



September 8, 2016

Dear colleague:

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) strongly believes that properly implemented school resource officers (SROs) can positively impact the lives of our nation's students. Interactions with SROs should be a positive experience for young people, and it is critical that we continue to foster the resulting relationships of mutual respect and understanding. For this reason, the COPS Office has provided funding for the nationwide hiring of more than 7,000 SROs since 1996.

In school settings, young people can get to know these officers as individuals, and can see them as professionals who are part of the school community and there to help provide safety and security. Likewise, officers who are present and engaged in schools get to know the students in informal and nonadversarial settings. This familiarity can help reduce bias and negative stereotypes on both sides and lead to strong personal relationships.

Officers also fill critical roles as mentors and educators—teaching students about public safety and the criminal justice system, as well as how to keep themselves and their families safe. Finally, and perhaps most important, officers can serve as role models for students. We've heard countless stories from across the country of SROs developing one-on-one relationships with students that led to life-long positive impacts that changed the trajectory of their lives for the better.

At the same time, we understand the legitimate concerns that have been raised about the presence of SROs in our nation's schools. We have seen that there is the potential for SROs to have a negative impact on students through unnecessary arrests and improper involvement in routine school discipline matters. If SROs are not properly hired, trained, evaluated, and integrated into the school community—or if they are given responsibilities more appropriately carried out by educators—negative outcomes, including violations of students' civil rights, can and have occurred. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us, including law enforcement and education leaders, to do everything we can to directly address these concerns and reduce the potential for problems.

Our partnership with the U.S. Department of Education on the development of the Safe School-based Enforcement through Collaboration, Understanding, and Respect (SECURE) rubrics represents an important step in that direction. These rubrics offer guidance to communities and law enforcement agencies to help those interested in implementing the most effective SRO programs. In addition, the rubrics can inform the efforts of state policy-makers looking to support local implementation efforts. The basic steps they describe align with the most effective



policing practices the COPS Office has promoted since the inception of our SRO funding and can be found at: www.cops.usdoj.gov/supportingsafeschools.

I suggest that you use this resource to generate important discussions about your SRO programs to find new ways to make them even more effective, so that they can continue to have a positive impact on the lives of your community's students. It is my hope that it will lead the way to new opportunities for strengthening the bond between our young people and the police who have sworn to protect and serve them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. Davis".

Ronald L. Davis
Director

