



The Montgomery County Department of Police

School Resource Officer Program FAQ Document



Introduction

The Montgomery County Department of Police, in collaboration with the Montgomery County Public School System, has built a School Resource Officer Program that excels in promoting diversity, maintaining a safe learning environment, fostering inclusion and acceptance, and exploring alternatives to traditional disciplinary processes.

We are proud of our School Resource Officer Program that is diverse in its composition and focuses on intervention versus physical arrest when presented with crimes on school grounds.

Deployed into the largest school system in the State of Maryland, the School Resource Officers (SROs) are one of the most effective community engagement means available to the Department of Police. School Resource Officers represent conduits of outreach to the youth of Montgomery County.

The program focuses on fair and impartial policing, conflict resolution, de-escalation, and building rapport with Montgomery County students and youth.

Overview

The Montgomery County Department of Police School Resource Officer Program consists of 23 sworn officers as well as one officer from the Rockville City Police Department, one officer from the Gaithersburg Police Department, and one deputy sheriff from the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office. These 26 sworn officers represent the cadre of School Resource Officers for Montgomery County, Maryland.

The Montgomery County Public School system has 25 High Schools and 1 Alternative Learning School. The School Resource Officers are assigned one to each of these schools. Additionally, when available, the School Resource Officers provide coverage to 40 Middle Schools and 135 Elementary Schools.

The Montgomery County Public School system is the largest in the State of Maryland, with over 165,000 students and 207 schools. The graduation rate in the MCPS system stands at 88.7%, and the suspension rate is less than 3% overall.

Selection Process for SROs

Involved law enforcement agencies formally announce SRO positions. The selection process will include the submission of a memorandum of interest from the officer(s), a review of personnel files, and a formal interview that includes the participation of an MCPS high school principal and/or the MCPS Director of School Safety and Security or his/her designee.

SRO Demographics

There are 26 total SROs in the program. These officers' demographic composition is as follows: 10 Black males, 5 Black females, 1 Hispanic Male, 8 White males, and 2 White Females.

Eliminating the SRO Program

Elimination of the SRO program would remove the SROs from Montgomery County Public Schools, however; the Maryland Safe Schools act requires that there be "Adequate Law Enforcement Coverage" in all Maryland High Schools. This coverage requirement will impact multiple additional police agencies within Montgomery County, to include; Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, Gaithersburg Police Department, and Rockville City Police Department.

The Maryland Center for School Safety has interpreted this to mean that departments must have officers:

- Conduct patrols of schools at various times before, during, and after school
- Require patrol officers to check in with school staff every day
- Require patrol officers to station themselves in hallways during class changes
- Assign officers to adopt a school in their assigned areas

This work would have to be assigned to officers who have not been trained to work with the adolescent population in a school environment like the MCPD SRO program officers.

SRO Training

School Resource Officers have several important roles. They are mentors, adjunct instructors, emergency managers, and law enforcers. These officers receive hours of intense and comprehensive training to fulfill these roles. They are the only group of officers trained to work well with the adolescent population in a school environment.

Training Required by State

The Safe to Learn Act 2018 required the development of a specialized curriculum for use in the training of SROs. This specialized curriculum developed includes training on:

1. De-escalation;
2. Disability awareness;
3. Maintaining a positive school climate;
4. Constructive interactions with students; and
5. Implicit bias and disability and diversity awareness with specific attention to racial and ethnic disparities.

The 40-hour Basic School Resource Officer Training in Maryland covers the following major topic areas:

- 1) ***Constructive interactions with students:*** The role of the SRO as a coach, mentor, and educator and how these supportive roles build relationships with students while maintaining professional boundaries.
- 2) ***Informal counseling:*** Identifying characteristics, strategies, roles, and responsibilities of being an informal counselor and how to advance the concept of conflict resolution.
- 3) ***Memorandums of Understanding (MOU):*** Understanding the importance of an MOU between the Law Enforcement Agency and School System, the key elements of an MOU, including the sharing of juvenile information in the State of Maryland.

- 4) ***Safe to Learn Act:*** Covers the State of Maryland's "Safe to Learn Act of 2018" and its impact 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 (LEO)/Emergency Manager), as well as the history of SROs within the State of Maryland.
- 6) ***Victimization and Child Protective Services:*** How to recognize the victimization of youth, abuse/neglect investigations, and relevant Maryland statutes and Code of Maryland Regulations pertaining to child protection.
- 7) ***Drug Education and Current Trends:*** Current trends in controlled dangerous substance usage in schools, signs of addiction/overdose, educative efforts, and "wrap around" services available in general throughout the State.
- 8) ***Bullying, Threats and Social Media Use:*** The characteristics of bullying, harassment, intimidation, social media misuse, the effects of victimization, possible suicidal/homicidal implications on bullied individuals, analyzing strategies/investigative techniques used in the prevention, and an overview of the Maryland State Department of Education's online reporting forms and how to utilize them.
- 9) ***Official interactions with Juveniles:*** Covers the difference between school discipline and criminal behavior, requirements for an LEO to conduct an interview, when an interview becomes an interrogation and use of Miranda, understanding of "Non-negotiables" for the arrest of anyone 14 years of age, and older and avoiding "embarrassment" of a student being taken into custody.
- 10) ***School Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams:*** Definition of a School Behavioral Threat Assessment team, options available to an SRO to mitigate an identified threat to a school campus, and reporting requirements and information sharing with the MCSS.
- 11) ***Youth Development:*** Covers the seven (7) developmental domains, cultures and sub-cultures relevant to youth in schools, distinguishing between risk factors, strengths along with worldviews youth might hold, identification of prosocial behaviors to

replace antisocial behaviors, the difference between school discipline matters vs. criminal matters, and use of conflict de-escalation techniques.

12) *Collaboration and Problem Solving with Stakeholders:* Covers the SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment) problem-solving model, along with understanding community stakeholders who need to be involved and how collaboration affects the school community in a positive light.

13) *Getting into the Classroom:* Covers creation of effective programs and/or use of available programs related law-related education of students for safe decision -making choices.

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

15) *School Emergency Planning:* Covers the four phases of an emergency; preparation, response, recovery, and resiliency, as well as preparation methods to mitigate an active assailant incident.

16) *Working Collaboratively with the School Administration:* Covers the importance of a positive working relationship with school staff, understanding chains of command from each entity, importance of frequent meetings within the education environment, and documentation requirements of each entity.

17) *Indicators of Behavior, Trauma-Informed Care:* Recognition of behaviors of concern, use of Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams to access issues, understand the impact of traumatic experiences on youth and how not to re-victimize an individual, and the four essentials of Trauma-Informed Care.

18) *Disability and Diversity Awareness:* Defines the terms; disability, diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural fluency. Differentiating between HIPAA, FERPA, and “Best Practices in Seclusion and Restraint” reporting for Maryland schools and discussing the possibility that individuals with disabilities may experience discrimination in various fields including; education, health care, employment, economic, and justice.

- 19) *Maintaining a Positive School Climate:*** Discusses differences in promotion and prevention mindsets, defines the creation and maintenance of a positive environment, and correlates a positive climate to a behavioral threat assessment.
- 20) *Managing Gangs in Schools:*** Discusses gang activity by region within the State, signs within schools, and gang activity documentation.
- 21) *Restorative practices:*** Use restorative practices to repair student relationships and to resolve conflict within the school environment.
- 22) *Implicit bias:*** Covers what implicit bias is and how understanding creates a better relationship atmosphere between students and their SRO.
- 23) *School Law and the School-Based Officer:*** Review of Maryland Education Article, Code of Maryland Regulations, and Constitutional law. HIPPA and FERPA are reviewed as well as the exceptions to each for information sharing.
- 24) *SORAT:*** Review of *single officer response to an active threat* within an educational environment.

MCPD SRO Training

In addition to the mandatory training set forth by the State, MCPD works in collaboration with community stakeholders in the county to develop SRO training that builds upon the minimum standards required by the State of Maryland. The department's 40-hour training curriculum includes:

1. Gang Prevention & Intervention, presented by the Street Outreach Network
2. Managing Gangs in Schools, presented by the MCPD Gang Unit
3. Trauma-Informed Schools & Youth Suicide Awareness; presented by MCPS
4. Bomb Threats, Evacuation, and K-9 Searches for Explosives in Schools; MCPD K-9
5. Hate/Bias Investigations; presented by the MCPD Community Engagement Division
6. IED Awareness in a School Setting; presented by MCFR Bomb Squad
7. Behavior Health Emergencies: Children and Adolescents; presented by the Crisis Center
8. Implicit Bias; presented by the Maryland Center for School Safety

9. De-Escalation: ICAT; presented by MCPD Instructors
10. Autism & Intellectual Developmental Disabilities: Youth Focused; MCPD Officer Reyes
11. Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness; presented by MCPD SVID
12. School Law Update; presented by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General
13. Single Officer Tactical Response in School Setting; conducted by MCPD SWAT
14. Advanced First Aide; conducted by MCPD ESU Medics

DARE Officer Training

Over 90% of our School Resource Officers are now certified in the new DARE program. This 80-hour training was provided by DARE America and the Police Corrections Training Commission. The new DARE curriculum was developed in conjunction with Keep'in It Real; an evidence-based, peer-reviewed curriculum created by experts from Penn State University and the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. These SROs are certified to teach the DARE program for school-aged children and the community. Additional information can be found at www.dare.org

MCPS Behavior Threat Assessment Teams

The Maryland Safe Schools Act established a Behavior Threat Assessment (BTA) model policy for local school systems to adopt. The purpose of BTA is to identify and train team members to proactively gather, share, and act on information pertaining to school threats. As mentioned in the Maryland Safe Schools Act, BTA team members include school administration, school psychologists, school counselors, and law enforcement. MCPS created its BTA policy that mirrors the State's model policy. As a result, most of our SROs have now been trained by MCPS in Behavior Threat Assessment. Most of the SROs attended the training with their school teams. The MCPS BTA policy is a good example of two agencies working together to keep the school environment safe proactively.

SRO Community Outreach

The School Resource Officers' primary focus is to maintain a safe learning environment and act as a bridge to establish positive relations with students within the school system. Community outreach and engagement are essential in developing relationships in the school community.

During a normal school year, SROs actively engage with students throughout the school day. There are approximately 180 school days in the school year. That is about 1,440 hours SROs spend in their schools each year. The SROs foster strong relationships with many of their students. Students will often seek out the SRO first when they have a problem at school or home. The SROs can provide guidance as a positive role model and connect the student with an appropriate school resource, such as a counselor, when applicable. SROs have stated that former students will still contact them for guidance even after the student has graduated.

The SROs' community engagement goes beyond the school walls and afterschool activities. In recent months, SROs have been working in collaboration with MCPS food distribution sites. SROs were initially part of MCPS's traffic control and security plan at each food distribution site. This role grew into an outreach opportunity for the SROs. As families came to the food distribution sites, the SROs had a chance to reconnect with their students. At times, SROs provided other county resource information to student families.

Many families do not have the means to pick up food at the meal sites. The SROs made it possible for meals to be taken from the food sites directly to students' homes. These activities provided the SRO an opportunity to connect with their students, but it also allowed the SRO to extend the school's hand to many marginalized students who could no longer get the usual services they received in the school building. This included obtaining correct contact information from the student and family so school administration and counselors could maintain a connection with students.

While delivering meals, the SROs had a chance to see some of their students' home environment's. Often, the students and their families needed more than just food support. On several occasions, the SRO connected with the school counselor and the Montgomery County

Collaboration Council to get other resources and support to families in need. These are great examples of collaborative efforts between MCPD, MCPS, and other community stakeholders working together to support families in our community. Without the efforts from the SROs, the families of these students may have continued to go unserved.

SRO Enforcement

Physical Arrests

During the 2019-2020 school year, there were 27 “physical arrests.” A physical arrest is made by an SRO when the type of crime is serious in nature, a felony offense, or presents an immediate or continuing disruption or threat to the safety of others. A student who is 18 years old or older cannot be charged as a juvenile; therefore, a physical arrest is necessary since the case cannot be referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice. A physical arrest usually entails taking the student into custody, transporting the student to a police facility for processing, and making a notification to the Department of Juvenile Justice if the student is under the age of 18. Physical arrests accounted for 10% of all student arrests by SROs in the 2019-2020 School Year and equate to about 1 per high school.

In the Memorandum of Understanding between MCPS and MCPD, there are several types of “Critical Incidents” where notification to MCPD is mandatory. These would include offenses such as robbery, firearm or other weapon possession, or possession with intent to distribute controlled dangerous substances, hate crimes, or gang-related incidents. These are the types of offenses where physical arrests were made in the 2019-2020 school year.

Charged by Exception/Paper

This is the most common enforcement conducted by SROs and accounted for 90% of all student arrests in the 2019-2020 School Year. Two hundred forty-two arrests were charged via citation or were “on paper.” This situation arises when a student commits an act which is deemed illegal in the State of Maryland but not of a significantly serious nature. Most misdemeanors such as assaults, thefts, and vandalism fall into this category. In these cases, the SRO will record all information, identify pertinent witnesses, and refer the case, via the event

report, to the Department of Juvenile Justice for disposition.

These incidents do not entail taking the student into custody and transporting to a police facility. Rather, it means that the student was referred administratively (i.e., “on paper”) to the Department of Juvenile Services for disposition. Criminal and civil citations can also be written for minor offenses and referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice via the event report. These dispositions could include treatment programs, counseling programs, or diversion programs such as “Teen Court.” In almost all these cases, the student does not end up with a criminal record, and there is virtually no impact on their ability to attend college or obtain employment.

Civil Citations

Most citations issued by SROs are for civil offenses. Civil offenses are minor violations that typically carry a monetary penalty. The vast majority of civil citations written are for alcohol, tobacco, and minor CDS offenses. As with incidents resulting in a physical arrest and charged by exception, MCPS also initiated over 97% of all civil citations issued by SROs.

SRO Initiated

In the 2019-2020 School Year, the SROs charged 269 students, a combination of physical and paper arrests. A School Resource Officers primary focus is to maintain a safe learning environment for all and act as a bridge to establish positive relations with students within the school system. If an SRO observes illegal behavior, it is incumbent to immediately address the situation, especially violent or dangerous actions. It is only a small percentage of total arrests by SROs that were initiated by the SRO. In fact, of the 269 incidents, only nine were self-initiated by the SROs themselves. That is 3% of all the arrests made by SROs in the 2019-2020 School Year.

School Initiated

A vast majority of total arrests made by SROs were initiated by MCPS administrators, MCPS Security staff, MCPS teachers, or parents. This means the SRO was notified by administrators, parents, and staff that they had a student detained in the office for an offense,

or they needed the SRO to assist with a disturbance or other emergency. During the 2019-2020 School Year, over 97% of all enforcement action by SROs were initiated by MCPS. This calculates to 260 of the 269 total arrests for the school year.

MCPD is committed to working with MCPS on revising procedures and policies to lessen the impact of arrests, particularly those incidents of a minor nature, whenever possible.