

# School Community Oriented Policing Officer Program

---

RACINE POLICE DEPARTMENT & RACINE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Bree Spencer**

Director of Evaluation & Technical Assistance



We unite residents, youth, law enforcement and  
community resources to build safe and empowered  
neighborhoods.

## Overview

Safe & Sound is a non-profit operating in Milwaukee, Wisconsin focused on uniting residents, youth, law enforcement and community resources to build safe and empowered neighborhoods. As the Wisconsin High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area's Prevention Initiative, Safe & Sound developed a technical assistance program to support communities outside of Milwaukee. The goal is to help municipalities improve public safety through collaboration and the development of creative cross-sector programs.

Safe & Sound approached Racine regarding technical assistance, the result of which is this proposal, developed at the request of Chief Art Howell of the Racine Police Department (RPD). RPD is looking to grow their relationship with the Racine Unified School District (RUSD). The goal is to leverage existing relationships between RPD and RUSD, capitalize on the Racine Community Oriented Policing (COP) House structure and take the best aspects of the current school resource officer program to create a standardized approach for both RPD and RUSD.

Several key community stakeholders were interviewed during the development of this proposal, including several members of the Racine Police Department. I am grateful to the people who took time to meet with me and share their perspectives and insights. Overall, they contributed necessary context about the environment in Racine, ideas for a successful school COP program and key areas of focus.

The contents of this proposal were developed from a combination of stakeholder interviews, readings referenced at the end of this document and Safe & Sound's organizational experiences with collaborative work in public safety.

## **Current Partnership & Motivation for Change**

Under the current partnership, RPD officers are able to pick-up extra shifts as part-time school resources officers. The officers are supervised and paid by RUSD, but act in a law enforcement capacity under the policies and procedures of RPD. The supervision structure can be confusing and has created some challenges for effective collaboration between RPD and RUSD. While many of the part-time school resource officers have good working relationships with the school staff, there can be discrepancies in school discipline policy that officers find confusing and a blurring of lines between law enforcement and school policy enforcement.

RPD has benefited from veteran officers serving as part-time school resources officers, particularly when those officers have successfully implemented community oriented policing practices in the schools. One challenge with the current structure is the variability in officer-school interaction, which is largely based on the individual officer and the relevant school environment. In a desire to identify best practices and standardize those practices across the school district, RPD and RUSD are working together to develop a consistent school resource officer model to maximize the meaningful work officers are already doing in the schools.

Currently 25% of juvenile arrests in Racine County come out of the schools. This reflects a high number of incidents and/or situations in which school resource officers are engaging with students through a traditional law enforcement approach. One goal of changing the school resource officer program is to expand the toolbox available to officers operating in the schools. By creating more direct collaboration with RUSD and implementing best practices including COP strategies, RPD hopes to improve the learning environment.

It is important to note that of the 25% of juvenile arrests coming out of the schools, Case High School has the highest apprehension rate. As such, it will be important for the Mt. Pleasant Police Department to be involved with this process as well.

### **Framework Already in Place for New School COP Officer Program**

The primary goal of having COP Officers embedded at RUSD is to improve school safety and help build educational environments that are increasingly conducive to learning.

A joint management structure will oversee the new School COP Officer program. RPD has assigned a member of their command staff at the Deputy Director level to manage the school resource officers in collaboration with RUSD administration.

The current burglary/truancy car officers will be reassigned into new, full-time school resource officer positions. One of these officers will be located at Horlick High School and the other will be placed at Park High. Case High School, located in Mt. Pleasant with approximately 80% of its student body comprised of young adults from Racine, already has a fulltime Mt. Pleasant school resource officer. Part-time school resource officers will continue to support safety and build positive engagement at the high schools and help the full-time school resource officer realize their vision for the school.

Additional staffing for the remainder of the school district, including middle schools, will be comprised of officers selected from the pool of moonlighting-eligible officers. The selected officers will form a mobile unit that will engage the rest of the district schools through proactive prevention approaches, much like school resources officers in the high schools, and as first responders, when there is a call for police service from a school.

## Recommendations

1. **Capitalize on the already existing COP House program by naming the program officers School COP Officers rather than School Resource Officers.** The goal is to grow the Racine brand of community oriented policing while making a clear delineation between the old approach and the new approach to police school engagement.
2. **Create a multi-disciplinary school safety team, at each school, to help develop the COP Officer program, ensure ongoing communication as well as thoughtful collaboration between RPD, RUSD and area community service providers.** This would be a formal expansion of a concept that is already, informally, in place. This team should consist of RUSD school administrative staff, the School COP Officer and community resource providers such as Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), juvenile court staff, a mental health professional and any relevant prevention/early intervention providers. The goal is to cut through red tape, streamline communication and address challenges students may have before they result in criminal justice action.

**Example:** The Red Hook Community Justice service team in Brooklyn, which served as the model for the Milwaukee Drug Court service team is structured similarly to the school team I am envisioning. The Red Hook team consists of a judge, prosecutor, defense attorney/public defender, the individual's case manager and if applicable their substance abuse counselor. By speaking together ahead of the hearing, all members of the team come to a better understanding of the individual's situation and progress. They are then able to come to an agreement about needed next steps. The team notices and incentivizes small wins for the individual and act as a support system for the individual while fulfilling each of their given roles.

**Example:** This group might be able to leverage home visits to students dealing with truancy or other issues obstructing their ability to engage meaningfully in school. The School COP Officer may have the latitude to access parents, after-school hangouts and other environmental factors that affect a student's life more easily than other service providers at the table.

**Opportunity:** JDAI is willing to convene the School Safety Teams and get the right people to the table.

3. **Principals and executive administrative staff at each of the three high schools Horlick, Park and Case, should be involved in the multi-disciplinary school safety teams.** This serves to ensure there is open communication and prioritization between the school and the police, allowing for the fulfillment of responsibilities and policies of each organization while honoring the Principal's vision for each school.

- 4. Create both a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) document between RPD and RUSD.** When the SOP is developed, it should include language that specifies the nature of behavioral events that will require police attention and the nature of events that require only school employee intervention. Steps should be taken to ensure that both COP officers and school district employees understand their responsibilities and boundaries. It is important for success of the program to ensure that COP officers do not become the disciplinarians of the school, but that teachers and administrators take on the responsibility of addressing lower-level behavioral issues that arise in a school setting. This particular issue is one that fuels significant concern in the academic research and in the general public about having law enforcement officers in schools. Clearly articulating the rules and responsibilities while thoughtfully ensuring that teachable moments in a teenager's life don't become criminal record will, I believe, go a long way to ameliorate these concerns. See the National Center Brief for School Resource Officers Brief, pages 7-9, for detailed recommendations on MOU and SOP creation.

“An SRO [School Resource Officer] who observes a violation of the school code of conduct preserves a safe and orderly environment by making sure that a school administrator is aware of the violation so that school discipline can be determined solely by school officials.” – National Association of School Resources Officers, National Center Brief for School Resource Officers, page 8

- 5. The Mount Pleasant Police Department should be involved in the planning and implementation of the new School COP Officer program.** This will help ensure consistency for RUSD and smooth the pathway for increased collaboration in the future between the Racine and Mt. Pleasant police departments. It is also important, due to the high amount of juvenile arrests that are currently coming out of Case High School, that Mt. Pleasant take advantage of a new School COP Officer approach.
- 6. Hold two brainstorming and planning meetings with RPD officers prior to finalizing the new program design and implementation.** There should be one meeting held with supervisors to discuss the program, explain the thought process behind this change and solicit their support for helping lead the second meeting. The second meeting should be held with the entire team of officers who currently choose to pick-up shifts in the schools. While it will not be possible to accommodate all officer suggestions, RPD recognizes and should utilize their in-house expertise to establish some of the program details. This will help to ensure the new program is the best possible fit for both RPD and RUSD while establishing ownership and buy-in from participating officers.
- 7. Prior to rolling out the program, hold a few community engagement meetings around the topic of School COP Officers.** Transparency with the public by providing opportunities for specific areas of community influence can help build buy-in for the program. It will also provide insight for both RPD and RUSD about what is most important to community members regarding police serving in the schools.

**8. All School COP Officers, full-time and part-time, should attend training** in the areas outlined on page 10 of the National Center Brief for School Resource Officers, namely: Prevention, Early Intervention, Diversion, Adolescent and Developmental Psychology and Substance Abuse. See the brief for further detail on training for school resource officers. This training should also include goals of the program, meaning and tracking of outputs/outcomes, the Racine COP brand and culture as well as the overarching reasons for the program change. It may also be relevant to train officers on research around effective school resource officer programs as well as mistakes that have been made in other jurisdictions.

**Example:** During training, specific examples should be provided for officers to clearly demonstrate the type of situations that have been escalated to a law enforcement level that perhaps shouldn't have been. Racine County has examples and this would be a great transition into training provided by the juvenile justice system.

**Example:** Another potentially helpful aspect of training could be COP Officers, current or former – especially successful school resource officers, who are willing to articulate their evolving thought process towards community oriented and problem oriented policing. One point brought up while interviewing officers was that good relationships in the schools also help officers in the streets. Officers have increased insight into street level criminal activity and increased cooperation from youth outside of the school if they have strong relationships with students inside the school.

**Training Opportunities:** The Youth and Family Division of the Racine County Human Services Department is willing to repeat Trauma Informed Care and Juvenile Brain Development training for the School COP Officers and for Administrative School staff, like they did for RPD two years ago.

**Training Opportunities:** The Eastern Division of the US Attorney's Office in Wisconsin may also be able to support relevant training for RPD or RUSD as they have funded some Classroom Management Training for the Milwaukee Public Schools in the past.

**9. Align efforts within the schools with the programming at the COP Houses.**

**Example:** When School COP Officers and/or other members of the School Safety Teams engage parents, they can encourage volunteerism with the Community Panels Program (CPP). This first time offender youth accountability program sees 300-400 youth per year with an incredible 70% non-recidivism rate in the two years following engagement with the program. CPP could potentially hold panels at the COP Houses. Currently the program does not utilize the COP Houses because it costs money to rent the space necessary to hold a Panel at the house. I do not know how decisions are made about costs associated with community use of the COP Houses but this might be an area that can be changed to create greater access to the houses by community service providers. Similarly, if intervention is needed but does not rise to the level of a student engaging formally with the criminal justice system, COP Officers can refer kids to alternative programming, like CPP.

**Example:** Utilize the COP Houses as potential internship spots for young people. When School COP Officers meet students interested in entering the career field of criminal justice, they could connect them to these internships. At Safe & Sound, we believe that access to community-facing program delivery prior to entrance into the criminal justice field can be an extremely important, formative first step towards a thoughtful, community-driven approach to the work.

**10. The School COP Officers and/or the School Safety Teams should create a referral process and make specific efforts provide students and parents access to relevant community service information.** For the School COP Officers, this should include building relationships with referral providers to secure responsive service for families and ensure that all necessary stakeholders are represented on the School Safety Teams.

**11. The mission and target outcomes of the School COP Program should be set prior to implementation and revisited each year of the program.** One of the challenges mentioned in the research materials is that school resources officers sometimes find it difficult to understand what success looks like in their position. These officers are asked to operate outside of the scope of traditional policing. Given that police officers engaging in community oriented policing positions often face misunderstanding and sometimes even ridicule from their more traditional colleagues, an individual officer's ability to find value in their work becomes even more important. Without a clear path to success, officers may either feel that their work is not valuable or revert to traditional policing within the school setting.

**Potential Outcomes:**

- Decreased number of youth being referred to the criminal justice system for exhibiting behavior below a certain threshold.
- Increased number of early/alternative intervention referrals
- Increased school attendance
- Decrease in criminal incidents in and around the school
- Clear anecdotal evidence demonstrating improved collaboration between RPD and RUSD, with increased incidents of positive engagement between partners
- Positive change in attitude towards law enforcement officers from both students and RUSD colleagues and vice versa
- Increase in positive interactions and decrease in negative interactions between officers and students
- Increase in requests for School COP Officer led programming in schools  
Decrease in truancy rate or Increase in number of hours students are spending in school
- Increase in graduation rate



**12. Data on legal legitimacy amongst school stakeholders should be gathered prior to or within the first three months of the program.** This will likely need to take the form of surveys of various school community members including students, parents, faculty, outside resource providers and police. Baseline data will help provide benchmarks against which program effectiveness can be marked. It also sets the stage for creating an evidence-based model, should the School COP Officer program prove to be a success. Setting up an evaluative process should not only serve the macro level purposes of the program but also help School COP Officers, School Safety Teams, funders and community members understand the impact of the program.

**13. Consider creating an accessible, transparent process available to students and parents if they have a concern or complaint regarding a School COP Officer.** This, I believe, will help demonstrate to stakeholders, especially parents, that both RPD and RUSD are transparent and open to community feedback.

*Example:*

San Antonio School District Police Department:

[http://www.saisd.net/main/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5752&Itemid=0](http://www.saisd.net/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5752&Itemid=0)

Santa Ana Unified School District:

<http://www.sausd.us/Page/84>

**14. There should be some documented processes for determining if a School COP Officer is a good fit for the position and clear steps to take if the officer turns out not be suited for work in the school environment.** Officers unfit for work in the school should not remain in this position as negative behaviors by a School COP Officer could have lasting impacts on the success of the program.

**15. Increase the amount of information available about COP Houses on the RPD website and create a new School COP Officer page for the program.**

## Technical Assistance Options

In addition to this report, which includes recommendations developed out of research, interviews and prior experience, Safe & Sound is able to provide implementation support for this project.

### Recommendation # 2

- \* Attend meetings and/or help facilitate sessions of the multi-disciplinary School Safety Teams

### Recommendation # 4

- \* Help create the MOU and SOP documents
- \* Document implementation process and lessons learned from implementation for RPD record

### Recommendation # 5

- \* Help develop the structure and implementation of the Mt. Pleasant School Resource Officer program with RPD and RUSD

### Recommendation # 6

- \* Support preparation and facilitation of RPD officer planning meetings regarding the new School COP Officer program

### Recommendation # 7

- \* Support facilitation of community meetings regarding the new School COP Officer program
- \* Create communication materials and/or help to plan informational meetings with school stakeholders regarding the program

### Recommendation # 8

- \* Support finding and creating trainings for School COP Officers and School Personnel

### Recommendations # 9 & 10

- \* Asset mapping to leverage existing programs and to create more collaborative community engagement and student referral processes

### Recommendation # 11 & 12

- \* Support outcome development, create survey and data gathering framework, find evaluation resources

### Recommendation # 15

- \* Create relevant new program content for the Racine Police Department webpage

## Considerations

The length of time that officers are assigned to the School COP Officer role is very important. These positions cannot be regularly switched around or relationships with both youth and RUSD employees will suffer. When good, well-liked officers do make a transition away from the school, it will help sustain relationships if RPD gives the officer some time to say goodbye to students, faculty and parents thus preparing everyone for the change. A period of time allowing the two officers to overlap for the purposes of training is also advisable.

General police culture and community feelings about legal legitimacy will impact the effectiveness of the both the School COP Officer program and the COP House program.

If teaching safety curriculum or job training presentations becomes part of the School COP Officer position, I would suggest exploring a potential partnership with local colleges to secure college credit for officers providing this service. This would incentivize officers, help bolster their professional development and encourage them to expand their conception of police work.

One of the benefits of new cross-sector collaborations is that many interesting, new ideas come about organically. As a result, it will be important especially in the early stages of the program, to ensure that someone is documenting the process and revisiting the structure. There will likely be many lessons, quickly. As such, this program framework would benefit from proactive leadership and some latitude to learn and evolve.

Schools may benefit from Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) input from School COP Officers. In Safe & Sound's experience CPTED projects are also an excellent engagement tool with youth and may be a good starting engagement point for the School COP Officers.

It may be advisable to consider either developing a new monthly safety meeting for parents at RUSD or engaging the PTA meetings with regular updates regarding public and school safety.

One interesting SRO model used in Anchorage Alaska places an officer in each high school. That officer is also responsible for all the schools that feed into the high school. This would ostensibly allow the officer to build relationships with kids, parents and teachers extending across a young person's entire educational K-12 career.

Racine could benefit from a strong mentorship program. COP Houses could potentially be involved in either bolstering existing programs by helping to capture or develop tangible outcomes, or helping incubate a new, stronger mentoring program. COP Officers and School COP Officers could work with the School Safety Team, the PTA and faith-based groups to drive volunteerism and participation in the program.

## References

Thomas, Benjamin, Towvim, Laura, Rosiak, John, Anderson, Kellie. 2013. "School Resource Officers: Steps to effective school-based law enforcement" *National Center Brief – National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention* Retrieved from <http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/SRO%20Brief.pdf>

Wolff, Russell, McDevitt, Jack. 2008. "School/Police Partnerships: Best Practices and Lessons Learned" *Innovative Practices from the Charles E. Shannon Jr. Community Safety Initiative Series – Northeastern University Institute on Race and Justice* Retrieved from <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/funding-and-training/justice-and-prev/grants/shannon-csi/shannon-pub-5.pdf>

Atkinson, Anne J. 2002. "Guide 5: Fostering School-Law Enforcement Partnerships" *Safe and Secure: Guides To Creating Safer Schools* Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/book5.pdf>

Myrstol, Brad A. 2010. "Police in Schools: Public Perceptions" *Alaska Justice Forum* 27(3):1,5-7 Retrieved from [http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/forum/27/3fall2010/a\\_sro.html](http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/forum/27/3fall2010/a_sro.html)

## Stakeholders Interviewed

Al Days - Deputy Chief, Racine Police Department

Dr. Eric Gallien – Deputy Superintendent, Racine Unified School District

Art Howell – Chief, Racine Police Department

Carole Johnson (& Friends) – Former Director of the Johnson Foundation, CROK Management Consulting Group

Kevin Klinkhammer – Investigator, Racine Police Department

Kerry Milkie – Youth and Family Division Manager, Racine County Human Services Department

Liz Powell – Executive Director, Racine Community Foundation

Walt Powell – Sergeant, Racine Police Department

Rodney Prunty – President & CEO, United Way of Racine County

Sam Stulo – Sergeant, Racine Police Department

Rev. RL Woods – Chaplain, Racine Police Department

### Additional Resources

Myrstol, Brad A. 2011. "Public Perceptions of School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs" *Western Criminology Review* 12(3):20-40 Retrieved from <http://wcr.sonoma.edu/v12n3/Myrstol.pdf>

May, David C., Rice, Corrie & Minor, Kevin I. 2012. "An Examination of School Resource Officers' Attitudes Regarding Behavioral Issues among Students Receiving Special Education Services" *Current Issues in Education* 15(3) Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/863>

Jones, Janine M. 2014 March/April. "Conflicting Cultures With a Common Goal: Collaborating With School Resource Officers" *The Newspaper of the National Association of School Psychologists – Communique* Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279520473\\_Conflicting\\_Cultures\\_with\\_a\\_Common\\_Goal\\_Collaborating\\_with\\_School\\_Resource\\_Officers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279520473_Conflicting_Cultures_with_a_Common_Goal_Collaborating_with_School_Resource_Officers)

Flynn, Dan. 2014 October. "The ABCs of School Security," *The Police Chief* 81 Retrieved from [http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display\\_arch&article\\_id=3567&issue\\_id=122014](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=3567&issue_id=122014)

Canady, Mo. 2015 March. "The Impact of School Resource Officers on Community-Based Policing," *The Police Chief* 82:40-43 Retrieved from [http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=print\\_display&article\\_id=3657&issue\\_id=32015](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=print_display&article_id=3657&issue_id=32015)

Libresco, Leah. 2015. "Cops In Classrooms Are Rarely Evaluated" Retrieved from <http://fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/spring-valley-high-school-resource-officers/>

Theriot, Matthew T., Orme, John G., 2016. "School Resource Officers and Students' Feelings of Safety at School" *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 14(2):130-146 Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285980423\\_School\\_Resource\\_Officers\\_and\\_Students'\\_Feelings\\_of\\_Safety\\_at\\_School](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285980423_School_Resource_Officers_and_Students'_Feelings_of_Safety_at_School)