

# The Importance of SROs

By: Deputy Kip Heinle

## WHY HAVE AN SRO

An SRO is the first line of defense against evil that could walk down your halls or onto your school property. But, the hats that an SRO wears are many. Not only do we keep peace and order at schools and school functions, but we are also mentors to students. We are educators, as most of us present in classrooms on various topics. We are parent figures to those students who need a positive adult in their lives for whatever reason. We are counselors with a listening ear for students, faculty and staff. We are building engineers, who need to know the ins and outs of our buildings and grounds because sometimes in an emergency we need to be able to shut off the water or gas, or know how to open up the elevator when the electricity is out because a student trapped in it and is calling out for help. These are all things that I have done in my career as an SRO.

I would say 90% of my job as an SRO doesn't necessarily deal with police work, but I'm trained to deal with any situation that can and has arose in my career. I have taken a loaded gun off a kid who had plans to use it after school. I have ridden in the back of an ambulance to comfort a student who had a medical emergency because they wanted a familiar face to go with them.

The contacts and bridges I have built, and many SRO's will build, are priceless. In today's current climate, building these bridges is important because these students are our future. There have been times when students will come to me, both current and former, and provide me with information because they trust me. I even recently had a former student who was suicidal request me to respond to the scene where he was up on a roof of a house. I was able to talk to him at the scene, where he was then transported to receive the help that he needed.

## THE JOB OF AN SRO

SRO's are a presence in the halls. They need to be proactive in their approach on things at the schools. If there is a trouble spot in the school, they need to respond and concentrate on that area. They need to be visible during passing period, lunch, and even at extra-curricular activities after school. Students and spectators will feel safer seeing a familiar face at these events.

Being an SRO is very stressful; there's not a day that goes by that I'm not thinking of ways to improve security at my school. I, like all SRO's, don't want to be the next school that pops up on the news for a shooting or stabbing. As a patrolman I would work my 12-hour shift and go home. As an SRO, I get calls or emails all hours of the night and weekends regarding follow up I need to do because of an incident that happened outside of school. Or a detective or patrolman needs info on a current or former student. I'm also constantly checking my school

email because I get all the “Gaggle” hits from students; most of these are just students working on a paper or doing research but some need to be addressed on my off-duty time.

#### SELECTING AN SRO

Many times, the SRO is the most visible person in your district, building and the Police Agency they work for. I would suggest when selecting an SRO, both the school and Police Agency work hand and hand in choosing the correct fit for the school. The SRO’s is the face of the school or department they represent. The SRO needs a special personality to deal with young adults and their parents. You don’t want an SRO who just wants an “easy” day job, because there is nothing easy about being an SRO. You want somebody who “buys” in or has a vested interest in the school and community. For me, not only do I live in the community in which I work and protect my school “family,” but as a father and uncle to students in the building, I am literally helping protect my own family. Even if an SRO doesn’t have family members in the school district, they can still be proactive in being involved.

For example, I often will attend events as a “regular” person, no uniform, just a fan or parent. I try to attend one home game for each team regardless of level. I will attend a band/chorus concert, a play/musical. This goes a long way with students and their parents when they can see you like this. Additionally, some of the most gratifying satisfaction I get is off duty when I have parents and former students stop me at a store or restaurant and thank me for something I did for them while they attended my school.

Why have an SRO? From protecting the schools to the many hats they wear, and from the relationships they build to the peoples’ lives they make a difference in, an SRO is important to the school district and the surrounding community. An SRO may cost money to the district, but the services they offer and what they are trained to do are PRICELESS!