



PSD SRO CAC – Meeting Notes

02/25

5:30pm – 7:30pm

Zoom

Notes	Outcomes / Action Items
<p>Welcome and Q&A Prep</p> <p>The group was reminded of the purpose of the meeting today which is to advance understanding of the current state by gathering information from SRO representatives.</p> <p>The CAC submitted questions they would like answered by the SRO representatives prior to the meeting. The facilitation team themed them into six main buckets, but acknowledged that there were other questions that did not fit into the buckets and hoped there may be time at the end of the meeting where other questions could be asked/answered. The themed buckets were: mental health, student rights, Bias / Disparities, Preparedness and Response, Breakdown of Duties, Zero Tolerance and other policies, Relationships. The group was asked if anyone wanted to ask the overarching themed questions; however the group decided that they would prefer that the facilitation team asks the overarching questions with follow ups from the CAC members.</p> <p>The team offered CAC members to turn off video and rename themselves if they were uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Next Steps: N/A</p> <p>Decision: N/A</p>
<p>Current State: Q&A with SROs representatives</p> <p>Laura Lunsford and Jerry Schiager from Fort Collins Police Department (FCPD) and Mike Lober and Tim Fox from Larimer County Sheriff’s Office (LCSO) joined at 6pm. They were asked to introduce themselves, and the FCPD team had a bit of info they wanted to share with the CAC before really starting.</p> <p>FCPD offered to go through previously submitted data, but the group had already seen that data and was most interested in diving into questions. FCPD acknowledged that they haven’t done a good enough job collecting data in past years, and they are committed to doing better on that front. FCPD offered that they could share what kind of citations they’ve given, but couldn’t show how often they’re contacted by students, had incidents reported by staff, or other things that don’t create an explicit paper trail. They stated that staff referrals make up about 90% of SRO responses (versus SRO-initiated actions).</p>	<p>Next step: The facilitation team will follow up with the SRO representatives on the following questions that were asked via chat but were unanswered due to time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How many SROs are BIPOC? ● Do you have conversations as to how your own biases impact your work, and the work of SRO’s on a regular basis? ● How can we get to the building differences for how things are handled? How can we look at PSD actions or expectations on



The following summarizes the questions and answers given by either FCPD or LCSO.

Question: What does "on view" mean?

Answer: It means the FCPD member "assisted on to a call" - they may have been in the area and noticed something and then made a decision to investigate further. Something an SRO saw themselves rather than was referred to by others.

Question: Our understanding is that SROs are trained and sometimes serve in a mental health support capacity. Can you talk to us about the extent of training SROs receive in offering that mental health support? Are SROs trained to differentiate between a mental health crisis versus an intentional dangerous act, for example? It would help if you could illustrate what supporting a student's behavioral health looks like with an example and maybe share when an interaction leads to a referral to a counselor or outside community provider. In general, are there any SRO roles that you think could be handled by a mental health professional or social worker instead?

Answer: SROs are not supposed to be the first line of mental health professionals students see - that should be school counselors, etc. SROs are only brought into mental health situations if students are in the middle of a crisis and/or have expressed that they want to hurt or kill themselves. In such cases, counselors usually get the SROs involved because SROs are authorized to do mental health holds. SROs are CIT trained and get extra mental health training yearly, but they do not believe by any stretch that they are the right people for that mental health support. SROs are usually involved when something has already escalated or in a crisis situation. Otherwise, they are a resource to help and assist counselors with diversion or connection to other services. The co-responder team is growing its capacity to be deployed to mental health calls, but they're not able to have that team available at all times yet. SROs & police respond often to mental health calls outside of school hours when needed. Often it's from Safe2Tell reports.

Question: Can co-responders ever respond alone?

Answer: No, that's not how the program works. SROs only go alone if it's a follow up to a previous call, not to an emergency call. The mental health professionals in PSD usually "co-respond" to mental health calls that come in during school hours.

police calls?

- What are policies about a call to a school, is it closest officer, is it closest SRO, are SROs asked to leave a school they are at to go to a school that needs police help?

Decision: N/A



Question: Are you saying the only real intersection between SROs and kids with mental health issues is when there's a kid having a suicidal/self-harm crisis?

Answer: There's many nuances to this. Yes, when we're in the school and if a student is in an active crisis involving harm or threats of harm, SROs are called. If it's just a case of a student feeling down, the PSD mental health professional is called, not an SRO. If it's got a violence or physical harm angle, then SROs are called, and the response looks different depending on the issue. Sometimes, a parent is called to help, and that's ideal - SROs might offer referrals to the parents in such situations. If it's a student younger than high school, SROs wouldn't transport the student they'd call an ambulance because "the less that they can touch a student, the better" and it's better for a paramedic to handle the transport. Usually, SROs are just there to sign the mental health hold, which involves a brief "interview" with the student.

Question: Can you tell us about the rules governing SROs interacting with students in the context of an investigation and the processes for conducting that investigation? For example, if an SRO hears that a student may be engaged in criminal activity, how do they approach that student? Do they disclose to them that they are the subject of an inquiry prior to initiating conversation? Do they talk to the student's peers to gather information about the alleged activities? And, if so, do SROs disclose that they are gathering information as part of an investigation? At what point would students be informed of their rights, and/or would their parents be contacted to consent to participation on their behalf if the student is a minor?

Answer: The SOPs that were written earlier this year answer some of this question (note: CAC members received the SOPs beforehand as reference). In the SOP creation, police services tried to define the interview/investigation situations better. A lot of times when talking to a student SROs don't know whether a student is reporting, is a suspect, etc. during the first conversation. SROs have protocols for when to use Miranda Rights and have a parent called, but there's a lot of nuance. For example, if an SRO knows a student was at the scene of something happening and a principal or other staff is also there, SROs don't read Miranda Rights. But if the SRO knows that a student is looking at criminal charges, they do read the Miranda Rights and invite the parent to be present.

Question: A lot can happen in the nuance between initial conversations and initiating criminal investigation / Miranda, so how do we get rid of the gray area? It's a real cause for concern as a parent. Lack of guidance or awareness of students' rights creates concern.



Answer: Sometimes there's a misperception that these situations are just a student alone in a room with an SRO, but that's not usually the case. It's usually a referral from a staff member who has the evidence of a criminal act and that information is shared by the staff - not usually found as a result of an interview with a student, although this does sometimes happen. You can't build relationships without talking with students casually and normally. It's super rare that such conversations would reveal some violation of the law and become a self-implication moment. SROs' efforts are usually aimed at giving referrals or getting referrals to a parent if they suspect something is wrong (e.g. drug use). SROs often only write a ticket if it's the second or third time an issue has presented, which is aimed at interrupting the problem behavior and getting the student services. The orientation is that "kids deserve 1,000 chances" to get it right and that's what the SROs are about.

Question: My special needs child had an incident where they were interviewed, and none of the teachers were present. What do SROs do to understand if they are speaking to a special needs student who may have a different interpretation of what transpired?

Answer: It's incumbent on the SRO to recognize that (the special needs) and reach out to the counselor or special needs staff to conduct the interview appropriately. They would hope SROs would go seek a professional out.

Follow Up Question: Could it be more than a hope, and instead an expectation that SROs know the SPED staff?

Answer: Yes, that is the expectation. The supervisors feel good about the level to which SROs are familiar with students and especially the staff at their respective schools, and the expectation is that SROs who encounter students who need support from specialist staff will seek it out before any interview. SROs from FCPD make it a point to go down to the schools and hang out with kids and build relationships at lunch, for example, so that they will have those relationships if/when a crisis arises. This practice supports a needed familiarity with students and staff. SROs are oriented toward rewards for students (ex: a K9 unit to come to reward a student for having several days without behavior problems). If SROs are downsized when there are issues at a school, officers will still come, but they won't be ones who have the relationships and familiarity with students and school staff or even guaranteed to have the training SROs do. Law enforcement partners are trying to deliver a more complete package or service that's specialized to schools with the SRO program, and that's a huge benefit of having the same officer engaging a school community every day.

Question: While the SRO program for Fort Collins at least shows disparities in students of color being charged compared to population



percentage, these numbers as whole are better than PSD discipline data. What can PSD learn from your experience? How can the disparity between charges against BIPOC students and white students be further reduced?

Answer: This is a necessary part of the convo. There's things in the 2019 data that look like disparities. There are some nuances to that data that first need to be addressed. SROs don't get to usurp a victim's right to be a victim. So if the victims want to pursue charges, SROs can't stop that. For example, 6 incidents for citing students on X thing, and 4 were BIPOC, so yes, there's a disparity. But those 4 citations occurred because there were victims attached to them, and that's who they said was the culprit. We believe there will be improvements next year that make the data more finely parsed, which will be looked at monthly, flagging issues with BIPOC overrepresentation or multiple calls on the same student. 50% of the calls SROs get are victim-related crimes. If SROs go away, police will still come to the school, but those who respond will be "strangers" to the school community. More specifically, between 2018 and 2020, LCSO wrote 10 tickets at one campus and another 26 at another. At the first campus, all of the BIPOC students were actually from one incident, and they were students from a different school. At the other campus it was mostly vaping.

Question: It sounds like you're saying the disparities aren't meaningful in the data - can you clarify? Do you as a department have the perspective that racial biases are showing up and have conversations like that internally?

Answer: No, we are not not trying to downplay this. If you look at the US Department of Education website data a huge determining factor in the school to prison pipeline is the expulsion rate. There's training yearly on bias. There is some disparity, and again, that it's nuanced. It's easy for the SROs to be the ones at fault for that because they write the ticket, but many of these are from staff making referrals. SROs can't keep staff from calling in referrals, which is one of the issues trying to be rectified with better data collection and SOPs around referrals. The number one issue in the state of Colorado has been marijuana. There are issues being criminalized that could be handled at a district level, which should be addressed in the new SOPs. SROs do not want to respond to calls of vaping, shoving matches, marijuana, etc. If the school's administration and teachers solved the problem instead of calling the police, many issues would not be handled by SROs. There is a continued need for (re)education of administration and staff to help them gain clarity on what is and isn't an SRO situation.

Follow Up Question: When you say "calling" what do you mean?

Answer: This could be outside of the school or from down the hall. It could be from a different school. "Calling" just means being brought in.



Follow Up Question: Expulsion is a PSD role, not SRO, correct?

Answer: Correct. There are two separate issues--school infraction, and then the question of criminal investigation. SROs are only involved in the criminal investigation.

Question: I am hearing a sense of disparity between the City and the County here. Law enforcement needs the investigative power to do their job. I get that. But for the folks that are getting picked on, BIPOC kids, get picked on disproportionately. Just wanted to point out the hesitancy about responding to something that seems pretty obvious.

Answer: I don't think the County is really at odds with the City. The point I was trying to make is that the majority of citations for BIPOC students were for vaping, but we are hoping to not be involved in those incidents. What I was trying to say is that we are concerned about the disparities around expulsions. We are also concerned about bias, if and when it occurs.

Question: From a 30,000 foot view, what can we do to improve the racial disparities in the police services, and in the SROs?

Answer: There is definitely bias in society and in law enforcement. We've beefed up our training, using data more intentionally, calling ourselves on it when there are disparities, and doing what we can within our work group to have those conversations.

Question: How are the new standard operating procedures that are now in place going?

Answer: We have work to do on both sides. The SOPs are not new, they just clarified how we should be working in schools to help reduce inconsistencies and clarify what SROs shouldn't be involved with. To be honest, the school district is still calling SROs to do things that they have all agreed SROs shouldn't be involved with. Site based management systems have benefits but also contribute to inconsistency.

Question: There seems to be assumptions about the positive roles of SRO in the schools--having lunch, candy, etc.--but for many students, that is not the case. They may not all see police officers in the lunch room as a positive thing. On the law enforcement side, is there a conversation about this?

Answer: We do begin with the assumption that establishing positive relationships is a good thing. We believe having positive relationships does make schools safer. LSCO SROs wear uniforms and know people will respond differently to that. We start from the assumption that strong



relationships are a good thing. In our hearts, and in our program, we want to provide a safe space where kids can learn.

Question: I want to invite you to make the assumption that it is not always a good thing. As a woman of color, I am a mess internally when you show up with your gun and badge. It can be even worse for kids. Shouldn't all police be trained in a way that is respectful?

Answer: It is not a bad thing to have another police officer show up but SROs have more background and context than a random officer. That background makes a difference as it can help de-escalate things, knowing the student's history. I think it better serves kids if there is a familiar face. Our belief comes from our experiences. The only way we can break down barriers is to provide more experiences. We believe it's better for students and police to see each other in different contexts, not just during an enforcement actions.

Question: What is an SRO's role in enforcing zero tolerance policies given that some of these infractions may violate both school policies and the law (eg underage vaping or drinking)? What is your opinion of zero tolerance policies?

Answer: These are school district policies. We think that police officers need discretion, so we don't have zero tolerance policies. The more serious the offense, the more black and white it gets. Marijuana - there is lots of discretion. Sex offense - there is less discretion. There should be room for discretion as these are kids who should be able to make 1,000 mistakes and figure it out. But as it gets more serious, there is less discretion. Districts are required by the state of Colorado to have very specific guidelines.

Closing comments: The reason we like to be in the room is make sure all students can have these relationships. For whatever reason a student might have bias, fear, anxiety I would like to help reduce it. All people should be able to feel comfortable wherever they are. We realize we are not the ones to fix everything. Our hope is to find the best resource for the student. Our hope is to continue the partnership and find the best resource to solve the problem at hand. The only way we all get better is to have these difficult and meaningful and hard conversations. Meaningful change requires this kind of dialogue. It doesn't always seem like it, but we have to test and qualify for SRO positions, and officers who become SROs really want to be in that position, and it hurts when we aren't having the impact we want to have. We think our schools are safer because we have really great people in the SRO program, which is growing because schools want it.



<p>SRO representatives then left the meeting.</p>	
<p>Community Engagement Subcommittee Update It was decided that the community engagement subcommittee's update would be shared via email in order to make more time for the conversation with the guests.</p>	<p>Next steps: John McKay will follow up with a community engagement subcommittee update via email.</p> <p>Decision: N/A</p>
<p>Closing CAC members were invited to each offer a word/brief statement on how they were feeling. Answers ranged from grateful and appreciative to feelings of discrepancy and disconnect.</p> <p>CAC members were asked to fill out the feedback form.</p>	<p>Next step: N/A</p> <p>Decision: N/A</p>