



# Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

October 4, 2021

To: School Committee  
From: Joe Sawyer  
Re: School Resource Officer program

The School Resource Officer (SRO) program is a partnership between the Shrewsbury Police Department and the Shrewsbury School Department. The SRO program began at Shrewsbury High School in 2001-2002, and was then put on hiatus due to Police Department budget and staffing issues in 2004. It was reinstated at SHS in 2007 under former Chief of Police James Hester, who also funded a second position for PreK-Grade 8 that began that year. Since that time, two School Resource Officers ("SROs"), who are employed by the Police Department, have worked in partnership with our schools. Officer Mark Hester is situated at Shrewsbury High School and is responsible for grades 9-12; he has been the sole SRO at SHS since 2007. The other, Officer Shawn Valliere, is responsible for grades PreK-8; he has served in this role since the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, replacing retired Officer Scott Mentzer, who had served since the institution of the PreK-Grade 8 role. The SRO positions are funded through the Police Department budget, but the cost of the positions and program are calculated as part of our school district expenditures on the End of Year Report to the state.

Over the past few years, SRO programs have undergone scrutiny at a national level due to a variety of reasons, typically due to incidents where a school-based police officer's actions become a news story, and also due to studies that suggest that the presence of an SRO is correlated with higher levels of suspension, especially for students of color, or are promoting what has been deemed the "school-to-prison pipeline." Such national studies have been cited by the Public Safety Subcommittee of the town's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force in its recommendation to eliminate the SRO program in Shrewsbury. Therefore, it is important that the School Committee and the community have an understanding about our local context regarding the SRO program.

The studies that critique the use of SROs reference situations where SROs have a high level of discretion regarding school disciplinary matters and take law enforcement actions against students for behaviors that would typically be handled by educators or school administrators, often in the absence of any formal agreement between the local police and school district (see links below). In Shrewsbury, this is not the case, as the SROs are not part of school discipline decisions, and the partnership is governed by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the departments. The MOU between the Shrewsbury Police and Shrewsbury Public Schools was recently updated to reflect some

elements of a recent Massachusetts state law, Chapter 71, Section 37P and is enclosed for your reference. You will see that our program has a variety of boundaries to prevent the kinds of concerning situations that may exist in other places where SRO programs are not administered the way we do in Shrewsbury and according to Massachusetts law. Additionally, the SROs in our program also receive extensive training in best practices (in fact, each SRO just completed an updated, week-long training program aligned with the new law).

There is a strong consensus among SPS school administrators that the SRO program is worthwhile and beneficial to our schools. When asked for feedback, general reasons included the following:

- Contributing to the safety and security of our schools by working with school administrators to address any threats of violence or general concerns regarding school safety
- Building relationships with students generally to make connections between them and the local police. Over the course of our program, relationships have been built that have prevented or solved crimes, and SROs have worked with students and their families to support them in difficult situations where a student may be a victim of a crime outside of school or involved in the court system in some way
- Working with school leadership on school safety and security plans and crisis response preparedness and readiness
- The relationship between the SROs and the school administration enables collaboration on issues as mundane as traffic to much more complex situations involving student well-being, such as cyberbullying
- SROs have a strong knowledge of our school environments, and this situational awareness enables a more proactive and productive partnership than what would exist if various police officers were only called upon when needs were heavy

At your meeting on October 6, Shrewsbury Chief of Police Kevin Anderson, SHS Principal Todd Bazydlo, and I will present additional information about the SRO program and will be available to answer any questions that you may have. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss the ways in which this partnership benefits our students, families, staff, and community.

Links to studies:

[Gottfredson, Crosse, Tang, Bauer, Harmon, Hagen, & Greene \(2020\)](#)

[Nance \(2015\)](#)

[Pigott \(2016\)](#)

