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## **2020-2021 ANNUAL REVIEW**

### **School Resource Officer Program**

#### **Background**

In July 2018 the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and School Board approved a revised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) and Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). In this document, the two organizations formed a School and Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) to establish a mutually beneficial framework so that both the FCPS and the FCPD can provide a safe learning environment for all members of the school community. The MOU clarifies the roles of key members in the program – including school administrators, FCPS counselors, school resource officers (SRO), school liaison commander (SLC), and FCPS special education staff – and addresses the scope of responsibilities of the FCPS and the FCPD as well as information exchange.

The revised MOU established a clear division between the role of the SRO in criminal matters and FCPS administrative staff on student discipline matters, clarifying that SROs are not involved in determining student discipline under the FCPS Student Rights and Responsibilities regulation. It ensured that SROs shall not be involved with the enforcement of school rules or disciplinary infractions that are not violations of law. It added SRO training focused on implicit bias, disability awareness, crisis intervention training, restorative justice techniques, and cultural competency. Finally, it established an annual review process, to include reporting on the following elements:

1. Success of established goals and objectives as defined by this MOU.
2. Accomplishment of tasks agreed upon as part of any work plan written in conjunction with a principal.
3. All available data related to student discipline and contacts with the justice system. This shall include student demographics, all police data and reports, restorative justice program data, and all other available data to study police-student contact trends.
4. Input from identified stakeholders such as students, parents, and formal school-community organizations.

Due to the pandemic, a virtual learning environment existed, and SROs were not in schools. Although the sections below contain the results of the MOU for school year 2020-21, much of the information is not available/applicable given the absence of SROs in schools.

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#### **Section One: Success of Goals and Objectives**

The MOU states that the primary goals of the School and Law Enforcement Partnership are:

1. To provide a safe and positive learning environment and
2. To promote mutual respect between law enforcement, school security staff, school administrative staff, students and their families.

SROs are considered active members of their assigned school's community. The SROs assist with matters related to safety, security, and the exchange of information while providing law enforcement services. SROs assist school administrators in developing school crisis, emergency management, and response plans. They work with administrators in problem-solving to prevent crime and promote safety in the school environment. SROs collaborate with school administrators and other school personnel to support positive school climates that focus on resolving conflicts, reducing student engagement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and diverting youth from courts when possible. SROs are not considered members of the administrative team.

SROs serve multiple roles in schools. The roles are interrelated, but all are carried out with the aim to contribute to school safety and security while promoting positive and supportive school climates. The primary role of an SRO in schools is that of a law enforcement officer. SROs assume primary responsibility for requests for assistance from administrators and for coordinating the response of other law enforcement resources to the school.

As resources permit, SROs assist with presentations for school personnel on law-related topics such as law enforcement practices, changes in relevant laws, crime trends, crime prevention, school safety strategies, and crisis response procedures. SROs also deliver law-related education with students using lessons and curricula approved in advance by their SRO Supervisor.

Students often seek approval, direction, and guidance from adults in the school setting regarding problems on a variety of issues. Through interaction with students, both formal and informal, SROs serve as mentors and role models. SROs are expected to clearly communicate to students the standards of acceptable and unacceptable behavior, to set a positive example for how to handle stressful situations and resolve conflicts, show respect and consideration of others, and express high

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expectations for student behavior. As another set of eyes and ears in the school community, SROs also help guide students to FCPS services including mental health services.

SROs are selected after applying to a competitive panel interview process composed of FCPD and FCPS representatives. Upon selection as an SRO, they are required to complete SRO and Crisis Intervention Training (CIT).

In accordance with the SRO MOU, all school administrators have attended training on the contents of the MOU, as well as the appropriate role of the SRO in handling school discipline. That training specifically stated that SROs “will not become involved in routine school matters unrelated to law enforcement.” Additionally, all school administrators have received required training on safety and security processes and procedures, which included basic information on the MOU related to SRO operations. Attendees included principals, assistant principals, directors of student services/activities, school resource officers, security specialists/assistants, and school transportation officials. Finally, the Office of Safety and Security conducts annual safety and security training to all school based personnel that includes information about the SRO Program and MOU requirements.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) requires that officers selected for the SRO program shall, within the first 6 months after receiving their assignments, and at least every two years thereafter, receive the following training:

- Mental Health Specific Training and Crisis Intervention Training in accordance with established and certified state standards
- Disability awareness training
- Implicit bias/racial bias training outlining attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner
- Restorative justice techniques and the Alternative Accountability Program as outlined in General Order 605, Juvenile Procedures
- Cultural Competency Training that is provided to FCPS staff

FCPD has exceeded the MOU requirements by conducting training more often than required. Every year FCPD has conducted a 40-hour SRO course covering the topics required in the MOU and beyond for all SROs. Most years FCPD conducts an additional 24-hour SRO course mid-year to accentuate the topics

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covered in the 40-hour course. Despite the pandemic, FCPD successfully completed the in person 40hour course in August of 2021. All topics highlighted in the MOU were covered.

### **Section Two: Accomplishment of Tasks**

In September of 2021, principals were surveyed regarding the involvement of SROs in administrative matters. As of September 22, 2021, responses were collected from all 50 schools with SROs. Of the responses gathered, 100% of principals responded affirmatively to the statement “I confirm that during SY 2020-2021, I did not ask or agree to allow my SRO to provide assistance with administrative functions outside the scope of the SRO assistance authorized by the MOU.” Due to the impact of the pandemic this was the only question asked of principals.

In a traditional in school learning year, principals would have verified any work plan covering tasks typically associated with the SRO program such as:

- Intervening when there was a threat to staff or student safety
- Patrolling hallways and school grounds
- Building positive relationships with students (including acting as an informal mentor to students)
- Applying alternative means to resolving issues in lieu of arrest when appropriate
- Maintaining safety, including cases involving possession of illegal substances
- Getting involved in cases of possession of illegal substances
- Assisting in school emergency/crisis planning
- Referring violations of routine rules to school administrators

### **Section Three: Data related to Student Discipline and Contacts with the Justice System**

The statistics presented in the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) School Resource Officer (SRO) Scorecard represent the entirety of the 2020-21 FCPS school year to include qualifying incidents and arrests that occurred both in the virtual and in-school environments. As noted, and for the second year, the pandemic has had an impact on the number of qualifying statistics recorded by SROs.

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During the time when FCPS delivered 100% virtual instruction, SROs were re-assigned to bolster FCPD patrol operations. Notwithstanding the reassignment to patrol, SROs maintained relationships with their schools and in some cases continued to handle cases generated via virtual school. In preparation for the 2020-2021 school year, a small group of SROs and an SRO supervisor were detailed to handle reports of criminal misconduct occurring in the FCPS virtual learning environment. SROs detailed to this assignment were provided with specific cyber investigations training from the National White-Collar Crime Center.

All SROs were given guidance to continue to maintain relationships with their assigned school as their new patrol schedule allows. FCPD and FCPS have also prioritized student mental health while children are not physically in school. When appropriate FCPD officers can guide FCPS students to FCPS mental health resources after a police encounter.

Upon the switch to partial in-person schooling on March 9, 2021, SROs were deployed to their school assignments, putting SROs physically in schools for approximately three months. A total of five arrests involving two people for the entire school year are noted in the statistical report.

The drastic changes in school delivery for the 2020-21 school year make many comparisons to past data difficult. The exception to this is the encouraging consistency of incident report data. Throughout the reporting process, SRO generated incidents have remained a small percentage of overall incidents. This indicates that SROs are being used as a resource for school staff, students, and parents and not as initiators of SRO interactions.

With abbreviated in-person instruction, arrest data drastically decreased for the 2020-21 school year. There were no instances of use of force or field contacts this school year.

The use of diversion programs has increased since the inception of the MOU. Fairfax County has several diversion options available for juveniles involved in the criminal justice system. Per the SRO MOU, all responses to school misconduct shall be reasonable, consistent, and fair, with appropriate consideration given to mitigating factors and of the nature or severity of the incident. Furthermore, the FCPD will emphasize Restorative Justice programs (e.g. Alternative Accountability Program) to avoid arrest situations while balancing the right of victims.

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The Alternative Accountability Program (AAP) is offered as an alternative to referring juvenile offenders to the juvenile courts/criminal justice system. It provides restorative justice and shoplifter offender education programming. The AAP MOU defines restorative justice as a process that is a victim-centered response to crime and wrongdoing. Restorative Justice brings together juvenile offenders with the people and communities that have been harmed by their actions in a safe, confidential process to understand what happened, who has been harmed, and what can be done to repair the harm.

In Fairfax County the AAP is a voluntary program. To participate, offenders must first acknowledge involvement in the incident. Additionally, during the conference they must be willing to engage the victim and explore repairing the harm in terms that meet the victim's needs. Victim and offender participation is voluntary, and the parent or guardian of each juvenile must consent in writing to the juvenile's participation.

#### **Section Four: Input from Identified Stakeholders**

The stated purpose of the SRO MOU is to build a positive and safe school environment. FCPS' Strategic Plan has metrics that measure the extent to which students, staff, and parents feel their schools provide a positive environment. Data on these metrics will be reported in FCPS Strategic Plan Goal Reports this school year.

#### **Section Five: Future Steps**

Data from the third year of the SRO MOU has been used by FCPS and FCPD to inform data dialogues with principals in schools where necessary. This targeted outreach to school communities will continue to be informed by the data provided by the FCPD and the perceptions of school environment and safety gathered by FCPS. This program will allow for the expansion of outreach to schools most impacted by the revised MOU. The results of this outreach will be reported in future annual reviews.

The Office of Safety and Security (OSS) will continue its outreach to schools on their safety programs. OSS reviews all security plans (Crisis Management Plans) for applicability, compliance, necessity and standardization. In future years, consistent templates for security plans will be developed and

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implemented. Any changes related to security plans will result in training for SROs and school based security and administrative staff if needed. This will ensure that safety plans are carried out with fidelity.

FCPS and FCPD will continue to collaborate on staff training to ensure the fidelity of its implementation. Currently, the MOU is under review for minor changes related to the passing of Virginia legislation. FCPS and FCPD will continue to collaborate with both Boards to ensure the MOU is positively impacting schools and the greater community.