

SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM DISCUSSION POINTS
REVISED FEBRUARY 21, 2018
SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

1. The unfortunate events in Parkland Florida have increased interest in and attention to safe schools' issues.
2. As discussions occur about a path forward, it is important to remember a few very key points about the past and present Safe Schools program, Safe Schools Allocation, and the School Resource Officers program.
3. The School Resource Officers (SRO) Program began many years ago as part of the community relations sections of Sheriff's Offices and Police Departments.
4. SRO's were explicitly assigned to be Community Relations Officers, were trained to deliver relevant lessons in appropriate classes, and were not assigned security or law enforcement duties.
5. SRO's were explicitly directed not to be involved with law enforcement and security functions, and when law enforcement was needed "zone cars" were called.
6. Over time the SRO function changed, and while the Community Relations component remains, the primary job is more focused on protecting the school from the community and enforcing the law on campus.
7. School Resource Officers are in the command and control systems of the Sheriff and Police Chief, and do not answer to the principal or the superintendent. When other law enforcement issues arise in the community SRO's can and are pulled from the campus to which they are assigned.
8. **The cost share between the school district varies from one district to another. Commonly, the school district pays 50% of the total cost of the SRO, including the car, equipment, and the sergeants and lieutenants who command the units.**
9. Most SRO's are assigned to district high schools and middle schools. Few elementary schools are served by a full -time SRO.
10. **Charter schools receive a per student allocation of the district's Safe Schools Allocation. Charter schools have autonomy from the district regarding how they spend those dollars.**

SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAMS AND FUNDING

1. The Safe Schools program and its categorical funding also began many years ago.
2. The original primary purpose for Safe Schools funds was the establishment of middle school after school programs. That focus was derived from complaints by citizens that when schools were released in the afternoon the crime rate went up. The trend was particularly noticeable when middle schools were released.
3. Over time, as community conditions changed and SRO's were recognized as a security asset to protect schools and their students from the community, and to enforce the law, particularly on the campuses of large high schools. SRO's became a lawful use of Safe Schools funding.
4. As other safety-related issues came to the attention of the Legislature the districts were assigned more requirements and districts were authorized to use Safe Schools funding for those issues.

5. At one time, there were nine programs identified in proviso language that districts were to fund from the Safe Schools categorical. SRO's middle school after school programs, alternative schools for disruptive students, peer counseling, anti-bullying programs, and sentry dogs were among the uses prescribed in Safe Schools proviso language.
6. Unfortunately, funding has not increased as student enrollment grew, costs grew, and responsibilities increased.
7. To provide a convenient reference point, in 2000, at the turn of the century, under the leadership of Governor Bush, Speaker John Thrasher, and President Toni Jennings, the Safe Schools Allocation was \$75,350,000.
8. In the General Appropriations Act for FY 2017-2018, seventeen years later, the allocation is \$64,456,011.
9. This is a reduction of almost \$11,000,000 from the allocation in the year 2000, seventeen years ago.
10. In addition, there are 440,351 more students projected in the 2017 GAA than were projected in the 2000 GAA.
11. To hold the Safe Schools allocation constant as compared to the allocation 17 years ago, in 2000, the allocation would have had to have been increased by the student growth and by the impact of inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, a very modest inflation calculator, as applied to the per student funding amount.
12. Had the Safe Schools per student average allocation been increased by the amount of the increase in the CPI for each of the last seventeen years and for student growth each year, the 2017-2018 allocation would be \$117,342,017 almost twice the current allocation.
13. If those allocation adjustments for student growth and the CPI growth over the past seventeen years had been made each year, there would have been an additional \$509,302,006 invested in school safety.
14. When considering the idea of placing a sworn member of the Sheriff's Office or city police departments in every school, it should be remembered that current data indicate there are about 655 charter schools and 3,964 district operated public schools in Florida for a total of 4,619 schools needing an officer.
15. Based on reports from selected districts, a district's share of a typical SRO is 50% of the total cost of the officer, and is well over \$50,000. These reports are from districts with which we have worked, not a scientific sample. **There are a few small districts that at one time reported that the sheriff provided the district with a resource officer at no cost to the district. However, there are other districts that report paying as much as 69% of the cost of each officer. A representative average per officer is about fifty percent of the total cost per SRO.**
16. The cost of a sworn school resource officer includes the officer's salary and fringe benefits. Fringe benefits are quite costly because of the cost of special risk retirement benefits and worker's compensation insurance. Other costs include the officer's car, and the supervisory infrastructure of sergeants and officers who command the school resource officers in larger departments. The average cost of a school district's share of a typical school resource officer approaches \$50,000 a year. If we assume the districts' cost is \$50,000 per officer, the total cost is \$230,950,000 for school districts to provide an officer for every public school, given the assumption that there are about 4,600 public district and charter operated schools in Florida. This is an increase of \$166,493,989 above the current safe schools' allocation.

17. It should be remembered that the Sheriff and police departments would also have to pay an additional \$166,493,989 beyond the current costs of operating their departments, assuming the departments pay half the cost of a typical officer currently.
18. These cost estimates must be verified with actual cost data for all districts, but they are derived from actual cost data derived from a sample of districts.
18. Since protecting life and property is the duty of law enforcement it is certainly not unreasonable to expect law enforcement to pay at least half the cost of protecting schools with school resource officers.
19. It is not known if law enforcement agencies have the funds needed to pay those costs, and it is not known if that many additional officers could be recruited.
20. It is recognized that all the adjustments and increases in Safe Schools funding may not be able to be accomplished in one fiscal year. Currently the only revenue that appears to be available to an outside observer are the unappropriated general revenue funds that appear to be available when comparing the proposed General Appropriations Acts and the most recent General Revenue forecast.
21. That could provide a start to the process of addressing these school safety needs, and future legislatures could adjust other commitments to increase available state general revenue.