**How to Learn More about School Policing and School Resource Officers (SROs) in Your Community**

Publicly accessible information about School Resource Officers and School Security Officers, detailed below and in our sample FOIA request, may be kept in several different locations within several different agencies, making it difficult to gather the full picture of a local community’s use of law enforcement in schools:

* Some information may be kept by a local school or school division.
* Some information may be kept by a local law enforcement/police agency.
* Some information (especially budgets) may be kept by a city manager, city council, or board of supervisors.
* Some information may be kept by the **Court Service Unit (CSU),** which is the juvenile court intake office that serves your community.
* Most CSUs are governed by the **Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice**, so some information may be held by that state agency.
* Still further, School Resource Officers are trained and certified by the **Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services**, so some information may be kept by that agency.

This document outlines preliminary investigation strategies and questions for community members to learn more about the relationship between police and schools in their localities.

**School Resource Officers in the Schools: the Basics**

Does my school division use SROs? A recent state survey found that SROs are used in at least 55% of all Virginia schools, either full-time or part-time. Of these, SROs are stationed in 41% of elementary schools, 93% of middle schools, and 96% of high schools—so, most school divisions are using SROs in some capacity. This information should be publicly available and can be requested via FOIA (see sample FOIA document).

**Sample questions to ask of your school division and local police agency:**

* How many SROs are employed and in which schools are they stationed? Compare these results to both student composition by race and poverty rates of schools within a division.
* Are they full-time or part-time employees?
* Are they stationed inside the school building or are they rotated through the district?
* If they are stationed inside the school building, what is their “beat” / where are they placed?
* What use of force implements (firearms, chemical restraints, mechanical restraints) do SROs carry, and under what conditions are SROs allowed to use these on students?
* What specific training do SROs receive before and during the time they are stationed in schools?

**School Security Officers in the Schools**

School Security Officers are school division employees (rather than law enforcement) and DO have authority to handle discipline matters within the school. Their duties would NOT usually be laid out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between school divisions and law enforcement because they are not law enforcement. However, they are—by state law—able to carry firearms on duty and refer students to both school discipline officers and police.

**Sample questions to ask of your school division:**

* How many School Security Officers are employed by the school division and in which schools are they stationed? Compare these results to both student composition by race and poverty rates of schools within a division.
* Do School Security Officers carry firearms, chemical restraints, or mechanical restraints, and under what conditions are they permitted to use these on students?
* Do schools track data and information about referrals by School Security Officers of students to school discipline officers or law enforcement? Communities could demand that this information be anonymized and tracked, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and disability status of students and disaggregated by school within the division.
* Do schools track data and information about use of force and use of seclusion/restraint by School Security Officers on students? Communities could demand that this information be anonymized and tracked, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and disability status of students and disaggregated by school within the division. Compare this data to both student composition by race and poverty rates of schools within a division.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

As of July 1, 2019, all school divisions who use School Resource Officers must have enacted a Memorandum of Understanding between the school division and local law enforcement agency to govern their use. **Va. Code §22.1-280.2:3.**

Beginning July 1, 2020, these school divisions must also:

1) post the most recent MOU on their website;

2) review the MOU at least once every two years (and at any point if either schools or police request it); and

3) provide opportunity for public input during its review.

This agreement should lay out the duties of SROs, as well as detail the responsibilities of school divisions and law enforcement in maintaining their use, including how costs are divided.

Sample questions to ask your local school division and law enforcement agency:

* When was the original MOU established and what is the date of the current MOU?
* Who negotiates the MOU, and who negotiated the original agreement?
* When is the next scheduled date for review?

If MOUs are used, communities can also demand an active role in their development and approval. The agreements should at least be placed on agendas of public meetings and be voted on publicly.

**Local Budgets**

School Resource Officers are funded differently across the Commonwealth. Some localities fund SROs using strictly local dollars. Others use supplemental grant funding from the state, via the School Resource Officer Grant Fund maintained by the Va. Dept. of Criminal Justice Services. Some school divisions reimburse local law enforcement/police agencies for SRO positions, whereas some localities use cost-sharing agreements between schools and police to provide funding.

Sample questions to ask local school divisions, law enforcement agencies, and city managers/city councils/boards of supervisors:

* How are SROs funded in this locality? Ask for a line item breakdown of all costs associated with maintaining SROs, and from where that funding is drawn.
* When was the SRO program started in this locality, and how was funding allocated over time (look at least 5-10 years back)?
* How are support staff and socio-emotional supports funded in the school division, and how has staffing of counselors, mental health supports, nurses, psychologists, mediators, and other support staff changed over time based on funding?
* Are there student or community needs assessments that are informing budget choices?
* When are School Resource Officer budgets approved each year? When have they been up for a vote on either school board or city/county agendas? When is the next such vote?

**Student Referrals to Law Enforcement and Court**

Virginia is among the states that refers the most students to law enforcement and courts. Nationally and statewide, we know there are extreme disparities within school discipline and school policing of students by race and disability. This data can be tracked at the local level, and communities can demand local school boards provide this information and discuss publicly at forums, school board meetings, and other events to help address any disproportionate contact by race and disability.

Sample questions to ask of local school divisions, local law enforcement/police agencies, Court Service Units and the Va. Dept. of Juvenile Justice. **All of this data should be anonymized, then disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age or grade, and disability to examine any disparities**. It is also helpful to look at this data over time—a 5- to 10-year lookback is helpful to show trends.

* How many students were referred to law enforcement by school administrators in a given school year? As of July 1, 2020, school administrators will no longer be mandated to refer students to law enforcement for potential misdemeanor offenses. What will the data say about their discretion vs when they were mandated reporters?
* How many students were referred by school personnel to courts through a complaint or charge filed with the CSU?
* How many students were referred by law enforcement to courts through a complaint or charge filed with the CSU?
* For what offenses were these students referred?
* What are the court outcomes for these students? How many were given diversion plans and how many were prosecuted? How do these results differ by race/ethnicity, gender, etc?