



EMBEDDING A SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER WITHIN SCHOOLWIDE PBIS IN PENNSYLVANIA

In 2013–14, 10 LLAS students were confined to juvenile detention facilities for a total of 759 days. Two years later, only a single student was detained.

Costing \$350 a day, the subsequent drop in out-of-school detention saved the county more than \$250,000 as students' success on campus increased.

What helped? Embedding a school resource officer within the schoolwide PBIS program.



"IT IS EASIER TO PREVENT BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS FROM OCCURRING IN THE FIRST PLACE THAN TO DEAL WITH THEIR CONSEQUENCES AFTER THE FACT."

— "OFFICER DAN" SIST

→ CHALLENGE

The Lehigh Learning and Achievement School (LLAS) is one of three center-based schools for students requiring enhanced behavioral, emotional and mental health support within Intermediate Unit #21 (CLIU 21), a regional educational services agency around Allentown, Pennsylvania. Addressing special learning challenges for its students, who are referred from numerous "feeder schools" in the region, LLAS enhances classrooms with emotional support interventionists and instructional assistants; provides a program psychologist and school social worker; and uses a [schoolwide positive behavior support framework](#), including multiple indicated evidence-based programs (e.g., [Aggression Replacement Training \[ART\]](#) and [Positive Action](#)).

Despite its powerful model, 88 police calls to the LLAS campus resulted in 40 arrests during the 2013–2014 (baseline) school year, when 10 students (of fewer than 100 total on campus) spent an average of more than 75 days in juvenile detention for school-related offenses. Typical among LLAS students, third-grader Casey struggled with severe mental health concerns and other risk factors, and spent little school time constructively engaged in academics.

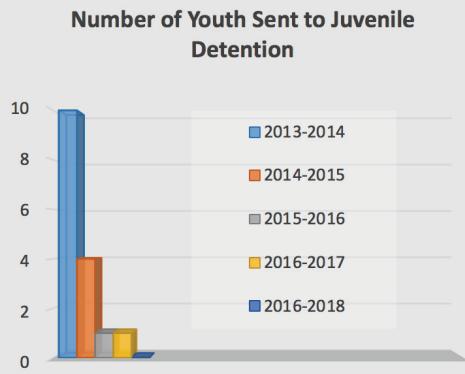
When LLAS decided to hire a school police officer, long-time [Pennsylvania State Police](#) force veteran Dan Sist answered the call. "Officer Dan" had been trained by the [National Association of School Resource Officers \(NASRO\)](#) to work as a partner with school professionals, families, and students.

→ SOLUTION

When Pennsylvania received a 2013 Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), LLAS, as one of its state's implementation sites, decided to embed a school police officer (SRO) within its schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) framework to address the historically high number of incarcerations and arrests within its student population. LLAS specifically hired and trained Officer Dan to approach students through a preventive lens, emphasizing non-physical de-escalation, recognizing behaviors that are synonymous with mental health conditions, reinforcing positive student behavior, implementing evidence-based programs, and building positive relationships with youth and family. Casey, who has envisioned himself as a police officer some day, was initially drawn to Officer Dan's uniform and badge; but he soon learned to seek him out when he was having a difficult day, and as he regulated his emotions, progress on his school goals began to noticeably improve. One day Officer Dan decided to "deputize" Casey, who proudly began to wear his own badge. LLAS staff have even been known to salute "Officer Casey" from time to time.

"It's amazing what you can accomplish when an SRO understands mental health and trauma warning signs. Their lens changes from arresting youth to 'how can we obtain the services they need'!"

– Deanna Moerer, Pennsylvania SS/HS Project Co-Director



"School officers have the most unique assignment in law enforcement. It requires a lot of balance in an officer who can be conducting some type of classroom training for students one moment and be able to flip a switch and respond tactically to an act of violence in the next."

**– Mo Canady, Executive Director
National Association of
School Resource Officers**

→ RESULTS

In 2013–2014 (baseline prior to grant activities), the number of youth at LLAS placed in juvenile detention centers was 10, resulting in a total of 759 days of detainment. In 2014–2015 the number of such placements decreased to four, totaling 638 days of detainment. A year later only a single LLAS student had been placed in detention, for a total of 31 days. That measure of success has been sustained in each ensuing year.

The average cost of juvenile detention in Pennsylvania is \$350 a day. It had cost Lehigh County over \$265,000 to place those 10 youth in detention in 2013–2014, but only \$10,850 for that single student in 2015–2016. Considerable research documents poor long-term outcomes for students removed from school for punitive incarceration. Beyond the positive results for students, families, and LLAS staff, the sharp drop in out-of-school detention saved more than \$250,000 per year, as students managed to succeed on campus. (It costs LLAS about \$35,000 per year to situate an SRO on campus within its PBIS program.)

→ MAGNIFYING PREVENTION THROUGH TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

CLIU 21 has been a leader in promoting trauma-informed schools, having trained SROs and all other school staff using [new curriculum developed by the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments \(NCSSLE\) for the U.S. Department of Education](#). Further, CLIU-21 has revamped its schools' "time out rooms" to instead create "calming centers" in the emotional support classrooms within LLAS feeder districts. This trauma-informed sensory integration approach to build social-emotional skills also includes practices such as [mindfulness](#), [trauma yoga](#), [MeMoves](#), and [GoNoodle](#). As with its SRO training, the underlying goal is to teach social-emotional skills, triggers, physical cues (self-awareness), and self-regulation so that faculty and students can increase time attending to academics and reduce the use of restraints and, ultimately, even the need for SROs themselves.

→ SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The LLAS case study encouraged CLIU 21 to invite NASRO to train all school police officers in its feeder districts in de-escalation techniques, roles, and responsibilities (including the role of informal counselor/mentor—see [Triad model](#)), to keep youth from entering criminal justice systems and strengthen their successes in school, home, and community. The model specifically situates the SRO as a co-facilitator of [Aggression Replacement Training \(ART\)](#), and fully embeds them on each PBIS team, as needed. Pennsylvania, as part of its capacity-building strategies, will host two more rounds of NASRO training in late 2018.

CLIU 21's SS/HS sustainability strategies rely on a capacity-building trainer-of-trainers (TOT) model for all evidence-based programs. The organization has developed numerous ART trainers, extending their reach throughout Lehigh County's nine feeder districts and into adjacent Carbon County. Each feeder school identifies three individuals, including their SROs, to participate in ART training. Meanwhile, all current SROs within the CLIU 21 region can complete the NASRO training by the end of 2018. CLIU 21 will continue offering ART training, guaranteed in its contracts with all feeder districts, stipulating that the program must be situated within the overarching context of the PA-PBIS framework. By providing preventative models, both exclusionary discipline and even referrals to LLAS are expected to decrease.

For more information about the program, contact:

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