



# PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN:

## The Value of School Resource Officers



Ensuring the safety of students in schools has always been top of mind for parents, teachers, law enforcement, and policymakers. Unfortunately, the heartbreaking regularity of active shooter events, combined with other school-based safety threats like bullying and harassment, has families deeply concerned about their children's safety at school.

**44%** In a recent Gallup poll, 44% of parents expressed worry about their children's safety and 20% stated their children expressed concerns about feeling unsafe at school. <sup>1</sup>

## The Vital Role of School Resource Officers

In response to growing safety concerns, School Resource Officers (SROs) remain a crucial asset in promoting a safe learning environment for students and providing peace of mind for parents. SROs are sworn law enforcement officers who receive the same training as patrol officers and oftentimes have additional training specific to working in the school environment.

As outlined by the U.S. Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services Office, <sup>2</sup> SROs have four major roles within the school community:

- 01. Promoting Safety** in and around the school campus by addressing crime, while also serving as a liaison between school administrators and outside agencies to create a safer environment.
- 02. Building Relationships** with students as mentors to reinforce positive behavior and connecting families with community services when needed.
- 03. Educating Students** on crime prevention, drug awareness, conflict resolution, and other safety topics.
- 04. Implementing School Safety Plans** in the event of an emergency.



In the Coronado Unified School District, SROs teach a class called "Crown City Safety Ambassadors" to fourth and sixth grade students. This class includes age-appropriate life skill lessons on subjects such as bullying, peer pressure, crime, safety, decision-making, and good citizenship. It culminates in a community service project to instill a sense of responsibility in students for their surrounding environment. <sup>3</sup>

*Image Source: The Coronado News*

<sup>1</sup> Gallup: [Parent, Student School Safety Concerns Elevated](#), September 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice: [School Resource Officers and School-based Policing Fact Sheet](#), December 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Coronado Times: [School resource officers build positive relationships with students](#), August 2023.



## Preventing Threats & Promoting Public Safety

SROs are critical to the daily safety and protection of students on campuses across the country. The U.S. Secret Service analyzed 67 plots to attack schools that were reported and averted from 2006-2018. The report demonstrates that SROs are instrumental in stopping potentially catastrophic attacks:

- ▶ An SRO played a direct role in preventing nearly one-third of all thwarted attacks analyzed by the Secret Service.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ In nearly one of every eight schools, an SRO was the first to receive the tip, showcasing their role as a trusted adult on campus.



In October 2022, SRO Deputy Jamie Mendoza responded to reports from two Fresno County students about threatening messages sent by another student. Within an hour of the report and with cooperation from the suspect's mother, Deputy Mendoza spoke with the student at his home and searched his backpack where he found a TEC-9 semiautomatic pistol and magazine that the student was planning to bring to school that day.

"I knew all the students involved. And my ability to speak with the mother in Spanish helped me build a relationship that fostered her cooperation."<sup>5</sup>

– Deputy Jamie Mendoza, School Resource Officer in Fresno County.

## Next Steps: Advocating for Safe Schools

SROs play a multifaceted role on school campuses as educators, emergency responders, and community representatives. It's critical that the officers tasked with protecting California's future are prepared to respond to all potential situations. PORAC encourages our elected officials to pass legislation that expands access to SROs, ensures they are fully trained and equipped, and creates guidelines to promote school safety:

- 01. Increased Resources:** Create a statewide grant program to provide school districts with resources to partner with local law enforcement to establish SRO programs. As agencies across the state struggle to fill open law enforcement roles, additional resources for recruitment, training, and retention are necessary to fill this gap and keep kids safe.
- 02. Federal Training Standards:** Establish a federal minimum training and use of force standard to create consistency in how officers are trained to respond to school-based calls.
- 03. Response Plans:** Adopt policies that ensure SROs are in the best position to respond to active shooter or other mass casualty attacks, allowing urban and rural communities to tailor response plans to best fit their local needs.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center: *Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools*, March 2021.

<sup>5</sup> National Association of School Resource Officers: *SRO Success Story: School resource officer averts potential school shooting*, May 2023.