



Ensure SROs walk right beat regarding students with disabilities

School resource officers often walk a fine line when it comes to students with disabilities. In some situations, they can misinterpret and inadvertently exacerbate a student's challenging behavior.

However, SROs can also help defuse difficult situations involving students with disabilities. See *Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan ISD #0196-01*, [115 LRP 34830](#) (SEA MN 05/26/15) (A Minnesota SRO de-escalated a situation after a student was outside running for 20 minutes by convincing the student to get into the SRO's vehicle.).

The key is ensuring SROs and those who work with them understand their limitations and need for training in special education. "They're ultimately responsible for safety," said Beth Morris, an attorney at Parker Poe Adams & Bernstein LLP in Atlanta, Ga.

This school year, administrators should take time to make sure that everyone on campus is clear on SRO responsibilities, what information they can access, and ways they can positively interact with students with disabilities. This will help avoid future distressing interactions, inappropriate discipline, and claims of disability discrimination. Use these ideas from Morris to ensure SROs work appropriately with students who have disabilities.

Ensure responsibilities are clear

SROs may be employed by a school district or a police department and assigned to work with a district under a [memorandum of understanding](#).

If they work for a district, they should have a job description and clear expectations and [procedures](#).

If they're employed by the police department, it's important for special education staff to have a good relationship with the department in addition to the SROs adhering to an MOU. "Make sure they have an [\[understanding\]](#) of your students and your students' needs, so you're on the same page about your goals for your students with disabilities and what your requirements under the IDEA are to help meet those students' needs," she said. "Make sure on you're on the same page."

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Discuss student behavior

The responsibility for implementing a behavioral intervention plan chiefly falls on educators, Morris said. But, occasionally, an SRO may be made aware of a student's BIP to keep the student safe. "We would only share educational records with other individuals in the school who have a legitimate educational interest," she said. "That's the language under [FERPA](#), so we wouldn't share IEPs or other educational records, including BIPs, with SROs automatically. All decisions need to be made on a student-by-student basis."

SROs can partner with educators for [general training](#), Morris said. "It's great if they have an understanding of students with disabilities and maybe even de-escalation techniques," she said.

At the same time, trained educators, not SROs, should be responsible if a student with a disability needs to be restrained because he poses an immediate danger to himself or others, Morris said. "Educators have specific training for that," she said. "They're very specific rules, guidelines, and training for that. Most districts don't use SROs for that purpose. An SRO might step in when they feel they need to, based on their own training and guidelines with regard to law enforcement. That's different. Those are different decisions they make with regard to when they feel they need to step in."

Clarify IEP involvement

As far as involvement in IEP development, it would be [very rare](#) to include an SRO, Morris said. It may make sense to include the SRO for part of the team meeting or gather input from the SRO before the meeting if he has specific knowledge about the student that can shed light on the student's needs. "It would be rare," she said. "They certainly are not [required members](#) of the IEP team."

Just keep in mind that if you plan to include an SRO, notify the parents. See *Crocker R-II Sch. Dist.*, [70 IDELR 28](#) (SEA MO 2017) (A parent's assertiveness in dealing with school personnel and her requests to tape IEP meetings did not justify a Missouri district's decision to invite its superintendent and a school resource officer to an IEP meeting without notifying the parent.).



SROs might also be involved in a manifestation determination review if they were involved in the incident that occurred, Morris said.

Build connections with students

Encourage SROs to get to know students in general and build positive relationships so they share mutual trust and respect, Morris said. SROs can visit classrooms and build a rapport with students.

"We want students to see SROs as the positive support staff they are," she said. "That's an important role they can play from the get-go. We have seen SROs used as positive reinforcers. A student can choose to eat lunch with the SRO or play a board game with the SRO. Sometimes, just having an SRO present can help a student de-escalate."

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