.<sup>5</sup>

### REAPING THE BENEFITS

The author's research found four main benefits of an SRO program. It can reduce the workload of patrol officers or road deputies, improve the image of officers among juveniles, create and maintain better relationships with the schools, and enhance the agency's reputation in the community.

#### Reduce Workload

According to the author's research, many agencies said that before they began their SRO programs, they had to send patrol officers or deputies to schools to handle problems up to several times a day, sometimes tying up the officers for hours at a time. As a result, law enforcement administrators felt (and subsequently discovered) that placing officers in the schools as SROs would

reduce and even eliminate 911 calls from the schools. Based on an analysis of 911 calls in 1999 before the program began and again in 2001 after the SROs were in the schools, one sheriff's office determined that SROs handled 280 calls in 2001, thereby freeing deputies for other duties. A chief of police reported that the number one reason he fought for the SRO position was because patrol officers spent many hours each week investigating crimes at the school, so it only made sense to assign an officer to the school full time. An assistant police chief in another jurisdiction advised that at a meeting on department budget cuts, he did not raise the idea of reducing the SRO program, although some personnel felt it took too many officers away from patrol duties because they did not realize the volume of calls SROs handle.

In addition to freeing patrol officers from responding to 911 calls from the schools, SROs *prevent* problems that would have resulted in an emergency call, thereby reducing the burden on patrol officers even more. Often, SROs accomplish this because students realize that with an officer stationed in the school, they likely will be arrested if they break the law. In addition, many students tell SROs when trouble is brewing,

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and the officers then take steps to control it.

SRO programs can save time for individual bureaus within an agency. One police department's administrators found that funding three additional SROs reduced the juvenile bureau's workload because these officers now respond to many incidents that detectives previously had to handle. In addition, SROs can give their detective bureau or patrol division personnel valuable information about crimes in the community that students warn them about.

Finally, SROs not only save patrol officers time but also frustration and stress. SROs have been screened for their interest in working with young people and trained in how to deal effectively with them. As a result, they not only spare patrol officers a difficult assignment but also improve the agency's image with juveniles through their firm but sensitive behavior.

### **Improve Image Among Juveniles**

Many law enforcement administrators reported that putting SROs in the schools improves the attitude and behavior of young people toward police officers, resulting in increased crime reporting. One chief of police related that when he visited the school with the

SRO, students approached him, asking to talk about problems.<sup>6</sup>

### **Create Better Police-School Relationships**

A number of police and sheriff's departments valued the collaborative atmosphere that SROs typically create between the agency and the school district. For example, one chief of police reported that the program

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***School districts represent the most common source agencies have turned to for funding SRO programs.***

changed the relationship between the department and the school system. Now, he can pick up the telephone and talk immediately to the superintendent. "There's a trust because they know us, so they are much more comfortable bringing the department into the schools. They also bring us problems they might not have shared with us in the past. Principals and the superintendent now call the captain about potential issues that could come up, such as problems with a teacher, 'Here's

what we've got; what should our next steps be?' Before the SRO program began, the schools would have handled the problem on their own and maybe ruined a chance to do a decent investigation."<sup>7</sup>

### **Enhance Agency Reputation**

Finally, the author's research found that SROs enhanced the agencies' images in their communities. Some personnel reported that the program aided their sheriffs' bids for reelection. A member of one sheriff's office pointed out that a large number of school employees voted in the election.

### **ESTIMATING THE COSTS**

Despite what might seem insuperable obstacles to finding money for an SRO program, a large number of police departments and sheriff's offices have managed to secure the necessary funding. However, before looking for possible funding sources, agencies need to develop a realistic estimate of what their programs will cost.

While expenses vary according to the number of SROs in their program, agencies need to consider other factors, including the officers' length of employment with the department and local salary levels, whether the budget covers supervisory and support staff salaries, and any costs related to training,

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overtime pay, equipment, and cruisers. As a result of these and other considerations, the author's research indicated that SRO program budgets ranged from \$80,000 for 1 officer in a small community to \$2.4 million for 27 SROs, 3 supervisors, and 1 office manager in a large city.

Typically, the law enforcement agency and one or more school districts share program costs. Some departments have a fixed formula for paying for SROs. In one state, interested school districts submit a formal request for an SRO to the state police, wherein the school agrees to pay the salary of a newly hired trooper. But, because the state police prefers to place a seasoned—and relatively expensive—officer in the school as the SRO, it contributes the difference between the salary of a newly hired trooper and an experienced one.

More often, law enforcement agencies and school districts negotiate each party's share of the costs. For example, one police department and secondary school district agreed to split the cost of 12 SROs and 1 field agent. The elementary school district agreed to pay 40 percent of the cost of the 6 SROs and 1 field agent, while the police department paid the remaining 60 percent. Program funds are supplemented by a COPS in Schools grant.

Some law enforcement agencies have arranged for automatic modifications of each contributor's share of program costs. For example, as law enforcement grant money fluctuates, the school district's and city's shares automatically compensate.

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## FINDING THE FUNDING

### School Districts

School districts represent the most common source agencies have turned to for funding SRO programs. Law enforcement organizations have used three main points to encourage school districts to contribute money.

#### *Improve Safety*

Most school district administrators support efforts they believe will improve safety in the schools because protecting students represents one of their responsibilities. As one high school principal said, “If you

have the opportunity to have an SRO at your school, how stupid of you to say no. It is an awesome responsibility to be a principal and in charge of the safety of students today. We are very vulnerable.”

SROs serve to keep principals and assistant principals, not just students, out of harm's way. For example, one high school assistant principal advised that the SRO was extremely important for him to do his job because he knows he has backup, someone skilled in dealing with contentious situations. Another one said that she has the SRO sit in with her when she has to discipline a student and feels the situation may potentially escalate. A third high school assistant principal reported that when parents become belligerent, she asks the SRO to sit in to “observe,” which usually produces a calming effect.

Some law enforcement agencies explain to school administrators that SROs can contribute to school safety by developing or reviewing school crisis management plans. One SRO sits on the school board's security committee and has assessed the physical safety of each building. He helped devise crisis plans to implement during various types of emergency situations. As a result, a school official reported that the officer had proven immensely helpful during a meningitis scare by

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coordinating communication and contact among public health experts, parents, students, and school district personnel.

Another reason many school administrators support program funding is because SROs routinely prevent crime and violence. One high school principal said he could not count the number of times that the SRO's contact with students had prevented more serious problems from breaking out on campus. A school board member stated that most board members felt that they were getting their money's worth because the SROs were a great deterrent. Moreover, some school systems provide funding because SRO programs can help reduce their legal liability.

#### *Increase Perception of Safety*

According to a superintendent of schools, students need to feel safe, and the SRO's presence makes a difference in their perception of safety. A school board member reported that the school district conducted surveys of students that showed safety as one of their top concerns, and the SRO program is a small price to pay to help do that.

#### *Quick Response Time*

Over and over in the author's research, law enforcement agencies reported receiving funding because school

administrators appreciate the quick response from their SROs in a crisis compared with the time it took in the past for an officer or deputy to arrive after they called 911. The quick response relieves administrators from having to detain and pacify an often agitated, accused student for a long period of time. One high school assistant principal reported that if she called 911 every time a violent incident occurred, she would



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have to wait for a patrol officer to arrive. Instead, the SRO handles it immediately. When one city budget committee considered making cuts in the SRO program to save money, the principals opposed the reduction because their major concern was preventing disruption and having an immediate capacity to deal with it when it occurred. A council member in another jurisdiction said that the town had accepted the SRO program as part of the police department's

budget because the high school principal and chief convincingly demonstrated to the council that an officer assigned to the school full time dramatically reduces the response time for incidents.

#### **Local Government**

Typically, local elected and appointed officials, as well as school committee or board members, decide on the funding for the local law enforcement agency and school system. As such, they often are in the best position to provide or find funding for an SRO program.

Law enforcement organizations can help motivate public officials to provide funding by reminding them of their responsibility for ensuring student safety and the risk of being blamed if a tragedy occurs. One city's chief public safety officer and mayor decided to continue to fund the SRO program after a grant ran out because, in light of the need to provide homeland security, they said that it was the mayor's responsibility to protect students and to have a liaison in the schools.<sup>8</sup> To meet this obligation, government officials have made sacrifices in other areas, such as funding for recreation, library expenses, and public works, to help pay for SROs.

#### **Federal Government**

Law enforcement officials often know that the COPS

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Office has provided grants to over 3,000 law enforcement agencies to cover entry-level salaries for SROs up to \$125,000 per SRO over a 3-year period.<sup>9</sup> However, they may not realize that Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act formula grants (Public Law 107-110) expressly allow school districts to spend up to 40 percent of their Title IV money to hire and train school security personnel.<sup>10</sup> For example, several school districts use Title IV funds to reimburse the sheriff's office for providing SROs to their schools, whereas another sheriff's department covers some of its SROs' training costs using school district Safe and Drug-Free Schools grant funds.

The Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program (Byrne Formula Grant Program)—funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice—provides money to states and units of local government to support personnel, equipment, training, technical assistance, and information systems to improve the criminal justice response to violent and serious crimes. One county funded 75 percent of two SROs' salaries for 3 years with Byrne grants.<sup>11</sup> One police department used \$1.8 million in Juvenile Accountability Incentive block grants from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office

of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to establish and maintain accountability and prevention programs and to provide overtime for SROs to participate in activities that involve interacting with students after school.<sup>12</sup>

### **Innovative Approaches**

Several law enforcement agencies have obtained funds from private sources, fund-raising events, and donations of money and materials. When a

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COPS in School grant ran out in the middle of the school year, city officials in one community agreed to pay two-thirds of the SRO's cost if the school district paid the remainder. Because the school district did not have the money, local civic organizations and charities raised the funds.<sup>13</sup> One police department secured about \$15,000 for its program from national and local businesses. And, a sheriff's office obtained a grant from a

community foundation to purchase laptop computers for elementary school SROs. The program raised money by hosting a charity golf tournament and secured in-kind office space in a building owned by the school district.<sup>14</sup>

### **MAINTAINING THE FUNDING**

Once a program has proven itself, school districts often increase their share of program funds because they see that it helps protect students. Also, a tragedy at a school where board members had reduced or eliminated the SRO program could constitute a political disaster. One school board member acknowledged his concern about cutting the program and then experiencing a critical incident, after which constituents would ask, “Why did you cut the SRO?”

Schools often can find the money if they value the program enough. The superintendent of schools in one community reported that when the COPS in Schools grant ran out, he tried to “go it on the cheap”—without an SRO—but, in 3 weeks “all heck broke loose.” So, he reduced each school line-item budget by 1 to 2 percent—sports, classroom supplies, technology—to obtain the funds to pay for the officer to return. One high school found some of the money

needed to retain its SRO by adding a surcharge to the fees it charges for parking lot passes. When a sheriff told his school district it would have to increase its contributions to its SRO's salary and fringe benefits, the superintendent of schools secured one-third of the total from the school district's general fund. He raised the remaining amount from a local foundation and an individual donor.

In several communities, objections by parents helped motivate local officials to continue to provide funding. One city council member said that constituents called him when an SRO had surgery because they were concerned that it was not merely a temporary situation but a long-term loss. When a county commission tried to reduce the number of SRO positions in the elementary schools, school administrators, teachers, and parents attended the budget meetings to support continued funding.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

According to the author's research, a large number of police departments and sheriff's offices have found that operating and contributing to the cost of a school resource officer program repays the agencies in significant ways, from keeping patrol officers on the streets to forging important relationships with juveniles and schools.

Furthermore, many law enforcement organizations have learned that they can minimize SRO program costs by sharing expenses with school districts and local government and by finding other sources of funding. In light of these considerations—and given the recent tragedies



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involving violence that have occurred in a number of schools—every agency should give serious consideration to initiating an SRO program. In addition, those departments that have programs in place can explore the variety of options available for reducing law enforcement's share of the costs. ♦

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sergeant Paul Marchand, SRO program supervisor, Salem, New Hampshire, Police Department.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew J. Hickman and Brian A. Reeves, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Local Police Departments 1999* (Washington, DC, May 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew L. Goldberg and Brian A. Reeves, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sheriff's Departments 1977* (Washington, DC, February 2000).

<sup>4</sup> For more information about SRO programs, see Peter Finn et al., U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, *A Guide to Developing, Maintaining, and Succeeding with Your School Resource Officer (SRO) Program: Practices from the Field for Law Enforcement and School Administration* (Washington, DC, 2005); and Peter Finn et al., "Case Studies of 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs" and "Comparison of Program Activities and Lessons Learned Among 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs," both available at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), Cooperative Agreement #2003-HS-WX-K041.

<sup>6</sup> Chief Paul Donovan, Salem, New Hampshire, Police Department, interview by author.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Bakas, Chief Public Safety Officer, Albuquerque, New Mexico, interview by author.

<sup>9</sup> Information about the grant program may be found at [www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=240](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=240). While there is no funding for SRO programs in the U.S. Department of Justice 2006-07 budget request to Congress, it is likely that Congress will include funding.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/progsum/sum\\_pg9.html](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/progsum/sum_pg9.html).

<sup>11</sup> See [www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov) or call 800-421-6770.

<sup>12</sup> See [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org) or call 800-638-8736.

<sup>13</sup> "Mason [Michigan] Schools Regain Resource Officer," *Lansing State Journal*, January 6, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Captain Tim Carney, Sarasota County, Florida, Sheriff's Office, interview by author.

<sup>15</sup> James Bailey, mayor of Maury County, Tennessee, interview by author.