

ALTERNATIVES TO SROS

School Resource Officers (SROs) are agents or career law enforcement officers, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with school and community-based organizations.¹ SRO programs have been in schools since the 1960's.² Although the placement of law enforcement officers in schools has grown tremendously over the past decade, the dramatic increase is as a result of the school shootings of the late 1990s when concerns about school violence led to rapid implementation of the zero tolerance policies.³ According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the number of School Resource Officers increased 38 percent between 1997 and 2007.⁴ As the presence of law enforcement and SROs in schools has increased, arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system generally have also increased.⁵

Most schools are working on dissolving the relationship with SROs but the ones that still have them enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with SROs to clarify their roles. By entering into this agreement, it will ensure that SROs are a part of the school culture and do not contribute to the school to prison pipeline.⁶ When MOUs are done effectively, they yield results. For instance, in November 2013, Broward County, Florida entered into a collaborative agreement that targeted school-based arrests.⁷ Creating and adopting the agreement was led by a community organization, and ultimately included a diverse group comprised of the school

¹ *Education under Arrest: The case against police in schools*, http://www.justicepolicy.org/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf.

² <https://www.schoolsecurity.org/school-resource-officers>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Education under Arrest: The case against police in schools*, *supra* note 1.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *School discipline & Security personnel: A tip sheet for Advocates on Maximizing school safety and student success*, <http://www.njln.org/our-work/school-discipline--security-personnel>.

superintendent, school board, judge, public defender, state's attorney, the NAACP, and others. The County saw results immediately – even in the first quarter of the school year, suspensions were down 66 percent, and expulsions down by 55 percent.⁸ While Broward County led the state in the rate of school-based arrests in 2011-12, with 1,054 arrests, in school year 2013-4, only 449 school-based arrests were made, a drop of 42 percent.⁹

Apart from the implementation of MOUs, some districts have totally eliminated SROs. In Los Angeles CA, the FREE LA HIGH School, practices Transformative Justice which uses similar practices as Restorative Justice, to heal from violence and prevent future violence.¹⁰ The school also has peacekeepers on staff to help maintain a positive school climate and address any issues that come up among young people.¹¹ They also have an agreement with the local police that when they do enter the school building, they do not bring their guns, requiring the police to follow the same community agreements as the school community.¹²

Also, at Orchard Gardens K-8, Roxbury MA a school focused on arts including music, dance and theatre got rid of law enforcement by taking resources away from law enforcement and putting them into the arts programs.¹³ The school instead hired more arts teachers and improved the art resources the school offered. Within three years test scores improved and the school climate was transformed. The school was one the fastest improving schools in the state.¹⁴

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *A Resource Guide on Counselors not Cops*, http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource_Guide-on-CNC-1.pdf.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

Furthermore, the Urban Dove Charter School in NY practices Restorative justice instead of the presence of SROs.¹⁵ Similarly the Urban Assembly School for Careers in Sports in the Bronx, in New York City, instead of SROs, there is a School Safety Agent at the door, but they are not allowed to patrol the hallway.¹⁶

In addition, District 287 in Plymouth, Minneapolis removed School Resource Officers from its self-contained programs and has employed Student Safety Coaches for four years.¹⁷ These SSCs, as they are called, build relationships with students and strive to advocate for them when they engage in challenging behavior rather than punish them.¹⁸ These SSCs are people who already have connections with the children example paraprofessionals etc. and are highly visible. District 287 continues to have partnerships with local police departments where school staff can call a designated officer at a station if they are unsure about a situation.¹⁹ Through the SSC models, incidents with police involvement decreased by over half the first two years of implementation. Arrest rates dropped from 65% to 12% within the first year and currently the average number of students arrests across the entire district is 5%.²⁰

Also, in Denver, Colorado, the public school district on June 11, 2020 voted to terminate its contract with the Denver Police Department.²¹ The district will rely on its own existing security and safety department that includes 100 unarmed and armed security officers to

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Student safety coaches an alternative to school resource officers*, <https://districtadministration.com/student-safety-coaches-an-alternative-to-school-resource-officers/>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ <https://www.district287.org/287-student-safety-coach-model/>.

²¹ *There's a Movement to Defund School Police, Too*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-24/minneapolis-denver-and-oakland-defund-school-police>.

protect campuses.²² All funds from the terminated program will be reallocated toward hiring mental health and restorative justice professionals.²³

Lastly, in Portland, Oregon, Mayor Ted Wheeler decided to remove officers from city schools and plans to transfer the \$1 million that funded Portland Police Bureau's youth service's division to a "community driven" program.²⁴

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*