

Executive Summary

Since 1999, the federal government has spent close to \$1 billion to deploy police in our nation's public schools.¹ Commonly referred to as School Resource Officers (SROs), these mostly armed law enforcement officers can now be found in [an estimated 71% of all public high schools](#) in the country, as well as in middle and elementary schools.

It remains unclear how effective SROs are in preventing the types of school tragedies that have rocked the country for 20 years and that are frequently used as a major justification for SROs' deployment. However, [studies do now provide compelling evidence](#) that their presence increases the odds that students will be arrested for minor offenses and that children of color and those with disabilities will be treated most harshly.

Despite these documented effects, since the Parkland, Florida and Santa Fe, Texas school shootings in 2018, states have allocated an additional \$965 million to increase the presence of law enforcement in their schools. This brings the total investment since 1999 made by state and federal governments in School Resource Officers to close to \$2 billion.



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Given this massive investment in public funds, how much oversight is being provided by the federal government and states? As it turns out, very little by the federal government.

In 2019, Strategies for Youth, an organization founded in 2010 to improve relations between police and young people, undertook a survey to **determine whether states are filling this void by mandating how School Resource Officers are hired, trained, and supervised.** In 2022, SFY updated this survey to reflect additional changes made by state legislatures regarding SRO training requirements. The findings listed in this report reflect state legislative activity through 2021.

Our findings reveal tremendous change in state laws during this 23-year period. Most changes are geared toward increasing SROs' skills for interacting more effectively with youth.

- 29 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws that specifically address SRO training; GA and UT do not require SROs to attend the training;
- 25 states have enacted laws regarding SRO training since 2014;
- Three states (KS, NE, VA) require training that focuses on improving the ability of SROs to work effectively with youth by providing developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and racially equitable curriculum;
- Thirteen states and the District of Columbia require SROs to be trained in adolescent development (UT recommends but does not require this topic);
- Ten states require SROs to be trained to recognize and address signs of adolescents with mental health issues;
- Six states (KS, KY, NE, TX, VA, WA) require that trauma-informed approaches be taught to SROs;
- Only ten states require SROs learn about special education students' needs and protections;

1. In the aftermath of the school shooting in Columbine, Colorado in 1999, the federal COPS in Schools Program allocated \$68 million to increase the deployment of officers in the nation's public schools. Since then, an additional \$950 million in federal funding has been spent for this purpose, bringing total federal government spending on SROs to over a billion dollars.



- Nine states and the District of Columbia require SROs to learn about school laws;
- Four states (IN, ME, NE and VA) require SROs to learn about implicit bias, students' rights, and parental notification laws.

Our findings also reveal:

- Presently, 22 states have no legislation requiring SRO training;
- Only ten states require SROs to be trained in de-escalation;
- Only four states and the District of Columbia require SROs to be trained in mediation and/or restorative justice practices;
- 17 states require schools and law enforcement agencies enter into a detailed MOU that clarifies the role of SROs before they are placed in schools.

Our survey shows the most comprehensive set of training requirements are found in Nebraska and Virginia.

Nebraska requires the curriculum to include sections on student rights and parent notification and involvement. Virginia appears to mandate all of the training requirements that SFY recommends as essential (see sidebar on Page 10 for more information), including adolescent development, recognizing and addressing signs of mental distress and trauma, de-escalation, special education law, implicit bias, restorative justice, bullying, and partnering with community organizations to identify additional services for students and families.

These state-mandated requirements would, at the very least, help ensure that SROs receive a minimal amount of instruction focused on interacting effectively with adolescents. This training is all the more necessary in view of the fact that instruction in police cadet academies on how to effectively interact with young people [typically hovers at around four to six hours](#). Comprehensive training for all SROs would likely prevent some of the harms to students generated by the rapid growth in their deployment in schools over the past 20 years. These harms include undue reliance on arrest, use of restraints, unreasonable and excessive use of force, and the unnecessary and traumatizing use of police powers to handle school discipline and related conduct.

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