



Response to School Resource Officer Crisis at Tolman High School

Learning Guide

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Learning Objectives

How to implement an SRO program.

How to manage a crisis in a school setting.

Case Study Discussion Questions

Why did the City of Pawtucket institute a School Resource Officer program?

Describe the role of School Resource Officers in Pawtucket.

What type of training did the Pawtucket School Resource Officer receive?

Describe the responses of different stakeholders to the viral video.

What did officials in Pawtucket do effectively?

Describe the lessons learned from this case.

Additional Discussion Questions

[For school districts currently using SROs] Describe the role of SROs in your district. How does this compare with Pawtucket?

Describe the process by which your district devised the Memorandum of Understanding [MOU].

If applicable, what other models for school safety does your district use?

[Where applicable] How has your district responded to student protests in the past? How does this compare with Pawtucket?

How do you use social media to communicate?

Have you dealt with any social media incidents in the past? If so, how did you manage the situation?

Describe the community of interest groups in your area. How do you communicate with them?

How may the lessons learned be applied to your own district's practices?

What are the merits of alternative approaches?

What are the three takeaways for your own school district?

Literature

School Policing

What is a SRO?

A SRO, or School Resource Officer, is “a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with school and community-based organizations.”^{1,2}

Traditional vs. Community Policing

The use of SROs developed from a national movement towards community policing. Anne Atkinson draws several major contrasts between traditional policing in schools versus community policing.³ Most have to do with what are supposed to be proactive elements of community policing. Under the traditional system, officers take a reactive, incident-driven approach towards operating in schools. Instead, officers in community-oriented policing work in partnership with a particular school community. The officer takes a problem oriented approach to their job, works on prevention and early intervention, viewed by the school in a positive way, and has their effectiveness measured by an absence of crime and disorder. Other characteristics of community policing include having broad participation (e.g. teachers, students, and parents) in developing solutions, greater information sharing between teachers and officers, and consistent responses (e.g. administration or criminal) to incidents.⁴

¹ This definition appeared in the amended version of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968. See Cathy Girouard, “School Resource Officer Training Program,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2001), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/fs200105.pdf>.

² The National Center for Education Statistics divided school-law enforcement partnerships into three categories. The first is where officers visit the school on an occasional basis. Such visits may occur on a formal or informal basis. The second category involves the use of site-based security guards who are there each day. Those guards are not sworn officers, nor are they employed by the local police department. SROs represent the third category of school-law enforcement partnerships. See Spencer C. Weiler and Martha Cray, “Policy to Practice: A Look at National and State Implementation of School Resource Officer Programs,” *The Clearing House* 84 (2011), 167.

³ Dr. Atkinson is President and Founder of PolicyWorks, Ltd., an independent program evaluation and policy research firm. A nationally-recognized expert on bridging policy and practice, her work has focused on education, child welfare, and school safety at the federal and state levels.

⁴ Anne J. Atkinson, *Fostering School-Law Enforcement Partnerships* (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, September 2002), 7, cited in Wayne W. Bennett and Karen M. Hess, *Management and Supervision in Law Enforcement* (5th Edition) (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2007), 80.

History of SRO Programs

The first school recorded to have an assigned police officer was located in Liverpool, England in 1951.⁵ Flint, Michigan was the first city (circa 1958) to use school officers within the United States. The Safe Schools Act of 1994 provided federal funding for officers in high crime schools. A 1998 amendment to the 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act facilitated support for an SRO approach to working in schools in an effort to reduce school crime.⁶

During the late 1990's, the implementation of SRO programs increased dramatically following noted examples of school violence, particularly the 1999 Columbine High School shootings.⁷ From 1999 through 2005, the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office within the U.S. Department of Justice provided \$724 million for SRO hiring. In 2013, this same office funded the Integrated School Resource Officer Safety Model and Training Curriculum Project, "which is designed to expand the knowledge base for SROs and those that select, hire, train, and manage them."⁸

It is not possible to determine the precise number of SROs in the United States. The most recent reporting by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice indicated that during the 2013-14 school year, 43 percent of all public schools reported the use of "one or more full-time or part-time security staff present at least once a week."⁹ This figure included not solely SROs, but other types of school-based security staff as well.

⁵ Bill Bond, "Principals and SRO: Defining Roles," *Principal Leadership* 1 (2001), 53, cited in Weiler and Cray, 161. McDaniel mentioned that a Miami police chief came up with the term SRO sometime in the early to mid-1960s. See Joanne McDaniel, "School Resource Officers: What We Know, What We Think We Know, What We Need to Know." http://test.ncdijdp.org/cpsv/pdf_files/whatweknowsp01.pdf, 2001, cited in Weiler and Cray, 161.

⁶ Aaron Kupchik and Nicole L. Bracy. "To Protect, Serve, and Mentor? Police Officers in Public Schools," in *Schools Under Surveillance: Cultures of Control in Public Education*, eds. Torin Monahan and Rodolfo D. Torres (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 22.

⁷ Nirvi Shah, "Downside Seen in Rush to Hire School-Based Police," *Education Week*, March 13, 2013, 1, 14.

⁸ United States Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services, "The COPS Office: 20 Years of Community Oriented Policing," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). <http://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p301-pub.pdf>.

⁹ Anlan Zhang, Lauren Musu-Gillette, and Barbara A. Oudekerk, "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2015 (NCES 2016-079/NCJ 249758)," (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Juvenile Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 2016), 106, 183.

SRO Job Description

The “triad model” is a common way to think about an SRO’s three major areas of responsibilities.¹⁰ The law enforcement officer role represents the first component of the job. SROs may use their arrest powers to tackle crime problems in and around the school premises. The second major area of focus is that of a school counselor. Here, SROs direct individual students to suitable community services. Finally, officers may serve as educators in the school community. Such responsibilities may include teaching their own courses on crime prevention, making school presentations, training students in conflict resolution, and helping to develop school policies pertaining to crime. Despite the three-part model, SROs tend to spend relatively more time focused on law enforcement compared to other responsibilities. According to Petteruti, an estimated weekly breakdown of SRO activities would include 20 hours on law enforcement, 10 hours on advising and mentoring, five hours on teaching, and 6-7 hours on other tasks.¹¹

How to Write Governance Document

The document governing the use of SROs should apply research-based practices for improving school climate and student behavior.¹² In addition, school administrators should have access to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).¹³ Kim and Geronimo articulated five major requirements for an effective governance document. First, it should make clear that students not experience formal police intervention for instances of “ordinary school discipline issues.” Arrests should be used only as a last resort. Second, the document should contain details about student rights, which includes situations where administrators or SROs conduct questions or searches. Third, in an effort to demonstrate transparency and accountability, the MOU should detail a system for the public reporting of SRO actions and a system for resolving complaints. Fourth, the document should demonstrate how the SRO fits into the overall public school mission. Finally, the document should specify the minimum training requirements for all SROs.¹⁴

¹⁰ C. Lavarello, and Ken Trump, “To Arm or Not to Arm?” *American School Board Journal* 188 (2001), 32, cited in Weiler and Cray, 161.

¹¹ Amanda Petteruti, *Education under Arrest: The Case against Police in Schools* (Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 2011), cited in David C. May, Brianna Wright, Gary Cordner, and Stephen Fessel, “School Resource Officers: Effective Tools when Properly Used?” in *School Safety in the United States: A Reasoned Look at the Rhetoric*, ed. David C. May (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2014), 172-173.

¹² Catherine Y. Kim and India Geronimo, “Policing in Schools: Developing a Governance Document for School Resource Officers in K-12 Schools,” *The Education Digest* 75 (Jan 2010), 35.

¹³ Cray and Weiler, 169.

¹⁴ Kim and Geronimo, 28-35.

Implementation of the SRO Program

Personnel Selection

The individuals serving as SROs play a key role in determining the effectiveness of the program. Therefore, the process for appointing them is of critical importance. The suggested qualifications for SROs are comprehensive, encompassing the applicants' personal objectives and past work history. SROs should demonstrate a willingness to work with the full community of students and staff. This includes the ability to work with teachers and administrators throughout the school building. They should support the use of community policing and problem-solving strategies. As far as past work performance is concerned, the SRO should have demonstrated effectiveness in working with youth and other members of the greater community.¹⁵ According to Maurice Canady, Executive Director of the National Association of School Resource Officers, "You have to know this officer that you're placing into this school environment. The wrong person in there- they can really do a lot of damage, reflect poorly on your department, and cause the whole community to say, 'We don't want law enforcement in schools.'"¹⁶ In summary, SROs, "must be experienced law-enforcement personnel who are patient, relish working with young people, are good listeners, and want to be on the job."¹⁷

In addition to the question of SRO qualifications, there is also the selection process itself. Namely, school administrators should be directly involved in choosing SROs. Administrators understand the practicalities of working in a school-based environment. Furthermore, their involvement in the selection process serves as an indication of a collaborative partnership.¹⁸

SRO Training

Kupchik and Bracy pointed out the potential for the training one receives as a police officer to conflict with the work of an SRO. To them, while police officers typically aim to "assert authority and not back down," SROs need to take a conflict-resolution approach to working with students.¹⁹

Kim and Geronimo recommended that SROs receive at least 40 hours of pre-service training, followed by 10 hours of in-service training on an annual basis. Suggested topics for in-service training included: Child and adolescent development and psychology; Positive behavioral

¹⁵ Anne J. Atkinson, *The Successful School Resource Officer Program: Building Effective School and Law Enforcement Partnerships* (Richmond, VA: Greystone Publishers, Inc., 2000), 27; Richard K. James, Joan Logan, and Scott A. Davis, "Including School Resource Officers in School-Based Crisis Intervention: Strengthening Student Support," *School Psychology International* 32 (2011), 215.

¹⁶ Shah, 14.

¹⁷ Shah, 15.

¹⁸ Atkinson (2000), 27.

¹⁹ Kupchik and Bracy, 32.

interventions and supports (PBIS), conflict resolution, peer mediation, or other restorative justice techniques; Children with disabilities or other special needs; and cultural competency.²⁰ Additional training topics proposed by Atkinson include: Negotiation skills; Juvenile and school law; Critical incident management; Gang prevention/suppression; and adolescent substance abuse.²¹

Atkinson found that SROs benefited from training that incorporated multiple instructional approaches. These included lectures, problem-solving exercises, and simulations. In addition, it is helpful for SROs to engage in joint training, especially on topics such as school law and crisis response.²²

The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) runs a 40-hour training course for officers that are new to the position. The organization employs a three-pronged concept to its program implementation. The three areas include individual and classroom teaching skills, school law enforcement practices, and counseling and problem solving skills.²³ In addition to the basic training course, NASRO offers follow-up classes on topics including school crisis plan development and role playing, anti-bullying, drug abuse prevention, and determining gang activity.

Prior to the SRO's first day on the job, the officer should meet with the school principal to review the MOU and operational procedures, and talk about what the program will entail in the building. According to Atkinson, "Experience has shown that time invested in orientation at the beginning stage greatly enhances development of the type of collaborative relationship and the shared ownership which is characteristic of effective SRO Programs."²⁴

Plan for Evaluation

There should be a system of evaluation in place from the outset. Given that SROs exist in a system of competitive funds, the funders will want to see demonstration of program effectiveness.²⁵

Possible Confusion over SRO Roles, and how this Affects Stakeholders

There has been much debate concerning the advantages and disadvantages of posting SROs in schools. These depend on the stakeholder in question. Among the advantages particular to the school setting, school administrators rely on SROs as a legal advisor. SROs provide advice on school security, and bring legitimacy to safety matters. A major disadvantage is that there may

²⁰ Kim and Geronimo, 35.

²¹ Atkinson (2000), 29.

²² Atkinson (2000), 29.

²³ Peter Finn, "School Resource Officer Programs: Finding the Funding and Reaping the Benefits," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 75 (August 2006), 1-7, cited in James et al., 214.

²⁴ Atkinson (2000), 30.

²⁵ Atkinson (2000), 30.

be administrative role confusion when it comes to matters of student discipline. Kupchik and Bracy pointed out that SROs are not usually supervised or evaluated by anyone from the school building, so questions may persist as to whether it is the officer or the principal holding greater authority.²⁶ Furthermore, school administrators and SROs are held to different legal standards. While a school principal may conduct a student search under the standard of 'reasonable suspicion,' the SRO may only do so when there is 'probable cause.' To get around this loophole, for example, an administrator might instruct an SRO to observe while the former conducts a search under the lower legal threshold.²⁷

From the vantage point of police departments, SROs serve as a type of ambassador to the greater community. Since the SROs are embedded in schools, officers have the opportunity to learn about particular students and their families, in addition to community issues as a whole. The information gathered as part of their SRO responsibilities may be used by the police department to deal with criminal matters beyond the school building. In addition, police departments use SROs as a mechanism for building relationships in order to socialize students to the legal system.²⁸

For the students themselves, there is a tension over how to view the role of SROs in their schools. On the one hand, there is the concept of SROs as "Officer Friendly." Here, the SRO acts as a role model for students, providing mentorship and education on topics related to personal behavior. The "Campus Cop," on the other hand, provides a different type of service. This individual's responsibilities are comprised of more traditional law enforcement practices, like drug confiscation and the monitoring of gang activity.²⁹ The potential for conflict exists when these roles collide. If a student confides in the officer about illegal activities (because of the role as mentor), the SRO would be obligated to act in accordance with their job in law enforcement.³⁰

Furthermore, the presence of SROs leads to the potential criminalization of student behavior. Beger pointed out that "some behaviors that would have led only to school punishment had an officer not been present now result in arrest because an officer is present."³¹ This might include such actions as dress code violations and attendance policies.³² Kim and Geronimo state that

²⁶ Kupchik and Bracy, 27-29.

²⁷ Kupchik and Bracy, 33.

²⁸ Kupchik and Bracy, 29; Arrick Jackson, "Police-School Resource Officers' and Students' Perception of the Police and Offending," *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management* 25 (2002), 631-650, cited in Kupchik and Bracy, 29.

²⁹ S.A. Grant, "Students Respond to Campus Cops," *School Safety* (Winter 1993), 15-17, cited in James, et al, 211.

³⁰ Kupchik and Bracy, 31.

³¹ Randall Beger, "The 'Worst of Both Worlds': School Security and the Disappearing Fourth Amendment Rights of Students," *Criminal Justice Review* 28 (2003), 336-354, cited in Kupchik and Bracy, 33.

³² Kupchik and Bracy, 26-27.

such incidents could be handled more efficiently and effectively by school principals, rather than by an increasingly clogged legal system.^{33,34}

Crisis Management

What is a Crisis?

Boin et al wrote that a crisis “is a label, a semantic construction people use to characterize situations or epochs that they somehow regard as extraordinary, volatile, and potentially far-reaching in their negative implications.”³⁵ Rather than being determined by strictly objective measures, it is determined largely by how individuals view the situation. The implementation of extensive preventative measures does not guarantee the avoidance of problems. Nevertheless, the public is likely to view crises, not as bad luck, but the result of poor policy practices.³⁶

Leadership during and after Crisis

Leadership during and after a time of crisis may be understood as consisting of a series of critical tasks. The first is sense making. Here, officials try to gain an understanding about what is occurring in the present, and anticipate events in the near future. For step two, decision making, leaders coordinate and prioritize resources to respond to the crisis. The third step, making meaning, requires officials to communicate their efforts to the public in a coherent manner. Terminating entails bringing the situation back to a routine state of affairs.

Following the crisis, the process of learning occurs. Here, leaders seek to draw lessons from the events, in order to apply these to existing institutions, policies, and practices, as necessary.³⁷ Officials may use crises to spark “windows of opportunity” for policy reform. In doing so, they seek to draw lessons from the events, in order to apply these to existing institutions, policies, and practices, as necessary.³⁸ A final step is accountability, where officials convey their actions

³³ Kim and Geronimo, 29.

³⁴ The authors state that alternative approaches to dealing with student behavior, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), peer mediation, and conflict resolution programs may be more effective ways of improving school climate. See Kim and Geronimo, 35. Recent media coverage suggests that in some school districts, a shift has taken place among SRO roles. In Denver, for example, the school district put into place a new MOU that emphasizes officers as mentors, rather than enforcers of the law. See Shah, 1.

³⁵ Arjen Boin, Paul ‘t Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 137-138.

³⁶ Boin et al, 138-139.

³⁷ Boin et al, 10-14, 140.

³⁸ Arjen Boin, Allan McConnell and Paul ‘t Hart, “Governing After Crisis,” in *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, edited by Arjen Boin, Allan McConnell and Paul ‘t Hart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9-10; see also T.A. Birkland, *After Disaster: Agenda*

to members of the public regarding the course of events that have transpired. It is then up to the public to assess the performance of policy makers.

The Effects of Crises

Crises cause a span of possible policy effects. These may range from fine tuning to policy reform to a paradigm shift. Fine tuning refers to the enactment of incremental policy changes without changes to core political values. Policy reform takes place when a shift occurs in policy principles and institutional values. A paradigm shift, which rarely occurs, involves the wholesale transformation of policies and institutions.³⁹

In addition to policy effects, crises lead to varying possible outcomes for the leadership. One possible consequence is elite reinvigoration. The public approves the work of the leadership, leaving the latter in a strong position. Elite damage is another possible effect. Leaders lose credibility, and, in extreme cases, get forced out of office. Finally, there is elite escape. Under this scenario, the crisis make little to no difference to the fortunes of the political leadership.⁴⁰

Understanding Crisis in a School Setting

While the aforementioned literature examines the management of political crisis in a broad context, one may also consider these ideas specifically at the school level. The first step in managing a school-based crisis is mitigation or prevention. Administrators determine how to best reduce the loss of life or property at their building in the first place. This includes addressing facility safety and security, as well as school climate. Another component of the process is preparedness. This involves the planning and preparation for worst case scenarios. Major tasks for officials in this phase include the need for considering existing efforts, identifying and involving stakeholders, and developing methods of communication. Once the crisis has unfolded, administrators proceed to engage in their response. Here, they seek to follow the crisis plans already put into place, rather than creating brand new ones. Lastly, recovery occurs when officials bring back operations to a regular state of affairs. This may involve managing stress in the school, debriefings, and evaluation. These four stages are not necessarily discrete, but involve a continuous cycle of assessment and improvement.⁴¹

Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997) and J. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2003), both cited in Boin et al, 2008, 10.

³⁹ Boin et al (2008), 16-17.

⁴⁰ Boin et al (2008), 13.

⁴¹ David C. May, "School-Level Crisis Response Planning" in *School Safety in the United States: A Reasoned Look at the Rhetoric*, ed. David C. May (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2014), 190. See also: United States Department of Education, The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, "Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2007), <http://rems.ed.gov/docs/PracticalInformationonCrisisPlanning.pdf>, cited in May, 190.