

School Resource Officer Overview

The goal is to give an overview and understanding of the role of the School Resource Officer (SRO) in the Watford City Schools.

The SRO position is one of the most misunderstood roles in law enforcement. The role has many different aspects and the SRO fills many roles. Let's start with the things an SRO is not. The SRO is not a hall monitor, school disciplinarian, security guard, or a ticket writer. These are some common misconceptions.

The SRO is a fully licensed and sworn law enforcement officer assigned to the schools. The SRO has the same training as the other officers in the department with specialized training for working in the schools. This training is a national certification with NASRO (National Association of School Resource Officers). The SRO has an office within the school to allow the students and staff to have better access. The SRO is a joint employee of the Watford City Police Department and the McKenzie County School District #1.

The SRO officer's role can best be broken down into what's known as the "triad". One of the roles is clearly the law enforcement officer. The SRO enforces state and local laws and does juvenile investigations. Another role of the SRO is an educator. The SRO comes into classrooms and assists teachers with providing additional information and detail to classes dealing with government/ law related subjects. The third role of the SRO is being an informal counselor/ mentor. This is one of the most important and hardest roles of the SRO. This role requires the SRO to build rapport with the students and staff. The SRO needs to understand the issues teens deal with on a day to day basis and how to help the student deal with these issues.

The mission for the SRO is to provide a safe school environment and prevent crime while building rapport with staff and students. The SRO also must be a positive role model for the students. I have found that over the course of the school year students have come to the SRO with issues that they do not feel comfortable coming to the school administration with. Building solid rapport with the students has provided an opportunity for them to come to the SRO with many different issues that they may not come to others with. This allows the SRO to deal with issues before they become big enough to spill into the classrooms and disrupt the educational process.

There is no “typical” day in the life of the SRO. The SRO deals with a variety issues in a day.

- Crime, crash reports and investigations
- Common area supervision
- Student counseling
- Staff meetings
- Conflict management
- Classes and presentations
- Parent meetings
- Extra-curricular events

Some of the more prominent issues the SRO deals with are social media issues, alcohol use, drug use, child abuse, mental health issues.

The SRO has a unique perspective of kids/youth. Kids are not to blame they are simply a reflection of society. Growing up today is much more difficult than in previous eras. There are many more negative influences and opportunities to make bad choices. They are growing up in a 24/7 society with a severe lack of quality family time. Youth in this era have a disconnected and isolated view of family and social groups. Peer pressure does not stop for youth of this era do to social media. Most kids just want to be listened to and have a voice. Many youth are looking to bad celebrity/athlete role models.

The SRO provides consistency and many of the student’s lives. This consistency leads to the students modeling better behaviors and actions. The SRO allows a person for the students to talk to and be heard and then give constructive advice and direction.

As the SRO in the Watford City Schools I have found that on average I will have anywhere from seven to ten independent student contacts at the high school. Three to four of these contacts are dealing with negative issues the rest of the contacts are typically dealing with mentor/counselor situations. At the Intermediate School I will have between three to five independent student contacts. One to two of these contacts are dealing with negative issues. The other contacts are dealing with mentor/counselor situations. At the Elementary School I will have between four and six independent student contacts. Two to three of these contacts are dealing with negative issues. The rest of the contacts are mentor/counselor situations. The numbers given are an approximate average some days and greatly exceed these numbers.