School Resource Officers in Maryland Public Schools

Introduction

Below, please find introductory information about the nature of work conducted by School Resource Officers (SROs) in the State of Maryland. Those honored to carry the title *SRO* in Maryland benefit from holistic education and training specific to the unique, important, and varied roles that SROs fulfill in Maryland's twenty-four diverse local school systems.

- The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 mandates either the assignment of an SRO or adequate law enforcement coverage for each individual school within each of Maryland's twenty-four local school systems.

- SROs and school security employees in Maryland receive instruction in Maryland's five-day SRO training curriculum; yet, individuals providing "adequate law enforcement coverage" to schools without assigned SROs are not required to complete this comprehensive training.

- Topics required by law to be covered in Maryland's SRO training curriculum include De-escalation, Disability Awareness, Maintaining a Positive School Climate, Constructive Interactions with Students, Implicit Bias, and Disability and Diversity Awareness with specific attention to Racial and Ethnic Disparities.

- Maryland's SRO training prepares the SRO to fulfill four distinct roles within a school community:

    1. The Role of Educator

    2. The Role of Emergency Manager

    3. The Role of Informal Counselor

    4. The Role of Law Enforcement

- Any Maryland school without assigned SROs would still need to ensure that an individual with expertise in law enforcement was assigned to serve on the behavioral threat assessment teams serving the school system in order for the school system to comply with the Safe to Learn Act; currently SROs fill these important roles on such interdisciplinary teams.

SRO Training Program In-Depth

The five-day School Resource Officer training in Maryland covers the following major topic areas:

1) ***Constructive Interactions with Students***: Explains the role of the SRO as a coach, mentor, and educator and how these supportive roles build relationships with students and maintain professional boundaries.

2) ***Informal Counseling***: Identifies characteristics, strategies, roles, and responsibilities of being an informal counselor and how to advance the concept of conflict resolution.

3) ***Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)***: Explores the importance of an MOU between a law enforcement agency and local school system and the key elements of an MOU.

4) ***Safe to Learn Act***: Covers the State of Maryland's "Safe to Learn Act of 2018" and the impact it has on student and school safety.

5) ***SRO History***: Defines the term "School Resource Officer," the roles the SRO assumes within a school (Mentor/Educator/Law Enforcement Officer/Emergency Manager), and the history of SROs within the State of Maryland and across the country.

6) ***Victimization and Child Protective Services***: Clarifies how to recognize the victimization of youth and discusses abuse/neglect investigations and relevant Maryland statutes and Code of Maryland Regulations pertaining to child welfare.

7) ***Drug Education and Current Trends***: Discusses current trends in controlled dangerous substance usage in schools, signs of addiction/overdose, education efforts, and "wrap around" services available - both in general and throughout Maryland.

8) ***Bullying, Threats and Social Media Use***: Explores the characteristics of bullying, harassment, intimidation, and social media misuse, the effects of victimization, possible suicidal/homicidal implications on bullied individuals, and explores how to analyze strategies/investigative techniques used in prevention.

9) ***Official Interactions with Juveniles***: Clarifies the difference between school discipline and criminal behavior.

10) ***School Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams***: Elucidates the benefits of the multidisciplinary school behavioral threat assessment team, the requirements under the Safe to Learn Act of 2018, and the SRO's role within the team to assist with prevention and intervention to avoid threats to the school community.

11) ***Youth Development***: Covers the seven developmental domains, cultures and sub-cultures relevant to youth in schools, distinguishes between risk factors,

strengths, and worldviews youth might hold, identifies pro-social behaviors to be encouraged to replace antisocial behaviors, reinforces the difference between school discipline matters vs. criminal matters, and explores the use of conflict de-escalation techniques.

12) **Collaboration and Problem Solving with Stakeholders**: Covers the SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment) problem solving model, discusses understanding community stakeholders who need to be involved, and explores how collaboration positively affects the school community.

13) **Getting into the Classroom**: Covers creation of effective programs and/or use of available law-related education programs for students that enable them to make safe decision-making choices, and other opportunities for SROs to participate in the classroom environment.

14) **Principles of Effective Learning**: Covers the eight principles of learning and styles of learning and how they relate to law-related education for SROs.

15) **School Emergency Planning**: Covers the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery and the preparation methods necessary to mitigate an active assailant incident.

16) **Working Collaboratively with the School Administration**: Covers the importance of a positive working relationship with school staff, the differences in the chain of command and management structure of a law enforcement agency and school administration, the importance of frequent meetings within an education environment, and documentation requirements of each entity.

17) **Indicators of Behavior, Trauma Informed Care**: Explores recognition of behaviors of concern, Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams to assess issues, understanding of the impact of traumatic experiences on youth, and the four essentials of Trauma Informed Care.

18) **Disability and Diversity Awareness**: Defines terms such as *disability*, *diversity*, *inclusiveness*, and *cultural fluency*, differentiates between HIPAA and FERPA, introduces "Best Practices in Seclusion and Restraint" reporting for Maryland schools, and explores how individuals with disabilities may experience discrimination in various areas including education, health care, employment, economics, and through the justice system.

19) **Maintaining a Positive School Climate**: Discusses the difference in promotion and prevention mindsets and defines creation and maintenance of a positive environment and the correlation of a positive climate to a behavioral threat assessment.

20) **Managing Gangs in Schools**: Discusses gang activity by region within Maryland, signs of gangs within schools, and documentation of gang activity.

21) **Restorative practices**: Explores use of restorative practices to repair student

relationships and resolving conflict within the school environment.

22) **_Implicit Bias_**: Covers what implicit biases are and how understanding and awareness of these biases creates a better atmosphere between students and their SRO.

23) **_School Law and the School Based Officer_**: Reviews the Maryland Code, Education Article, Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), and Constitutional Law; HIPAA and FERPA are also reviewed along with the exceptions to each for information sharing.

24) **_SORAT_**: Reviews single officer response to an active threat within an educational environment.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *How is Maryland different from other states when it comes to School Safety?*

A: In 2018, the Governor of Maryland and the Maryland General Assembly worked to create a comprehensive law, known as the "Safe to Learn Act of 2018" (STLA-2018), which created a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to school safety.

Q: *Who coordinates this approach to School Safety for the State of Maryland?*

A: The Maryland Center for School Safety, MCSS, created in 2013, is the agency charged with School Safety in Maryland. MCSS is an independent unit within the Maryland State Department of Education. It collaborates with local school systems, State and local government agencies, community organizations, parents, and other stakeholders to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to school safety.

Q: *Who does the Maryland Center for School Safety report to?*

A: MCSS is governed by the School Safety Subcabinet, which consists of the following State Cabinet members, or their designees:

- The State Superintendent of Schools,
- The Secretary of State Police,
- The Attorney General,
- The Secretary of Health,
- The Secretary of Disabilities, and
- The Executive Director of the Interagency on School Construction.

Q: *Who gives advice/input to the Subcabinet on behalf of Maryland residents?*

A: There is a School Safety Subcabinet Advisory Board that includes the following members:

- A member of the Senate of the State of Maryland,
- A member of the Maryland House of Delegates,
- A Representative of Local Superintendents of Schools,
- A Representative of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education,
- A School Psychologist or Licensed or Clinical Social Worker,
- A Special Education Administrator,
- A Classroom Teacher,
- A School Principal,
- A Representative of the Department of Human Services,
- A Representative of the Department of Juvenile Services,
- A School Resource Officer,
- A Sheriff,
- A Police Chief,
- A Representative of Maryland Emergency Medical, Fire, and Rescue Services,
- The Director or designee from the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center,
- A Representative of the Maryland Assembly on School-Based Health Care,
- A Representative of the Maryland Association of Student Councils,
- A Representative of the Center for School Mental Health,
- A Representative of Disability Rights Maryland,
- A Parent of a Public School Student,
- A Parent of a Child with Disabilities who Attends a School in State,
- A Representative of a Non-Public School in the State,
- A Representative of a Non-Public Special Education Facility, and
- A Representative of School Bus Drivers.

Q: *Why is there a school bus driver on the Advisory Board?*

A: School bus drivers are usually the first and last school or school system employees to see a child during the school day. Drivers observe many student interactions and are in a position to help parents and administrators by notifying them when or if suspicious activity occurs or they observe a student who may need additional assistance or support.

Q: *Are Subcabinet and Advisory Board meetings subject to Maryland's Open Meeting Act?*

A: Yes. Maryland's Open Meetings Act is a statute that requires State and local public bodies to hold their meetings in public. The Act permits public bodies to hold meetings in person or virtually and in limited circumstances to discuss

some topics in a closed session. Any permissible items discussed in closed session by a public body must be summarized for the public.

Q: *How does MCSS provide a coordinated approach to school safety?*

A: By providing grants, information, training on promising practices, programs and resources to all stakeholders, and technical assistance and education, collaborating on collection, analysis, and integration of statewide data, and promoting interagency efforts that support safe schools for all students, school staff, parents, and community members.

Q: *How are School Resource Officers (SROs) in Maryland trained differently than in other states?*

A: The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 <u>required all SROs</u> to complete an approved curriculum of instruction. The approved curriculum consists of five full days of instruction delivered by MCSS staff and other subject matter experts certified and approved to provide the instruction. Required areas of instruction under The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 that make Maryland's course of instruction particularly noteworthy include:

- De-Escalation,
- Disability Awareness,
- Maintaining a Positive School Climate,
- Constructive Interaction with Students, and
- Implicit Bias and Disability and Diversity Awareness with specific attention to Racial and Ethnic Disparities.

Q: *Who teaches this course?*

A: MCSS staff and other subject matter experts deliver SRO training throughout the State of Maryland. Members of MCSS have become certified through the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commissions as general subject matter instructors. Additionally, several individuals from Anne Arundel County Public Schools, the Greater Baltimore Medical Center, Office of the Attorney General, Maryland Emergency Management Agency, and Maryland State Department of Education have received this certification and assist MCSS with provision of these courses across Maryland. There are five blocks of specialized instruction taught by non-police instructor subject matter experts:

- Victimization of Youth in Schools,
- School Threat Assessment Teams,
- School Emergency Planning,
- Assessing Indicators of Behaviors of Concern and Utilizing Trauma Informed Interventions, and

- Disability and Diversity Awareness.

Q: When is an SRO required to attend MCSS-approved courses?

A: All SROs assigned to a school prior to the start of the 2019-2020 school year were required to complete the course before the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

SROs assigned mid-year, after the start of the 2019-2020 school year, are required to complete the course prior to the start of any subsequent school year.

Q: What is the difference between a School Security Employee/Officer and a School Resource Officer?

A: A School Security Employee (SSE), who may be referred to as a Security Officer, Advocate, Monitor, or another title depending on the local school system, is a school system employee, not a sworn law enforcement officer.

An SRO is a sworn law enforcement officer employed by a local police department assigned to serve within the local school system at one or more school buildings pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding between the local law enforcement agency and local school system. A Baltimore City school police officer, as defined in § 4–318 of the Education Article is also defined as an SRO.

Q: My child's school has assigned security officers who are not police officers; are they trained as well?

A: If your local school system employs staff members who are responsible for the safety and security of students in your school system, these employees are also required to receive instruction in the SRO training curriculum.

Q: What training have school administrators completed in order to establish professional working relationships within the school building?

A: For school leaders, MCSS has developed a course titled "Understanding the SRO," which discusses the roles and responsibilities of the SRO in schools, including the difference between school discipline and criminal behavior. This training is available to school leaders and administrators across Maryland.

Q: What is a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team?

A: A threat assessment team is a cross disciplinary group of officials who convene to identify and respond to behaviors of concern that may pose a threat to the safety of an individual attending or working in a public school. The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 required the School Safety Subcabinet to

develop a policy for Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams. This document was provided as a model policy, procedure, and guidance document for Maryland school systems' school behavior threat assessment teams. It includes best practices or standards of practices in behavioral threat assessment and management in school settings.

Q: *Why is an SRO required to be a part of a School Systems Behavioral Threat Assessment Team?*

A: The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 requires a sworn law enforcement officer to be a part of a school or school systems behavioral threat assessment team(s). The benefit of having an SRO as part of this team is that an SRO is part of that school community. An SRO is trained to notice changes in students. Working collaboratively as part of the team, the SRO helps ensure outside resources, normally available only to law enforcement, are available to help students and provide diversions in lieu of arrest.

Q: *How does the Maryland Center for School Safety work directly with students and parents to bring school safety awareness?*

A: One way MCSS works with students and parents is through the web-, app-, and phone-based **Safe Schools Maryland** tip line, which is an anonymous reporting system used to report threats to safety and concerns for the well-being of students.

         Safe Schools Maryland is a tool that proactively addresses harmful situations and helps students and school communities that need it. By using a variety of communication modes to support reporting and routing of tips, **Safe Schools Maryland** empowers residents of Maryland to create a culture of preparedness, prevention, and school safety for all Maryland students. MCSS also uses various forms of social media to address issues, make announcements, and assist our communities in helping to make our schools safer.