



MINNEAPOLIS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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School Resource Officers Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Providing safe and welcoming schools is a top priority for Minneapolis Public Schools. In the interest of cultivating more welcoming and safe school environments, MPS is asking for feedback on the future of its School Resource Officer (SRO) program to inform a Board of Education vote on August 8, 2017.

Engagement sessions and surveys will be conducted in May and June 2017 to gather input from students, families, staff and community members. This work is a continuation of the engagement that was conducted in 2016 and 2017 through a series of focus groups and surveys with staff and students across the district, including communities of color. At this time, the feedback will focus on three possible scenarios regarding the continued use of SROs in schools:

1. **Maintain/Modify:** Maintain existing SRO program and modify agreement with MPD on how SROs work with students.
2. **Reduce and Support:** Reduce number of SROs and enhance centralized supports to schools.
3. **Eliminate:** Eliminate SRO program and support schools in site-based or centralized security management.

The following are frequently asked questions about SROs.

1. Why does MPS have SROs?

Minneapolis Public Schools has used SROs since the 1960s and has had a formal contract with the Minneapolis Police Department since 1980. Like many school districts, SROs foster positive relationships between youth and the police; strengthen police-community connections; and support safe learning environments by protecting students and staff from high-threat situations that either start inside the school or from the outside. SROs are trained specifically to work with students and to intervene only in specific high-threat situations such as when a weapon is brought into a school or a big fight breaks out.

2. Does every school have an SRO, even elementary schools?

There are currently 16 SROs serving MPS' seven comprehensive high schools and in two Level 4 special education sites. Of these 16 SROs, there are 15 men and 1 woman and in terms of ethnic diversity there 9 are White, 3 Asian American and 4 are black. MPS is deliberate about creating a diverse team of SROs that are reflective of the students they serve.

3. Can't MPS schools just have security guards instead of police officers to fill these roles?

Using security guards instead of police officers is a possible model that could be adopted; however, MPS has preferred working with SROs because they are better trained and qualified than security

guards in handling high-threat situations. Security guards are also limited in the degree they can intervene in high-threat situations since they do not have the ability to arrest individuals when and if such occasions become necessary. And because security guards do not have a direct and formal connection to the community, they cannot adequately serve the larger function of building positive relations between students, the community and police.

4. What training do SROs get?

All Minneapolis police officers must:

- Pass the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certification.
- Have a 2- or 4-year degree or equivalent military service, plus receive 2-9 months of additional training.
- To remain certified, SROs must do 16 hours of continuing education every year.
- SROs must also get 24 hours of additional training from the Minnesota School Safety Center before they can even start working in schools as an SRO.
- SROs also go through 8 to 24 hours of training each year to familiarize themselves with MPS programs such as special education, positive school wide engagement, social emotional learning and equity efforts.
- When a new SRO starts, they are partnered with an SRO that has worked in MPS for a number of years.

5. How common is the use of SROs across the country?

Nationally and locally, the use of SROs is common practice with some districts even having their own police department. The best available data on SROs is through a survey done by the United States Department of Education during the 2013-14 school year (see [2015 report by the National Center for Education Statistics](#)). The survey is given to schools with different grade configurations -- elementary, middle and high schools -- with a range of enrollment sizes and in different types of communities including cities, suburbs and smaller towns and rural communities.

Of those schools who participated in the survey, 30% reported employing at least one full-time or part-time SRO which comes out to be almost 30,000 schools across the nation; 43% of schools reported using some type of security personnel at school at least once a week. It's important to note here that this survey was a **representative sample**, meaning it was not sent to every public school in the nation, so in reality these SRO numbers are much higher.

In a survey done with Minnesota schools in 2014, it was reported that 28% of schools had SROs that ranged from elementary and middle schools and also a mixture of secondary school types. For high schools serving just grades 9 to 12, that number goes up to 61% of high schools across the state report using SROs. See the table below for more information:

Percent of Minnesota Public Schools with SROs, by School Type*			
School Type	MDE School Count	SRO Count	Percent of schools with SROs
Elementary Schools	924 (PK-6)	189 (PK-6)	21%
Middle Schools	193 (5-8)	113 (PK-8)	59%
All Secondary Schools	761 (7-12; K-12; ALCs)	225 (7-12; K-12; ALCs)	30%
TOTAL	1,878**	527	28%
Senior High Schools Only	218 (9-12 only)	132 (9-12 only)	61%
<p>*Schools classified by the highest grade served.</p> <p>** Total public school count excludes 30 schools classified as state-approved Distance Learning Programs</p> <p>+Percentages should be interpreted with caution due to different definitions in classifying schools</p> <p>Source: Law Enforcement in Minnesota Schools: A Statewide Survey of School Resource Officers, September 2014; Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs</p>			

6. How are SROs selected to fill these roles in MPS schools?

To work in a Minneapolis school, these officers go through an intensive review process: They have to submit a letter of intent that speaks to why they want to work with students; their work and discipline history is looked at closely; and interviewed by a panel of staff from both MPS and MPD.

7. Why do some people not want SROs in schools?

The concern with having police officers in schools is that it may set up a “school-to-prison pipeline,” particularly for African American males, by criminalizing student behavior which in turn increases their chance of ending up in prison. In addition, there is the concern that tensions between police and communities of color can spill into the schools, despite the best efforts to prevent or decrease these conflicts in and outside of school.

8. What is MPS planning to do about these (above) concerns?

In response to concerns over the criminalization of student behavior, SROs who work in MPS schools must go through 8 to 24 hours of training to familiarize themselves with MPS programs aimed at building skills among staff and students to positively handle and de-escalate conflicts such as [restorative practices](#) and [social emotional learning](#).

In addition, every year, both school staff and SROs are reminded of the appropriate and inappropriate use of SROs in handling student behavior issues. As part of MPS' Behavior Standards Policy, the district developed the student [Behavior Standards and Code of Conduct](#) that outlines the types of behaviors that are not acceptable in any school or district property. Behaviors are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 with Level 5 being the most serious type of behavior. The standards also outline the appropriate staff interventions and responses to guide schools on how best to handle these situations and when it's appropriate to bring in an SRO into a situation.

Also, schools throughout the district have staff trained in Nonviolent Crisis Intervention and get clarification on how and when to engage SROs, as appropriate. With a focus on prevention, the core training program equips staff with proven strategies for safely defusing anxious, hostile or violent behavior at the earliest possible stage. These guidelines emphasize that SROs should only be brought in to handle high-threat situations that pose a danger to students or staff such as fights or if a student brings a weapon onto school property.

This specialized training with SROs, along with other positive-school wide engagement strategies at the school level, have contributed in the continuous decrease in [student-based incidents, citations/arrests and suspensions](#).

And as a final note, community concerns are being addressed through the district examining possible changes to its current SRO program which is why MPS is doing extensive engagement with students, families, staff and the community to inform the future of its SRO program that will be determined by the Board of Education on August 8, 2017.

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