

TRAINING FOR SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS ON DISABILITY AWARENESS

A PROJECT OF THE MARYLAND CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

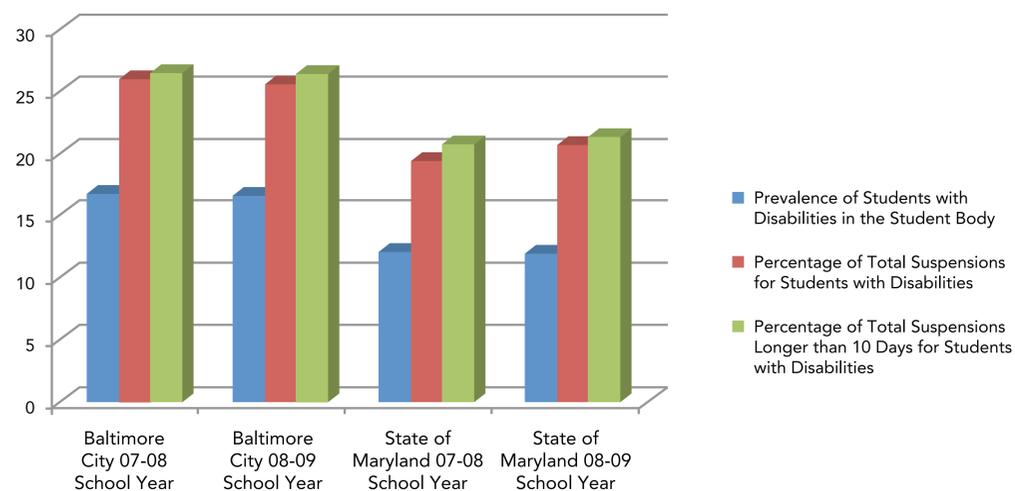
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OVERVIEW

In response to high-profile incidents of school violence in the 1990s and a corresponding increase in federal funding, the number of school resource officers (SRO) has expanded tremendously over the past 20 years. However, a 2005 review by the U.S. Department of Justice showed that although most SRO programs provided training for their officers, few officers were trained to work with children in schools before starting their placement. Reportedly, programs often fail to provide timely training because courses are often expensive or not locally available.

This delay and lack of training for SROs may affect children with disabilities to a greater extent than typical students. In Maryland and nationwide, children with disabilities account for a disproportionate number of school arrests, suspensions, and expulsions, despite procedural safeguards provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Continued over-representation of children with disabilities in the school disciplinary process suggests that there are complex issues regarding children's behavior in the context of disability that need to be addressed with all individuals involved in school discipline, including SROs.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY REPRESENTED IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS



DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING

In response to this need, the associate director of the Maryland Center for Disabilities (MCDD) partnered with Baltimore City Schools, Baltimore City School Police, and other community organizations and experts to provide pilot training sessions and collect feedback from participants. In 2007, 2008, and 2009, the MCDD held several three-hour training sessions with Baltimore City SROs. Presenters included the parents of children with disabilities, local advocacy agency representatives, and special education attorneys. The training included:

- An overview of relevant laws (IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Code of Maryland Regulations, and the Americans with Disabilities Act).
- An overview of the qualifying disabilities identified by IDEA; additionally, descriptions of behavioral and social characteristics typical of each disability.
- Functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, and the limitations and regulations for the use of seclusion and restraint.
- Goals and techniques in de-escalation, including how to use proxemics, kinesics, paraverbal communication, and principles of behavior change.
- A description of the discipline process for children with disabilities, including limits on suspension and expulsion, manifestation meetings, alternative educational settings, and parental rights through the discipline process.
- Scenarios involving children with disabilities, which provided the officers an opportunity to apply what they learned individually or in small groups.

Training session participants indicated that the information provided was valuable and pertinent to their jobs. The MCDD can continue to provide research and guidance about SRO training content, recommended areas of competency, avenues for funding and advocacy, and suggestions for program evaluation and data monitoring.

CONTACT INFORMATION

To find out more about disability awareness training, please call the MCDD at 443-923-9555.

“Before entering the front doors of a school, there is little to no training afforded to school resource officers. Once they begin working in the schools, SROs receive a crash course in special education and not always with good results. The learning curve can be long and confusing.”

— School Safety Specialist and former SRO, Minnesota School Safety Center



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