



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

March 2001 #05

## School Resource Officer Training Program

by Cathy Girouard

In the aftermath of school violence outbreaks in recent years, the safety of children at school remains an important national issue. According to *Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2000* (published by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice), students ages 12 through 18 were victims of more than 2.7 million crimes committed at schools in 1998. Although research continues to show that schools are relatively safe places for children (students were twice as likely to be victims of serious violent crime away from school than at school in 1998), the subject of school safety continues to concern families, school administrators, and communities. The perception of imminent danger in the school environment has become commonplace in many communities, leaving parents, students, and school personnel with, at best, a tenuous sense of security. The school resource officer (SRO) concept offers an approach to improving school security and alleviating community fears.

### School Resource Officers

Part Q of Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended, defines the SRO as “a career law enforcement officer, 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.” According to the Center for the Prevention of School Violence at North Carolina State University, the SRO concept evolved during the 1950’s in Flint, MI, where community policing had been implemented and police officers had become involved in schools. The concept flourished during the 1960’s and 1970’s (predominantly in Florida), then languished in the 1980’s, and did not gain momentum nationwide until the mid-1990’s.

Today, the concept of what constitutes an SRO varies from one State or local jurisdiction to another, making counting of the number of SRO’s difficult. Although the number of identified SRO’s has continued to grow, key issues related to SRO program funding, definition and standardization of SRO roles and

responsibilities, and provision of appropriate and adequate training for SRO’s remain to be addressed.

### Federal Response

On September 6, 2000, the Department of Justice announced that the COPS in Schools program of its Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) would award \$68 million in grants to hire 599 SRO’s in 289 communities across the Nation. These grants will enable communities to hire new police officers and encourage working relationships between police and schools, thus bringing the principles and philosophy of community policing directly into the school environment.

Although these community grants provide the funding needed to hire new SRO’s, the SRO’s multifaceted role—as law enforcement officer, counselor, teacher, and liaison between law enforcement, schools, families, and the community—requires training beyond that traditionally offered in police academies. The SRO’s focus on youth in schools means these officers work with a complex population in an environment unfamiliar to most law enforcement officers. To help communities prepare SRO’s for their unique role, Congress appropriated \$5 million in fiscal year (FY) 2000 and an additional \$3 million in FY 2001 for the COPS program to provide training and technical assistance.

### Training and Technical Assistance

With COPS funding, Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) of Appleton, WI, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in Alexandria, VA, in conjunction with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, are collaborating to implement a Comprehensive School Safety Leadership Initiative. This initiative includes a three-part training program and a technical assistance and support component. FVTC and NCMEC have defined the mission of the initiative as providing a “comprehensive interagency strategy designed to assist communities in focusing leadership and resources on the issues related to creating and maintaining a safe school environment.”

The Comprehensive School Safety Leadership Initiative provides targeted training designed to reach a wide audience, including school and law enforcement executives, SRO's, other police and school personnel, social services representatives, and community leaders. The initiative's training program will enable schools, communities, and juvenile justice agencies to provide leadership in implementing and sustaining an effective SRO program. It will also help communities build organizational capacity and competency and create sound policies and procedures.

The Comprehensive School Safety Leadership Initiative provides a model of cooperative leadership, illustrating how roles and responsibilities can be shared across agency lines. The three primary components are:

- ◆ **Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Safe Schools Forum.** This 2-day training course presents an overview of the Comprehensive School Safety Leadership Initiative, introduces a model framework that defines critical roles and responsibilities for community SRO programs, and discusses information-sharing and policy issues related to school safety and juvenile justice. Attendees include school superintendents, police chiefs, chief probation officers, social services administrators, and chief prosecutors.
- ◆ **School Resource Officer Leadership Program.** This week-long course demonstrates standards of excellence and best practices for the enhanced role of SRO's as leaders in planning and maintaining a safe school environment. Because what constitutes an SRO is locally defined, attendees include police officers designated as SRO's, SRO supervisors, school district police officers, university police, and school counselors, psychologists, and other school staff.
- ◆ **Safe Schools Interagency Team Planning Program.** This program (not yet piloted but available to jurisdictions that participated in the CEO Safe Schools Forum) brings together chief executives of schools, communities, social services agencies, and juvenile justice organizations to learn about a process and method of information sharing, cooperation, and coordination that can lead to improved school safety, better supervision

of students, and more effective crime prevention. Attendees include school/school district superintendents, SRO supervisors, social services directors, school district and community police chiefs, local government executives, and other community leaders.

A technical assistance component, designed to sustain and support SRO program development, is available to eligible teams and course participants who have completed training and have begun to implement SRO programs.

## For Further Information

For further information about the Comprehensive School Safety Leadership Initiative, please contact:

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National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
Charles B. Wang International Children's Building  
699 Prince Street  
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800-843-5678  
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*The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.*

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