

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**The Need for  
School-Based Law Enforcement**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

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## **ABSTRACT**

School violence is so much more than the shootings that pelage our news feeds.

Teachers and school administrators are fighting a daily battle with student's bad behavior and class disruptions. Each one of these class outbursts causes the learning environment to stop and deal with the select few students causing problems. A school employee should not have to revert to the fight or flight mentality and protect themselves against physical assaults, theft or threats from their students. The need for a school based law enforcement program is greatly warranted. The school resource officer is a person on campus who can be relied on to be there for the growing problems so the educator can focus on teaching. School police officers are not only there to enforce the law, but can be utilized as mentors, counselors and positive role models in a child's life. The school officer will build lasting relationships with the students and leave a positive outcome as the child grows into adulthood.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last year, twenty-three school shootings have taken place in the United States (Ahmed & Walker, 2018). But school violence is much more than school shootings. School violence is recorded from school shootings, assaults of students and teachers, weapon use, gang violence and bullying (CDC, 2019). But it is only the gun violence that grabs the attention of the politicians and social media. Media attention is wide spread with gun violence rhetoric. But if everyone would take notice with the other violence, there would be a calling for a school-based law enforcement program in every school. These incidents carry a heavy burden on most parents sending their children into a school setting, outside of their protection. With this trend, some districts are looking at arming teachers and staff members, even though most teachers fill the responsibility of school safety should not fall on their hands (Chicago Tribune, 2018).

Short of arming the teachers, many school districts have reviewed many safety features that would make their school campuses safe. Safety measures have been implemented such as locking doors to include securing entrances where the visiting public is only allowed to enter in one door, utilizing metal detectors at all entrance points and having cameras in all areas of the school, thus making a prison like setting. Research has found, students and teachers alike have less of a connection to their schools when prison like settings are in place, thus causing more school violence and disciplinary issues (Rhodes, 2015). These measures can be helpful but having other safety measures in place such as trained police will benefit the district in more ways than one.

When school violence rings down the hall of any school, everyone looks at the district to see what has been done to provide a safe learning environment for the students they serve. School districts should take more action in ensuring they are providing a safe school environment for their students and faculty by providing a trained police officer on every campus.

School resource officers have been around for years, but it was not until now the focus has been turned to what a school resource officer duties are. (Quinn, 2013). Having an officer on school campuses may not always stop the violence but it can be extremely beneficial to have school-based law enforcement present ("The Absurdity of Teachers," 2018). Having an officer on campus provides a teaching opportunity for the staff and students to learn how to protect themselves and equipping themselves with the needed training instead of cowering down, waiting for the threat to find them. The police officer can provide this training to the students and staff through many avenues such as class room instruction or after school programs.

Additionally, not only is the police officer there for protection, they will serve as a mentor and counselor and this helps building the needed trust with the communities (Theriot, 2016). Building trust between the police and the people they serve through procedural justice can start in the schools and continue on way past the school grounds. Research has proven that when a person thinks they are being treated fairly, they tend to obey the law more and have a sense of ownership in what they have (Tyler & Huo, 2002). This being said, if a student has an encounter with a school police officer and the officer can build a trust with the student because they feel they are being treated with respect and fairness, then the student will have fewer disciplinary issues. Employing

school-based law enforcement on every campus has very favorable outcomes such as having built in protection when violence does take place to having someone on campus to build a lasting relationship through mentor and educational programs.

## **POSITION**

Having an officer on campus can be beneficial for several reasons from offering school safety to building a community of trust and protecting the students so they will have a safe learning environment. First, if school administrators and teachers are having to deal with school violence and stop the learning process daily to contend with growing problems such as bullying, rapid drug problems and having to worry about an active shooter on campus, the education being provided is being placed on the back burner and the learning environment has ceased (Johnson, 1999). A school resource officer will remove the burden away from the educators and serve as protectors of students and faculty, thus allowing the educators to fulfill their jobs.

Second, a student who respects authority will be the same student who will have a sense of ownership in the school. This behavior will be on display in the way they respects their teachers, administrators and the overall property of the school. Additionally, this behavior will be passed on to other students and may even be passed on to the parents and other family members (Theriot, 2016).

Third, law enforcement and the general public, to include some troubled students, have often clashed mainly due to one being the rule enforcer and the other being forced to follow. Dating back to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's to the most recent news of police brutality, there seems to be a growing number of people who have an overall mistrust of the police and the criminal justice system. Dr. Victor

Kappeler (2015) states, "Change and conflict are inherent to the occupation of policing. In fact, one can argue policing is all about addressing social conflict" (p. 6). According to research, the police will be able to motivate individuals to obey the laws when they feel they have been treated with fairness or what is known as procedural justice.

Dealing with people and the way they wished to be treated is no different. If a person feels they are being treated fairly, the individual will respect the legitimacy of the police (Tyler & Huo, 2002). A student will feel more inclined to cooperate with authorities when they feel the authorities are truthful and respectful of the student. The student will comply with decisions and rules more willingly than complying because of fear (Murphy & Cherney, 2011). This application not only works in policing, but in all aspects of life. The student will be able to take this understanding and have this feeling follow them in adulthood.

The troubled, most disciplined students just want to be treated fair and with respect. Having an officer on campus that displays a guardian mindset does not mean they cannot remove the threat of violence. Just like a tool on the officer's belt, switching from the guardian to the warrior to protect the school, students and all involved can be utilized at any given moment. This is accomplished through training and experience.

Where an officer may have to make the change from guardian to warrior is when the offending party is at a level of intensity that deserves the officer to take their course of action one degree higher and the officer's actions may require a warrior mindset. But, with that being said, treating a person with procedural justice can still be accomplished to some degree and a positive outcome can be obtained no matter what the situation is at the time the encounter takes place. Having a police officer work in this capacity,

building the trust with the students, instead of a security guard situation, and sitting back waiting for trouble to find them will help and the officer will be able to build a lasting relationship. Troubled students' will remember a bad experience with every negative encounter they are involved with. If a police officer can build a good relationship by making the troubled student feel respected, on overall general acceptance will be received. The acceptance of the police officer will be remembered even if the final outcome was not favorable (Tyler & Huo, 2002).

Police officers assigned to the school campuses can be utilized as a source to combat a wide variety of criminal offenses through a thorough interviewing and investigative technique. With the implementation of school-based law enforcement, more crimes will be reported because the reporting process will be more readily available for students and faculty to have an avenue to report (Johnson, 1999). Though more crimes are being reported, one should not look at this as the school-based law enforcement program not working. Crime is not on the rise, the crime has always been there, but now there is an avenue to report these crimes.

Lastly, a police officer can build a guardianship within the school and provide a safe network and reduce the number of victims being targeted (Choi, Cronin, & Correia, 2016). Having law enforcement-based policing can play multiple roles. A police officer can be seen as a mentor or as a person of trust so one can express their concerns or problems. A police officer often times puts on the counselor hat and helps students work through their problems. Having a police officer on campus allows the officer to be utilized as another voice bringing educational programs to combat bullying and conflict resolution workshops. A police officer can also be helpful with conflict resolution



programs and school violence preventive programs (Johnson, 1999). School resource officers can work with community leaders, parents and school administrators to create a safe school environment for students through employing each person to take a role in combating school violence.

## **COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

The most prevalent reason to not buy into the school resource program is cost. School safety does not reach across the school needs and testing requirements such as English, Math and Science. In a 2011 report, 84% of the schools across America feel they are inadequately funded. With so many school programs being cut off the budget, the school-based programs are often found at the top of the list of cuts (May, Hart, Ruddell, 2011). Funding may be on the minds of many administrators, but there have been proven methods of funding from state and local funding and also sharing the cost with the local police agency so the cost of funding does not rest solely on the school district's budget. This type of contract with a school district allows an officer to work within the schools, but being employed by the departments. The school may cover half of the officer's salary but does not have to pay the entire startup cost of a new department.

Other areas of funding can come through grants from the Federal Government such as Community Oriented Police Services (COPS). This grant has invested over 14 billion dollars since its inception in 1994 (USDOJ, 2018). In a society where school violence is on the rise, the safety of the children is a concern on most people's mind. The estimated cost to raise a child from birth to the age of eighteen is over \$288,000. (USDA, 2017) With that cost in mind, protecting the students has not only become a

thing to worry about daily, it has become an issue of protecting our investment and finding ways through federal programs or sharing the cost with other agencies will combat any budgeting concerns that may arise.

Another issue when allowing school-based law enforcement into the public schools, is the violation of students and facility Constitutional Rights. School police must enforce state laws but often times are called to enforce school policies. This can be troublesome in how the law is interpreted and put in place. An example of this is student searches and detaining students. When the school administrator asks for a property search, though the officer may be covered under school policy, the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment of illegal search and seizures will take precedent over the officer's actions (Theriot, 2016). This action can be easily resolved through a working relationship between the school administrator and police agency with explaining the reasoning to the school administrator so they will have a working understanding of how the law is interpreted and put into action (Theriot, 2016).

With the number of school resource officers being implemented into the school districts, research has been conducted that states employing a police officer on school campuses would criminalize students with minor disciplinary issues into the juvenile justice system instead of allowing the school administration handle these minor disciplinary problems (Theriot, 2009). School resource officers are sworn law enforcement officers assigned full-time to patrol schools. As they become more common on school campuses, it is argued, discipline problems traditionally handled by school principals and teachers now are more likely to be handled by a school police officer (Theriot, 2009). This issue can easily be dismissed by reviewing the

effectiveness of an existing school-based law enforcement program. Though the number of reported crimes has gone up, minor violations have not resulted in arrests being made. The crime reports have gone up simply because the reporting is easier (Theroit, 2009).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The uptick in violence across America and especially the schools have caused great debate on both sides of the political parties and has become a hot bed for the social media. Several theories have been discussed and even published over the last two decades that can be utilized to give a blue print for law enforcement to be successful in school policing. A police officer's appearance and having the control or force mentality focuses on what is commonly known as command appearance. Being on a school campus can bring that same presence and offer a sense of protection and build the needed trust so others feel they are welcome in a safe learning environment.

Employing a police officer to provide a safe learning environment has many advantages from building a trust between police and the communities they serve to protecting the students and staff while they are in a learning environment. Every school district, no matter the size, should employ a school-based law enforcement program within their district to ensure a safe learning environment that provides a trust between the police and the people they serve. Building relationships seems to be just as important in school-based law enforcement as providing security. Some theorists believe the precedential justice theory in building trust is key to students and the general public alike obeying the law because they feel their rights have not been violated and they were treated fairly.

Though there has been some research concluding that police-based law enforcement causes more problems than it does it helps (Theroit & Cuellar, 2016). The problems listed in this paper has touched on cost effectiveness of having an officer on campus while other programs such as after school programs and reading awareness programs go unfunded. Even more research has concluded that having an officer on campus will cause 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment violations or the students' rights will be taken away and more arrests will be made due to minor offenses often referred to the school administration, now being handled by the police (Theroit & Cuellar, 2016). Each concern is valued and is not easily dismissed, but further research has been concluded that having a school-based law enforcement program is very effective in ways that outweigh the negative research.

A successful blueprint has already been laid out for school-based law enforcement to be implemented. The issue for not going through with a full time program could be dismissed based on misinformation and an unwillingness to change by school districts who are either too afraid of budget short comings or overall fear of treating their schools as prisons (Theriot, 2016).

The federal government has already allowed funding for school-based law enforcement programs so that policy exists to monitor the money being allowed (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). The school districts and law enforcement agencies should work collaboratively to form a successful partnership so that every one of their students and faculty members will have a safe learning rich environment. This funding will save the school districts money while trying to fund a school based policing.

A plan of action could be started by forming a committee made up of local law enforcement, school district employees, and parents to walk the districts to survey each school and highlight the problem areas. After a plan of action is formulated, grants will be written and money requested to fund the program. Once the money is approved, extensive training by both the police agency and school districts would be conducted. This entire process should take no more than a year to finalize. But, while this process is going on, the local law enforcement could carry the weight and assign a police officer to work in the school to start the protection and guardianship that is so badly needed.

When implemented correctly, school-based law enforcement will result in high returns for the investment. Everyone involved will feel the overall protection and sense of ownership through the relationships built between law enforcement and the people they serve. Throughout this paper, the benefits of employing a school-based law enforcement program in every school have been listed. At the end of the day, a school district should not allow money, feelings or personal bias to prevent from having a safe learning school environment.

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