

**Comments for the Charlottesville School Board
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Observations on School Resource Officers

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- 1. We all want our schools to be safe. The question is whether law enforcement engagement in schools is helpful or harmful.**
- 2. The main concern is that officers will criminalize student misbehavior that can be managed by school discipline.**

- 3. The MOU carefully restricts the SRO to law enforcement of criminal acts and not disciplinary misbehavior.**
- 4. The MOU emphasizes a supportive school climate and efforts to resolve problems with support services rather than punishment, and it encourages SROs to take the same approach.**

- 5. There are correlational studies showing an increase in arrests when officers are in schools, but no studies showing these arrests were over reactions versus legitimate responses to a crime. If a student is selling drugs or has assaulted someone, we want an officer on the scene to take action.**

- 6. Correlation does not mean causation. For example, we know there is a positive correlation between the number of firefighters in a community and the number of fires, but no one blames the firefighters for the fires.**

- 7. There are studies showing that students and teachers feel safer because of the SRO in their school. Several of these studies were conducted in Virginia and showed positive perceptions among all racial groups.**

- 8. Some students might have had traumatic experiences with law enforcement and might be anxious around them. Counselors should work with these students and help them process their experiences. One of the leading treatments for trauma is positive exposure. It is better for these students if they can see an officer who is friendly and helpful, and not threatening, than to perpetuate the trauma by keeping them isolated from officers.**

Restorative practices are a popular and promising approach to school discipline; however, rigorous research has yielded disappointing results.

Zakszeski, B., & Rutherford, L. (2021). Mind the Gap: A Systematic Review of Research on Restorative Practices in Schools. *School Psychology Review*, 50(2–3), 371–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1852056>

Huang, F.L., Gregory, A. & Ward-Seidel, A.R. The Impact of Restorative Practices on the Use of Out-of-School Suspensions: Results from a Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial. *Prev Sci* **24**, 962–973 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-023-01507-3>

Gregory, A., Huang, F. L., Anyon, Y., Greer, E., & Downing, B. (2018). An Examination of Restorative Interventions and Racial Equity in Out-of-School Suspensions. *School Psychology Review*, 47(2), 167–182. <https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0073.V47-2>

- 9. Law enforcement can be helpful when:**
- there is a physical fight, or a need to search a student for a weapon**
 - The presence of an officer discourages someone from an aggressive act such as an assault.**
 - Students feel comfortable reporting a threat of violence to an officer.**
- 10. Law enforcement officers have training and capability that other school staff do not have.**

- 11. Law enforcement officers have knowledge of the community and criminal activity in the community that affects schools. Many incidents in our schools are generated by conflicts and problems in the community.**
- 12. The MOU has multiple strategies for training officers to make a positive contribution to the school climate, as well as monitoring and reviewing officer actions in the school and responding if there are concerns.**

Conclusion

In our view, the MOU does an excellent job of specifying appropriate use of SROs, with safeguards against potential problems.