

# **Riverside County Sheriff's Department School Resource Officer Program**

## **Background**

The Riverside County Sheriff's Department has, by law, the following major responsibilities: keep the peace, maintain a county jail, serve civil process and attend the court. In addition to providing traditional law enforcement services throughout the unincorporated areas of the county, the department provides contract services to twelve municipalities.

Among these services are a variety of youth services programs in some twenty-three K-12 school districts. Funding for these types of programs is in different configurations, ranging from grant monies of approximately \$1.3 million to partial funding by either the respective school districts or incorporated into contracts between some cities and the sheriff's department.

The sheriff's department has established four different categories of youth-oriented services, ranging from intervention, interdiction and diversion programs to offender or victim investigations. This report will only address the School Resource Officer (SRO) program.

The SRO positions consist of twenty-seven sworn deputies and, according to the sheriff's department, one supervisor. These deputies are assigned to publicly-supported secondary schools throughout the county on a dedicated basis. These on-campus officers are intended to provide "close supervision, high visibility law enforcement presence on campus" and to effect liaison with school officials.

On July 15, 1998, the sheriff's department provided a report entitled "Youth Services Program Inventory," to include the SRO, to the board of supervisors, the district attorney, the chief probation officer and the director of the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS).

An integral part of this inventory was essentially an opinion survey distributed to all sheriff's stations and bureaus. This survey resulted in the compilation of a program matrix upon which certain conclusions were reached regarding the success of all youth-oriented programs involving the sheriff's department.

## **Findings**

The Riverside County Office of Education, in their detailed annual report which focuses on organization, service and achievement, fails to address the subject of the SRO. The

subsection entitled "legal," while addressing other programs involving the sheriff's department, is silent on the county-wide SRO program.

A sampling inspection of activity logs and records maintained by SROs did not disclose actions demanding the presence of a sworn police officer. Noted examples included truancy consultations, non-drug-related smoking on campus and minor non-injury mutual combat incidents which were broken up by school employees and not the campus SRO. The use of sworn deputies in the role of SRO may be an unjustified expense and inappropriate utilization of available human resources. We find that an objective analysis of this possibility has not been performed

The fundamental principle that SROs must be sworn police officers appears to be firm within the sheriff's department. Nonetheless, there is no disclosed evidence that reflects consideration for the use of properly trained, less costly individuals for these assignments. An example might be a classification similar to the Sheriff's Service Officers (SSOs) who are utilized at each station in the county. The prevailing compensation scale for sworn deputies, \$35,000-\$47,000 per annum, can be compared to that of SSOs, \$19,000-\$24,000 per annum.

## **Recommendation**

Board of Supervisors direct that a detailed audit and analysis of the SRO program be conducted. This study to include the following:

Elemental duties of the SRO assignment.

Detailed analysis of daily SRO activity including arrest incidents

Criteria for assignment to certain schools.

Comparison of Riverside County SRO program with adjacent county programs.

Consider the use of non-sworn officers for SRO assignments.

Estimate prospective cost savings if the use of non-sworn officers is deemed appropriate.

Consider the feasibility of adding SRO training to other training programs at the Ben Clark Public Safety Training Center.