



# **SOLANO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY**

2024-2025

**SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS**

July 1, 2025

# **School Resource Officers**

Solano County Civil Grand Jury 2024-2025

## **I. SUMMARY**

The Solano County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) reviewed the operations and effects of having Police Officers from Fairfield Police Department (FPD) and Vacaville Police Departments (VPD) assigned as School Resource Officers (SROs) within their public schools. We found that the officers receive special training for this sought-after position, and that most SROs prefer to stay in the role as long as possible. The Program has been active in various school districts in the county for at least 30 years. It was clear to this Jury that the presence of SROs in those two Solano County cities' school districts is very beneficial and should be operated in a manner to maximize efficiency within the program.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

The topic of SROs has been in the news recently. We researched which local school districts within Solano County have SRO programs. We reviewed the two largest districts in the county – Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District (FSUSD) and Vacaville Unified School District (VUSD).

This report discusses our methodology and findings, and presents recommendations for program modifications. We learned the program is valued by teachers, administration, students, and parents; their feedback highlights the importance of SROs in maintaining a safe and supportive school environment. The SROs strive to foster positive relationships with students and staff alike. Their role extends beyond law enforcement, encompassing mentorship, conflict resolution, and community engagement. For example, the SROs help with outreach to homeless children to ensure they are able to attend school. The presence of SROs in schools provides an enhanced feeling of safety to students as well as teachers and staff. As SRO programs continue to evolve, maintaining open communication among the police, schools, and the community will be key to their ongoing success.

### **III. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

A School Resource Officer is a police officer who has completed at least 40 hours of specialized training to work with students. SRO positions are viewed favorably within Police Departments (PDs) as a desirable assignment and are actively sought. Appointments are awarded to officers who have excellent interpersonal skills and a desire to serve in this specialized position. An SRO is assigned to a high school or middle school. They also may be called upon occasionally to assist at an elementary school. They interact extensively with students and teachers and at times with staff and parents.

SRO programs first appeared in the 1950s, but did not become widespread until the late 1990s, especially after the Columbine shooting in 1999. Federal support came in the form of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services program, which heavily subsidized the hiring of SROs. According to national survey data of 2,400 public

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schools<sup>1</sup> collected by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in 2022, 52% of public schools in the United States reported having sworn law enforcement officers, including SROs, present at school at least once per week. The number varied significantly based on the size of the school.

In California, Education Code (EDC) Section 38000 authorizes, but does not mandate, school districts to employ peace officers, including SROs, to ensure the safety of school district personnel and students, as well as the security of school district property. In 2024 California AB 3038 proposed to mandate armed police officers on every California school campus. However, this Bill failed in the State Assembly.

A School Resource Officer program was adopted in the Vacaville Unified School District in 1974. The Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District has had the program in place since at least 2002.

### *Staffing*

FSUSD has a total of five SROs, one at each of three high schools (Rodriguez, Fairfield, Armijo), Grange Middle School, and the Public Safety Academy. The Rodriguez SRO is shared with nearby Green Valley Middle School. VPD has allotted funding for four SROs to be assigned to the VUSD; however, one position is currently vacant. Vacaville SROs cover all public schools, but the priority is high schools and middle schools. Both districts' SROs work four ten-hour days per week, either Monday through Thursday or Tuesday through Friday.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_233.70.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_233.70.asp)

SROs frequently are called away from their assigned campuses to cover calls from non-staffed schools and to respond to external non-school-related calls requiring extra police presence.

Additionally, SROs may be absent from their campuses for extended periods of time for personal reasons or training.

Officers in Vacaville can remain in an SRO position for four years with a possible two-year extension, for a total of six years. Most Vacaville SROs stay for the entire period of eligibility.

Fairfield has a five-year maximum limit on any assignment in the police department. Solano County schools have the following SROs:

**Solano County SROs**

<u>District</u>	<u>SRO</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Schedule</u>
Benicia	Yes	1	10 hours/4 days
Dixon	Yes	1	8 hours/5 days
Fairfield-Suisun	Yes	5	10 hours/4 days
River Delta (Rio Vista)	No		
Travis	Yes	1	10 hours/4 days
Vacaville	Yes	4 (1 vacancy)	10 hours/4 days
Vallejo	No		

## ***Funding***

The SRO programs in both Vacaville and Fairfield are funded by their respective police departments and school districts. In Fairfield, the SRO costs are split equally between the city and the school district.

The Vacaville Police Department fully funds the salaries of officers assigned to the SRO program and provides supplemental funding for counseling services. Additionally, the Vacaville School District contributes \$70,000 to support a Diversion Program (to provide an alternative to the juvenile justice system), as well as student counseling.

## ***Training***

Training for each officer varies, however the State of California mandates 40 hours of training for all SROs. A full week of basic training is offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) over the summer, and advanced training is available at NASRO conferences throughout the year. SROs also can take advantage of online courses and department in-house training. Training focuses on mental health topics, fostering interpersonal communications, and building relationships, as well as serving students with special needs. Training also includes a three-day “Active Attacker” course, safety protocol, NARCAN® use, and human trafficking. On-the-job training takes place daily. Former SROs also are a good source of information and advice.

## ***Responsibilities***

As required by California Education Code Section 44276.1, SROs ensure their schools are a safe, secure, and peaceful place for students to learn. This includes keeping them safe from threats inside and outside the school. SROs also evaluate potential infrastructure improvements to fencing, gates, access points, grounds supervision, and surveillance cameras.

SRO duties include in-service training for school staff, such as active-threat drills, presentations on drugs and alcohol, and anti-bullying. Interviewees stated that joint training between SROs and school staff is limited.

Another important SRO role is serving as a liaison between the school and the community. In addition to providing safety and law enforcement, SROs may refer students and parents to outside social services.

## ***Challenges***

Some interviewees stated that school populations do not always have a clear perception of the legal constraints on SROs, such as what they are required versus allowed to do. For example, they are not able to tow cars or make arrests for bullying. They also identified another obstacle, which is that sometimes parents want to blame the SROs or teachers for challenges with their child. It can be difficult for parents to accept that their child is having problems on campus or is in trouble.

## ***School Safety Plans***

California Education Code Sections 32280-32289.5 mandate that all public schools (kindergarten through grade 12) develop and maintain Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSP) to address campus risks, prepare for emergencies, and ensure a safe learning environment for students and staff. SROs work as part of School Safety Teams including students, staff, and teachers to create and document safety procedures for the schools. California law encourages school Safety Plans to “include clear guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of mental health professionals, community intervention professionals, school counselors, School Resource Officers, and police officers on school campuses, if the school district uses these people.” Both FSUSD and VUSD have Safety Plans. These Plans cover preparedness, including monthly drills on the actions of Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter.

## ***Communications***

Having SROs on campus reduces delays when immediate law enforcement presence is necessary. If needed, SROs can call for additional law enforcement or other emergency assistance, reaching those agencies more rapidly than if they were not present in the schools. They use their radios to communicate frequently with each other and with the school administration. They sometimes use radios to provide rapid alerts informing the school population about potentially dangerous situations either within or near the school. VUSD uses the Catapult™ app to communicate with PD and staff for emergencies. Both FSUSD and VUSD use the ParentSquare™ app to contact parents and students for emergency and routine communications.



SROs serve as an important liaison between schools and the city Police Departments. Officers hold regularly-scheduled meetings among themselves, as well as with school administrators, to reduce bureaucratic barriers.

SRO communications also serve to combat misinformation. Social media can pose an especially great challenge, including the spreading of rumors (e.g., fake shooters, bomb threats). Incidents at schools are front page news. They are posted to social media platforms almost immediately and people re-post and comment. This can lead to parents arriving at school believing there is an imminent threat when there is not. The goal is to get ahead of news/rumors whenever possible and respond safely, immediately, lawfully, and avoid campus congestion.

### ***Outreach and Referrals***

SROs strive to build mutual trust to make themselves approachable to students. Besides being a Police Officer, SROs sometimes act as counselor, mentor, or guide. In order to accomplish this, they must build relationships with students and staff.

Participating in civics class instruction, attending sports events, and coaching at some schools help make SROs part of the school community. Having SROs as a helpful presence at schools, whether just to say “hello” in the halls or by providing a safe harbor, lets students see police officers as human beings. This familiarity is very helpful to police/community relations, especially given the negative perceptions in some students’ homes and neighborhoods. SROs also participate in community events, including Police Activity League (PAL) events.

The presence of SROs appears to have resulted in a corresponding general reduction in violence, fights, confrontations, and vaping incidents. The objective is not to arrest students, but to use different avenues to keep students on a positive track. For example, Diversion Programs provide an alternative to jail. One such program in Vacaville helps keep students from entering the juvenile justice system. The Fairfield Police Department no longer has a Diversion Program, so students from FSUSD may be sent to the Solano County Diversion Program.

#### **IV. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **FINDING 1**

SROs are called away frequently from their assigned campuses to cover calls from non-staffed schools and to respond to external, non-school-related, calls which require extra police presence.

##### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

Increase staffing to expand SRO coverage for absences to accommodate health, training, outside assistance calls, and afterschool events.

##### **FINDING 2**

The current four-day, ten-hour staffing schedule results in frequent coverage gaps.

##### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

Change SRO scheduling from four ten-hour shifts to five eight-hour shifts to improve coverage and minimize staffing gaps.

##### **FINDING 3**

SRO assignments prioritize high school campuses and have limited coverage of other schools.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

1. Assign SROs to all middle school campuses
2. Provide for easier on-call access to elementary schools
3. Allow for roving assignments, including part-time; and
4. Add a Community Services Officer (CSO) to each district to assist with Diversion Programs and home visits.

### **FINDING 4**

SROs and school staff need more joint training.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Expand joint training between SROs and school staff to:

1. enable SROs to better interact with students and become more integrated with school staff; and
2. provide active-attacker training between staff and SROs.

### **FINDING 5**

Social media, widely-used by students, is not fully leveraged by SROs or administrators to combat misinformation.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Conduct more social media outreach to:

1. combat misinformation regarding school threats and keep family members from flooding campuses; and
2. disseminate useful information about resources and activities.

## **V. COMMENTS**

The presence of armed officers in schools is seen by some critics as creating a climate of fear and vulnerability for students, and contributing to the "school-to-prison pipeline." This review did not support those beliefs and, in fact, confirmed that conscientious and effective measures are in place to overcome such concerns.

In March 2024 a Fairfield SRO was arrested after allegations that he was exchanging inappropriate text messages and photos with some students. The Officer was removed immediately from his position and was criminally charged. This type of situation is extremely rare within SRO Programs. The strict oversight by the PD and School, resulting in the rapid response to this unfortunate situation, appeared to be sufficient and commendable. A replacement SRO was assigned immediately to ensure continuity of coverage and, to our knowledge, there have been no additional incidents.

Other districts may wish to institute an SRO program in their schools if funding and personnel become available.

## **VI. METHODOLOGY**

- Interviewed personnel from Vacaville and Fairfield Police Departments.
- Interviewed school staff from VSD and FSUSD.
- Surveyed all School District Superintendents within Solano County about their SRO programs.

- Reviewed school websites.
- Reviewed NASRO website.
- California, Education Code (EDC) Section 38000, Chapter 1. Security Departments:  
[https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=3.&title=2.&part=23.&chapter=1.&article=](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=3.&title=2.&part=23.&chapter=1.&article=)
- California, Education Code (EDC) Section 32286, Article 5. School Safety Plans:  
[https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=32286.&article=5.&highlight=true&keyword=school+safety+plan](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=32286.&article=5.&highlight=true&keyword=school+safety+plan)
- California AB 3038: <https://trackbill.com/s3/bills/CA/2023/AB/3038/analyses/assembly-education.pdf>
- NASRO: <https://www.nasro.org/>
- NASRO Training Courses: <https://www.nasro.org/training/training-courses/>
- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Digest of Education Statistics:  
[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_233.70.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_233.70.asp)
- Examining the Impact of School Resource Officers and Possible Alternatives  
[juvjustice.org/blog/1491](http://juvjustice.org/blog/1491)

## **VII. REQUIRED RESPONSES**

- Fairfield Police Department
- Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District
- Vacaville Police Department
- Vacaville Unified School District

## **VIII. COURTESY COPIES**

- Benicia Unified School District
- Dixon Unified School District
- River Delta Unified School District (Rio Vista)
- Travis Unified School District
- Vallejo Unified School District