

SRO vs. SSO

Understanding the roles of School Resource Officers & School Security Officers

HB 1214 (2021) draws a clear, legally grounded line between these two roles — one a sworn law-enforcement officer, the other non-sworn campus security staff. Both are required to complete state-approved training under HB 1214 before serving in a school setting.

School Resource Officer

SWORN LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

A sworn peace officer employed by a police department, sheriff's office, or tribal law-enforcement agency, and assigned to a school through a formal agreement.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Full arrest authority, on and off campus
- Completes Washington's SRO training requirements
- Operates under an MOU between district and agency
- Mentors students and builds positive relationships

PRIMARY ROLES

- **Safety & emergency response** — active threats, investigations, emergency planning
- **Mentorship** — positive youth engagement
- **Education** — classroom safety presentations, prevention
- **Law enforcement** — criminal matters; sits on the threat assessment team

Should not handle routine discipline, classroom management, or enforcement of non-criminal school rules.

School Security Officer

NON-SWORN SECURITY STAFF

Non-sworn staff employed by the school district, a contracted security company, or a security organization, focused on campus safety.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- No arrest power beyond that of a private citizen
- Completes OSPI-required training for school settings
- Works under school district supervision
- Mentors students and builds positive relationships

PRIMARY ROLES

- **Campus security** — entrances, visitor management, patrols
- **Emergency prep** — drills, reunification support
- **Threat assessment** — sits on the team; observes & reports concerns
- **Relationship building** — student engagement, de-escalation

Cannot conduct criminal investigations, exercise police authority, or make arrests beyond citizen's-arrest limits.

THE CORE PRINCIPLE

Both SROs and SSOs contribute to school safety, but **neither should be used as a disciplinary tool**. Their role is to support a safe learning environment while allowing educators to remain responsible for student discipline and behavior management.

Function Comparison & Real-World Examples

Function	SRO	SSO
Sworn law enforcement	Yes	No
Arrest authority	Yes	No
Criminal investigations	Yes	No
School discipline	No	No
Emergency response	Yes	Yes
Relationship building	Yes	Yes
Threat assessment participation	Yes	Yes
Employee of district	Usually No	Usually Yes

Practical examples

How each role responds in three common scenarios

1 Student Fight

SSO

Intervenes if safe, calls administration, documents observations, contacts law enforcement if needed.

SRO

May intervene, determines whether a criminal offense occurred, investigates, coordinates with juvenile justice.

2 Vape Violation

SSO

Reports the violation to administration and assists with supervision.

SRO

Generally should not be involved, unless there is a significant criminal concern.

3 Threat of School Violence

SSO

Reports the threat, preserves information, supports safety measures.

SRO

Participates in threat assessment, investigates criminal aspects, coordinates with law enforcement resources.