

# DEVELOPMENT OF A FULL-TIME SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER FOR THE URBANA HIGH SCHOOL AND URBANA MIDDLE SCHOOL



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## **ORIGIN OF PROPOSAL**

Concerns regarding safety and security came to a head as the result of a large fight at the UHS on February 4, 2019. During that fight, a teacher was seriously injured and briefly hospitalized. There were eleven arrests made as part of that investigation. Parents, students and staff expressed safety concerns both before and after this incident to both Urbana School District #116 (USD #116) and the Urbana Police Department (UPD).

In conversations after this particular incident, USD #116 requested information about obtaining full-time presence of a police officer in the UHS. As a result, the current School Resource Officer (SRO), in conjunction with other police officers, have been providing full-time presence at the Urbana High School (UHS). However, UPD cannot sustain the current staffing design to maintain a full-time officer presence at the UHS. Additionally, the majority of officers working the detail have no training as an SRO. This solution also does not allow for any SRO presence at the Urbana Middle School (UMS).

## **HISTORY OF THE UPD SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER**

The first recognized SRO at the UPD was Troy Phillips. He began acting as a SRO in December of 1993. Since that time, there have been ten other SROs. Some of the SROs had short tenures; others were particularly long.

The SRO has always been a police officer assigned to the criminal investigations division as a detective. The SRO has always had a caseload comprised of both adult and juvenile cases. The SRO has also been a part of the rotation as the on-call detective and subject to callouts at unpredictable times. The school resource officer is, and has historically been, no more than a half-time position in the schools and a half-time position working the aforementioned caseload. That time split has varied based on the needs of the schools and the department.

The SRO has never been a uniformed position; rather the SRO has worn civilian clothing in keeping with departmental policy for investigations division personnel.

Since the inception of the SRO position at UPD and for the last 26 years, the UPD has funded 100% of the personnel salary, benefits, training, overtime costs, equipment and vehicles for the position. There has never has been a formal contract in place concerning the SRO position.

## **OTHER SCHOOL RESOURCE MODELS IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY**

Currently three other law enforcement agencies in Champaign County have full-time SRO positions. Those agencies are the Champaign County Sheriff's Office, Champaign Police Department, and the Rantoul Police Department.

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The Champaign County Sheriff's Office has two SROs at two high schools. The Champaign Police Department has five full-time SROs at three middle schools and two high schools. The Rantoul Police Department has two SROs at multiple elementary schools/one middle school and another SRO at one high school.

All three agencies have contracts with their respective school districts that cover the cost to train, equip, and fund the officers and deputies assigned as SROs. Those contracts define, amongst other things: concept/guiding principles of the SRO, duties of the SRO, law enforcement agency responsibilities, school district responsibilities, insurance and indemnification of each party, hours of work, reimbursement, working conditions, and the term of the agreement.

### **MODEL FOR FULL-TIME SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS**

The UPD subscribes to the "triad" model for SROs. The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) recommends this same model. The model explains a SRO is actually engaged in three distinct and equally important roles.

The first, and most obvious, is that of law enforcement. The SRO will engage in common law enforcement duties – handle initial police reports of crimes committed on campus, take enforcement action on criminal matters when appropriate, enforce criminal law, and protect students, staff, and the public at large against criminal activity, including an armed intruder event.

The second role is that of a teacher. The SRO will provide information and lectures concerning multiple law enforcement related subjects to students and staff. These presentations include topics such as general safety strategies, occupational training, leadership, life skills, traffic safety, interactions with law enforcement officers, and legal issues.

The final role is that of an informal counselor. This role is important to provide information to students, parents, staff, and administrators on variety of topics. This also provides students a safe way to discuss issues occurring in both the school and the community.

This "triad" model provides a valuable resource to students, parents and staff members by fostering and reinforcing positive relationships with those stakeholders and the police. Additionally, SROs help to cooperatively develop strategies to resolve problems related to and affecting young people and protect students and staff.

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Over the course of the last 26 years, the UPD has learned lessons and changed the SRO program in attempt to meet those challenges. Starting approximately ten to fifteen years ago, the needs of the school have increased. The department has struggled to manage SRO duties while at the same time meeting the needs of the investigations division. During times of lengthy or complex investigations, the needs of the school, students, and staff were simply put on hold.

Below is a table that contains the student populations for the various school buildings in Champaign County where a full-time SRO is assigned. The numbers listed were accurate as of September 26, 2019 and provided by personnel from the respective school district and/or law enforcement agency having jurisdiction.

The National Associations of SROs provides a recommendation of an SRO per capita ratio of one officer per 1,000 student or one per school building. Current UPD staffing meets neither recommendation, dedicating a half-time SRO to 2,161 students at UMS and UHS, a ratio of 1: 4,322 students.

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<u>Agency</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Population</u>
Champaign County Sheriff's Office	St. Joseph-Ogden High School / Prairie View Ogden Junior High School	1,492 students
Champaign County Sheriff's Office	Unity High School	1,537 students
Champaign Police Department	Edison Middle School	789 students
Champaign Police Department	Franklin Middle School	724 students
Champaign Police Department	Jefferson Middle School	790 students
Champaign Police Department	Central High School	1,326 students
Champaign Police Department	Centennial High School	1,316 students
Rantoul Police Department	Eastlawn, Pleasant Acres, Northview, Broadmeadow Elementary Schools, JW Eater Junior High School	1,782 students
Rantoul Police Department	Rantoul Township High School	783 students
Urbana Police Department	Urbana Middle School	967 students
Urbana Police Department	Urbana High School	1,194 students
<u>Agency</u>	<u>Number of SROs, Total Number of Students in SRO Staffed Schools</u>	<u>Per Capita Ratio</u>
Champaign County Sheriff's Office	2 SROs, 3,029 students	1 : 1,514 students
Champaign Police Department	5 SROs, 4,945 students	1 : 989 students
Rantoul Police Department	2 SROs, 2,500 students	1 : 1,250 students
Urbana Police Department	1/2 SRO, 2161 students	1 : 4,322 students

**School Resource Officer during Summer months**

The preference of the UPD is for the SROs to engage in community engagement activities. This will include a high number of “non enforcement contacts”. Examples would include youth police academies, the Urbana Self-Made Kingz program, explorer posts, presence at Urbana summer school activities, and officer benefit leave time.

**School Resources Officer Uniform**

The Champaign County Sheriff's Office and Champaign Police Department have SROs wear traditional uniforms. The Rantoul Police Department has SROs wear a variety of uniforms, including a less traditional uniform/"soft" uniform. It is the belief of the UPD that a SRO should wear a uniform of some type that makes them clearly identifiable as a police officer. This is also consistent with NASRO recommendations on the matter.

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The rationale for that decision is simple. SROs need to be identifiable by the clothing they wear to all occupants and visitors of a school building. This will allow other police officers to identify another police officer during a call for service at a school building, staff to easily identify a SRO during a stressful situation, and allow school building visitors to immediately recognize the SRO as a police officer.

Does the department need the uniform to be the same as a patrol officer? No. The chief of police could order a modified uniform policy to allow the uniform to be something less formal than a patrol officer's uniform shirt and pants. The ability to identify the SRO is of paramount priority however and is in keeping with local trends and identified national best practices.