The School Resource Officer Program in the Ballston Spa Central School District is entering its fourth year and continues to be a very effective model for students, staff, and parents. There are four key principles that we can point to that have led to this effectiveness:

1. *Selection* – As with any such program in a school district, the “fit“ of the SROs is critical to the program’s success and to being able to leverage the training that these individuals go through prior to entering our schools. It is this training as well as the integration of the SROs into the district level training and the truly collaborative relationship that we have with our SROs and the Department that further fosters the effectiveness of the program.
2. *Clear Communications* – In the first year of the program, an in-person meeting was held to clearly define the expectations of the program and the officers, and, where necessary, bright lines to ensure full understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the officers and of school administrators. With these expectations in place, subsequent conversations for program improvement are much easier to have. Further, establishing a collaborative relationship from day one has served both the Department and the District very well in terms of meeting our respective needs on a flexible basis.
3. *Focus* - While there has been a great deal of state and national level discussions recently about having armed officers in our schools, I am confident in saying that most of our students and staff no longer recognize the fact that our SROs are indeed armed as they are viewed as having much more powerful tools in their ability to thoughtfully and collaboratively work with students, staff, and parents to resolve issues across a variety of areas from family dynamics to school attendance. This focus allows the officers to be seen as true partners in the work of providing a safe, secure, and welcoming school environment for teaching and learning.
4. *Ongoing Improvement* – Whether it is the individual SRO’s asking for feedback on their effectiveness or the Program Coordinator seeking this same feedback, there is so much value in establishing this as an operating principle early on in the relationship. Every organization has room to get better at getting better and the SROs are no exception to this. Focusing on ongoing improvement for improvement’s sake only benefits the students, staff, and families which brings greater credibility to an already successful program.

By taking an intentional and principled approach to building the SRO program into the larger District program, a community can bring additional trained care and support to our students and staff in the best of times and in times of crisis. This approach also avoids the grossly oversimplified “guns or no guns debate” that only serves as a distraction from the work that we remain collectively focused on – creating safe, healthy, and welcoming school environments for teaching and learning.

Ken Slentz

Superintendent of Schools

Ballston Spa CSD