

Indiana School Resource Officer Needs Assessment Study

Executive Summary – January 2013

- The **Office of the Indiana Attorney General** initiated a Needs Assessment Study during the fourth quarter of 2012 to measure prevailing attitudes and dispositions regarding school safety in Indiana and to specifically assess awareness and perceptions of Indiana's **School Resource Officer (SRO)** concept. The intent of the study was to measure perceived benefits, challenges and concerns regarding existing SRO programs in school districts, as well as to identify potential barriers to expansion and funding of future programs elsewhere.
- The Needs Assessment Study was conducted from November 5 through December 10, 2012. In total, 1,149 constituents across Indiana were sampled, including parents, teachers, school administrators, law enforcement personnel and current School Resource Officers.
- Key findings:
 - At the time the study was completed, prior to the December 14 incident in Newtown, Conn., nearly 6 in 10 Indiana parents and teachers and nearly 8 in 10 Indiana school administrators reported being highly positive that their schools are well equipped to address safety and security concerns.
 - While concerns over students bringing and using weapons in schools are top of mind for many, incidents of bullying and fighting, intimidation and drug or substance abuse are chronic and universal concerns. Teachers also expressed concerns regarding lack of specific security measures within their schools as well as lack of student respect for authority or school rules. School administrators were more likely to cite suspicious visitors as a primary concern.
 - Overall, parents were more inclined than teachers to perceive their schools as capable of addressing most potential problems, particularly emergency situations and students in possession of weapons and vandalism. Teachers regarded their schools as most capable of handling violent incidents on school buses, emergency situations and technology-based problems.
 - The majority, 9 in 10, of sampled parents, teachers and school administrators acknowledged that their schools currently have some type of safety and security personnel in place. Half of the sampled teachers and school administrators specifically reported that School Resource Officers are currently present in their schools. In contrast, awareness of SROs by name was limited to 1 in 4 parents who were aware of the presence of SROs at their school.
 - Among those sampled who currently have SROs in their schools, maintaining safety and security is perceived to be the primary role of these personnel. To lesser extent, SROs are perceived as serving as counselors or positive role models and/or disciplinarians in managing behavioral issues. Law enforcement officials also view SROs as liaisons between their agencies and school administration.
 - Overall, SROs receive very high marks for their effectiveness in their roles and, as such, those who currently have these personnel in their schools are inclined to recommend that their SRO program continue. Impressions toward SROs are also favorable among those who report not having these personnel in their schools, and based on their understanding of SROs, most believe they would be effective in their roles.

- Limited familiarity currently exists relative to how SRO positions are funded, particularly among parents, with the majority assuming that taxpayers are the primary funders. Parents as well as educators and school administrators tend to believe that state and local government should be the funders. In contrast, law enforcement officials are inclined to believe that the school districts should fund SRO programs.
- While the majority of Indiana parents, teachers and school administrators are inclined to recommend that their schools institute SRO programs, they reported funding appears to be a primary barrier to adoption. While more than 9 in 10 sampled school administrators and law enforcement personnel would recommend that their schools hire SROs, fewer than 3 in 10 indicated positions actually would be created in the future, given funding concerns.
- Law enforcement officials are receptive to supporting school systems in their pursuit of SRO programs, with 7 in 10 officials indicating they would consider sharing an employee with a school district to serve in an SRO role.
- Overall, the study revealed Indiana constituents to be highly supportive of the School Resource Officer concept. In general, those who acknowledged that their schools currently have SROs in place reported higher levels of perceived safety and security than those without SROs. Furthermore, nearly all of those participating in the study – both those with and without SRO programs currently – provided a positive evaluation of the SRO concept.
- These findings suggest that opportunity exists to expand utilization of School Resource Officers to reach schools throughout Indiana with the support of parents, teachers, school administrators and law enforcement agencies. Not only is it believed that SROs can play a valuable role in promoting positive citizenship among students, but that SROs with their law enforcement training and experience in emergency operations can also serve as deterrents to potential threats on school premises.