The Montgomery County Department of Police

Community Engagement Officer Program FAQ Document

February 2022

Introduction

The Montgomery County Department of Police, in collaboration with the Montgomery County Public School System, has built a Community Engagement Officer (CEO) Program that excels in promoting diversity, maintaining a safe learning environment, fostering inclusion and acceptance, and exploring alternatives to traditional disciplinary processes.

We are proud of our Community Engagement Officer Program, which is diverse in its composition and focuses on intervention versus physical arrest when presented with crimes on school grounds.

Deployed into the largest school system in Maryland, the Community Engagement Officers (CEOs) are one of the most effective community engagement means available to the Department of Police. Community Engagement Officers represent conduits of outreach to the youth of Montgomery County.

The program focuses on fair and impartial policing, conflict resolution, de-escalation, and building rapport with Montgomery County students and youth.

Overview

The Montgomery County Department of Police Community Engagement Officer Program consists of 23 sworn officers, one officer from the Rockville City Police Department, one officer from the Gaithersburg Police Department, and one deputy sheriff from the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office. These 26 sworn officers represent the School Resource/ Community Engagement Officers cadre for Montgomery County, Maryland.

The Montgomery County Public School system, has 25 High Schools and 1 Alternative Learning School. The Community Engagement Officers are assigned to a cluster of schools, typically including one of the High Schools and its respective feeder schools (40 Middle Schools and 135 Elementary Schools).

The Montgomery County Public School system is the largest in Maryland, with over 166,000 students and 207 schools. The graduation rate in the MCPS system stands at 89.3%, and the suspension rate is 1% overall.

Selection Process for CEOs

Involved law enforcement agencies formally announce CEO positions. The selection process will include the submission of a memorandum of interest from the officer(s), a review of personnel files, and a formal interview.

CEO Demographics

There are 26 total CEOs in the program: 35% Black males, 22% Black females, 9% Hispanic males, 9% Hispanic females, 9% White males, and 9% White females.

Elimination of the SRO Program

Elimination of the SRO program in fall 2021 removed the SROs from Montgomery County Public Schools, however; the Maryland Safe to Schools Act requires that there be "Adequate Law Enforcement Coverage" for all Maryland public Schools. The referenced law enforcement agencies in Montgomery County coordinated to provide the adequate coverage, but SROs are no longer posted inside public schools.

School Service Calls (SSCs)

Previously, when MCPS needed police, SROs were contacted via their cell phone or school radio; the exact number of service calls was not recorded. During the first half of the 2021-2022 school year, MCPS only contacted the dispatch center to request police. One thousand six hundred eighty-eight school-service calls (SSCs) were logged during this time; 27% were traffic issues, but 33% of the calls resulted in a police report being written. At no time have police been involved in any form of school discipline. Of the 563 police reports taken during the first half of the year, 34% were assaults, 15% were school threats, 13% were CDS offenses, 10% were weapons, 10% were conflict/disruptive behavior, 6% were mental health calls, 6% were *other,* 5% were property crimes, and 1% were robberies.

Typical daily duties for the Community Engagement Officers include:

- Checking in with High School staff daily.
- Responding to schools in the cluster when called.
- Creating positive community engagement with youth when not responding to calls for service.
- Serving as a resource to answer questions for MCPS personnel, other law enforcement officers, parents, and students.

SRO Training

School Resource Officers have several important roles. They are mentors, adjunct instructors, emergency managers, and law enforcers. These officers receive hours of intense and comprehensive training to fulfill these roles. They are the only group of officers trained to work well with the adolescent population in a school environment.

Training Required by State

The 2018 Safe to Learn Act required the development of a specialized curriculum for use in the training of SROs. This specialized curriculum developed includes training on:

1. De-escalation;

2. Disability awareness;

3. Maintaining a positive school climate;

4. Constructive interactions with students; and

5. Implicit bias and disability and diversity awareness with specific attention to racial and ethnic disparities.

The *70-hour Basic School Resource Officer Training in Maryland covers the following major topic areas (*expanded from 40 to 70 hours in 2022)*:

1)   ***Constructive interactions with students:*** The role of the SRO as a coach, mentor, and educator and how these supportive roles build relationships with students while maintaining professional boundaries.

2)   ***Informal counseling:*** Identifying characteristics, strategies, roles, and responsibilities of being an informal counselor and how to advance the concept of conflict resolution.

3)   ***Memorandums of Understanding (MOU):*** Understanding the importance of an MOU between the Law Enforcement Agency and School System, the key elements of an MOU, including sharing juvenile information in the State of Maryland.

4)   ***Safe to Learn Act:*** Covers the State of Maryland's "Safe to Learn Act of 2018" and its impact on student and school safety.

5)   ***SRO History:*** Defines the term "School Resource Officer," the roles the SRO assumes within a school (Mentor/Educator/Law Enforcement Officer (LEO)/Emergency Manager), as well as the history of SROs within the State of Maryland.

6)   ***Victimization and Child Protective Services:*** How to recognize the victimization of youth, abuse/neglect investigations, and relevant Maryland statutes and Code of Maryland Regulations pertaining to child protection.

7)   ***Drug Education and Current Trends:*** Current trends in controlled dangerous substance usage in schools, signs of addiction/overdose, educative efforts, and "wrap around" services available in general throughout the State.

8)   ***Bullying, Threats and Social Media Use:*** The characteristics of bullying, harassment, intimidation, social media misuse, the effects of victimization, possible suicidal/homicidal implications on bullied individuals, analyzing strategies/investigative techniques used in the prevention, and an overview of the Maryland State Department of Education's online reporting forms and how to utilize them.

9)   ***Official interactions with Juveniles:*** Covers the difference between school discipline and criminal behavior, requirements for an LEO to conduct an interview, when an interview becomes an interrogation and use of Miranda, understanding of "Non-negotiables" for the arrest of anyone 14 years of age, and older and avoiding "embarrassment" of a student being taken into custody.

10)   ***School Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams:*** Definition of a School Behavioral Threat Assessment team, options available to an SRO to mitigate an identified threat to a school campus, and reporting requirements and information sharing with the MCSS.

11)   ***Youth Development:*** Covers the seven (7) developmental domains, cultures and sub-cultures relevant to youth in schools, distinguishing between risk factors, strengths along with worldviews youth might hold, identification of pro-social behaviors to replace antisocial behaviors, the difference between school discipline matters vs. criminal matters, and use of conflict de-escalation techniques.

12) ***Collaboration and Problem-Solving with Stakeholders:*** Covers the SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment) problem-solving model, along with understanding community stakeholders who need to be involved and how collaboration affects the school community in a positive light.

13) ***Getting into the Classroom:*** Covers creation of effective programs and/or use of available programs related to law-related education of students for safe decision-making choices.

14) ***Principles of Effective learning:*** Covers the eight principles of learning and learning styles and how they relate to law-related education for SROs.

15) ***School Emergency Planning:*** Covers the four phases of an emergency; preparation, response, recovery, and resiliency, as well as preparation methods to mitigate an active assailant incident.

16) ***Working Collaboratively with the School Administration:*** Covers the importance of a positive working relationship with school staff, understanding chains of command from each entity, importance of frequent meetings within the education environment, and documentation requirements of each entity.

17) ***Indicators of Behavior, Trauma-Informed Care:*** Recognition of behaviors of concern, use of Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams to access issues, understand the impact of traumatic experiences on youth, and how not to re-victimize an individual and the four essentials of Trauma-Informed Care.

18) ***Disability and Diversity Awareness:*** Defines the terms; disability, diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural fluency. Differentiating between HIPAA, FERPA, and "Best Practices in Seclusion and Restraint" reporting for Maryland schools and discussing the possibility that individuals with disabilities may experience discrimination in various fields including; education, health care, employment, economic, and justice.

19) ***Maintaining a Positive School Climate:*** Discusses differences in promotion and prevention mindsets, defines the creation and maintenance of a positive environment, and correlates a favorable climate to a behavioral threat assessment.

20)   ***Managing Gangs in Schools:*** Discusses gang activity by region within the State, signs within schools, and gang activity documentation.

21)   ***Restorative practices:*** Use restorative practices to repair student relationships and resolve conflict within the school environment.

22)   ***Implicit bias:*** Covers what implicit bias is and how understanding creates a better relationship between students and their SRO.

23)   ***School Law and the School-Based Officer:*** Review of Maryland Education Article, Code of Maryland Regulations, and Constitutional law. HIPPA and FERPA have been reviewed, and each has an exception for information sharing.

24)   ***SORAT:*** Review *single officer response to an active threat* within an educational environment.

MCPD SRO Training

In addition to the mandatory training set forth by the State, MCPD collaborates with community stakeholders in the county to develop SRO training that builds upon the minimum standards required by the State of Maryland. The department's 40-hour training curriculum includes:

1. Gang Prevention & Intervention, presented by the Street Outreach Network
2. Managing Gangs in Schools, presented by the MCPD Gang Unit
3. Trauma-Informed Schools & Youth Suicide Awareness; presented by MCPS
4. Bomb Threats, Evacuation, and K-9 Searches for Explosives in Schools; MCPD K-9
5. Hate/Bias Investigations; presented by the MCPD Community Engagement Division
6. IED Awareness in a School Setting; presented by MCFR Bomb Squad
7. Behavior Health Emergencies: Children and Adolescents; presented by the Crisis Center
8. Implicit Bias; presented by the Maryland Center for School Safety
9. De-Escalation: ICAT; presented by MCPD Instructors
10. Autism & Intellectual Developmental Disabilities: Youth Focused; MCPD Officer Reyes
11. Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness; presented by MCPD SVID

12.   School Law Update; presented by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General

13.   Single Officer Tactical Response in School Setting; conducted by MCPD SWAT

14.   Advanced First Aide; conducted by MCPD ESU Medics

DARE Officer Training

Over 90% of our School Resource Officers are now certified in the new DARE program. This 80-hour training was provided by DARE America and the Police Corrections Training Commission. The new DARE curriculum was developed with Keep'in It Real, an evidence-based, peer-reviewed curriculum created by experts from Penn State University and the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. These SROs are certified to teach the DARE program for school-aged children and the community. Additional information can be found at www.dare.org

MCPS Behavior Threat Assessment Teams

The Maryland Safe Schools Act established a Behavior Threat Assessment (BTA) model policy for local school systems to adopt. The purpose of BTA is to identify and train team members to proactively gather, share, and act on information about school threats. The Maryland Safe Schools Act mentions that BTA team members include school administration, school psychologists, school counselors, and law enforcement. MCPS created its BTA policy that mirrors the State's model policy. As a result, most of our former SROs have now been trained by MCPS in Behavior Threat Assessment after training with their school teams. The MCPS BTA policy is an excellent example of two agencies working together to keep the school environment safe proactively.

CEO Community Outreach

The Community Engagement Officers' primary focus is to maintain a safe learning environment and act as a bridge to establish positive relations with students within the school system. Community outreach and engagement are essential in developing relationships in the school community.   During the summer, the CEOs organize and sponsor free camps for underprivileged youth.

During prior school years, SROs actively engaged with students throughout the school day. There are approximately 180 school days in the school year. That is about 1,440 hours SROs spent protecting schools each year. The SROs fostered strong relationships with many of their students. Students often sought out the SRO first when they have a problem at school or home. The SROs provided guidance as positive role models and connected the student with appropriate school resources, such as a counselor, when applicable. SROs are often contacted by former students for guidance even after the student has graduated.

Community engagement goes beyond the school walls and after-school activities. Throughout COVID, former SROs worked in collaboration with MCPS food distribution sites. SROs were initially part of MCPS's traffic control and security plan at each food distribution site. This role grew into an outreach opportunity for the SROs. As families came to the food distribution sites, the SROs had a chance to reconnect with their students. At times, SROs provided other county resource information to student families.

Many families did not have the means to pick up food at the meal sites. The SROs made it possible for meals to be taken from the food sites directly to students' homes. These activities provided the SRO an opportunity to connect with their students, but it also allowed the SRO to extend the school's hand to many marginalized students who could no longer get the usual services they received in the school building. This included obtaining correct contact information from the student and family so school administration and counselors could maintain a connection with students.

While delivering meals, the SROs had a chance to see some of their students' home environment's. Often, the students and their families needed more than just food support. On several occasions, the SRO connected with the school counselor and the Montgomery County Collaboration Council to get other resources and support to families in need. The visits were strictly utilized to provide outreach and assistance. These are great examples of collaborative efforts between MCPD, MCPS, and other community stakeholders working together to support families in our community. Without the efforts from the SROs, the families of these students may have continued to go unserved.

CEO Enforcement

Physical Arrests

During the 2019-2020 school year, there were 27 "physical" arrests. During the first half of the 2021-2022 school year, with the SROs no longer being assigned to the schools, there have been 11 "physical" arrests. A physical arrest is made by an SRO when the type of crime is serious in nature, a felony offense, or presents an immediate or continuing disruption or threat to the safety of others. A student who is 18 years old or older cannot be charged as a juvenile; therefore, a physical arrest is necessary since the case cannot be referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice. A physical arrest usually entails taking the student into custody, transporting the student to a police facility for processing, and making a notification to the Department of Juvenile Justice if the student is under the age of 18.

In the Memorandum of Understanding between MCPS and MCPD, there are several types of "Critical Incidents" where notification to MCPD is mandatory. These would include offenses such as robbery, firearm or other weapon possession, or possession with intent to distribute controlled dangerous substances, hate crimes, or gang-related incidents.   These are the types of offenses where physical arrests were referenced.

DJS Referral/Charged by Exception

A Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) referral, or a "charge by exception" accounted for one-hundred sixty two (162) events in the 2019-2020 School Year. During the first half of the 2021-2022 school year, with the SROs no longer being assigned to the schools, there have been thirty-nine (39) referrals. This situation arises when a student commits an act which is deemed illegal in Maryland but not of a significantly serious nature. Most misdemeanors such as assaults, thefts, and vandalism fall into this category. In these cases, the SRO will record all information, identify pertinent witnesses, and refer the case, via the event report, to DJS for disposition. These incidents do **not** entail taking the student into custody and transporting to a police facility. Rather, it means that the student was referred administratively (i.e., "on paper") to the Department of Juvenile Services for disposition. Criminal and civil citations can also be written for minor offenses and referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice via the event

report. These dispositions typically include treatment programs, counseling programs, or diversion programs such as "Teen Court." In almost all these cases, the student does not end up with a criminal record, and there is virtually no impact on their ability to attend college or obtain employment.

Civil Citations

Most citations issued by SROs are for civil offenses. Civil offenses are minor violations that may carry a monetary penalty but not a criminal penalty. Most civil citations written are for alcohol, tobacco, and minor CDS offenses. Citations accounted for sixty-nine (69) charges in the 2019-2020 School Year. During the first half of the 2021-2022 school year, with the SROs no longer being assigned to the schools, five citations have been issued.

SRO Initiated

In the 2019-2020 School Year, the SROs charged 269 students, including physical arrest, on-paper referral, and citation. In the first half of the 2021-2022 School Year, the CEOs charged 55 students, including physical arrest, on-paper referral, and citation. A School Resource Officers' primary focus is to maintain a safe learning environment for all and act as a bridge to establish positive relations with students within the school system. It is only a tiny percentage of total arrests by SROs that the SRO initiated. In fact, of the 269 incidents in 2019-2020, only two (1%) were self-initiated by the SROs themselves. Of the 55 incidents in the first half of the 2021-2022 School Year, zero were self-initiated by the CEOs.

School Initiated

Nearly every arrest made by SROs was initiated by MCPS administrators, MCPS Security staff, MCPS teachers, or parents. The SRO was notified about a student already detained in the office for an offense or needed the SRO to assist with a disturbance, or other emergency. During the 2019-2020 School Year, over 99% of all enforcement actions by SROs were initiated by MCPS. This calculates to 267 of the 269 total arrests for the school year. During the first half of the 2021-2022 School Year, 100% of all CEO enforcement actions were initiated by MCPS.

MCPS-Handled Consequences

In accordance with the updated MOU between MCPS and MCPD (August 2021), there have been 214 additional incidents reported in the first half of the 2021-2022 School Year for which MCPS has elected to handle the student's consequence. These are typically minor civil or criminal events; all parties agree the vast majority of student misconduct is best addressed through classroom and in-school strategies that maintain a positive learning environment and afford students opportunities to learn from their mistakes, correct any harm results from their behavior, and restore relationships disrupted by their conduct.

MCPD is committed to continuing to work with MCPS to revise procedures and policies to lessen the impact of arrests, particularly those incidents of a minor nature, whenever possible.