

When Johnny Brings a Gun to School

Firearms and Tactics Training for the School Resource Officer

L. A. Hamblin, MA

Most would agree that when an officer faces a violent situation on school grounds, particularly when firearms are involved, it is the making for a potentially bad day. Most officers who are assigned to the high schools, middle schools or junior highs, have received some form of training in the areas of coaching, mentoring, and problem solving. However, when little Johnny brings a gun to school, a much different form of intervention is required.



Surprisingly, the usage and possession of weapons on school property is not uncommon as School Resource Officers (SRO) self reports indicate. Over 78% of school-based police officers reported they have taken a weapon from a student in the past year. (NASRO National School-based Survey. <http://www.nasro.org>. 2005.)

Most recently the school shooting tragedy that injured SRO Akia Scott (25yrs) and took the life of SRO Dwayne Reeves (35yrs) at Weequahic High School in New Jersey, is a clear indicator that SROs are often first responders to a variety of serious conflicts on school grounds. A dispute between two high school girls over a boy, and a brother's vow to defend his sister turned deadly when shots were fired. The melee outside the school drew the attention of Ofc. Reeves, whose call for backup summoned Ofc. Scott. Reeves and Scott approached the suspects, Tindell and Reeds who were outside the school. As Reeves and Scott attempted to handcuff Tindell and Reeds, Tindell pulled a gun and fired one shot. According to investigators, Reeves was shot in the head at close range. Scott, like Reeves is a special officer assigned to Weequahic. He suffered a hand injury from the same shot that killed his partner. Scott returned fire, striking Tindell twice in the abdomen and once in the leg. The outcomes have proven to be critical not only to the officer, but the school, and the community. In regard

to this incident, Essex County Prosecutor Paula T. Dow said "There's nothing new about fighting happening among students in a high school setting. The fact that this fighting escalates with the use of handguns is the problem that traumatizes us all and led to these unfortunate events." (The Associated Press., PORTER, D. "Dispute over boy led to fatal shooting of police officer". phillyBurbs_com.htm/)

In response to the precedent setting 1999 Columbine High School incident many agencies have employed some form of "Active Shooter" or "Rapid Response" policy, equipment and training into their repertoire. Training for this type of situation must be systemic in nature to include the school-based officer. Typically "Active Shooter" training is geared toward the responding road patrol officers rather than those who are working inside "the hot zone" i.e. the SRO. Because the industry standards for training include the need for relevancy and realism, training must be tailored to meet the specific needs, responsibilities, capabilities and limitations of the SRO.

Having said this, what should be expected from the on-scene SRO by the police and the school administrations in the event they experience a "man with a gun," or homicide in progress situation? How can the SRO best contribute to the ultimate goal of expeditious suspect(s) neutralization in this type of arena? Is the SRO fully equipped and trained to contain, and if need be, neutralize the threat to minimize potential casualties? What are the environmental conditions that should exist to adequately prepare the SRO to deal with such situations and other, more common violent encounters?



This summer the Fort Worth Police Department hosted a 3-day *Firearms and Tactics Training for the School Resource Officer* class. The course offered a broad view of school violence throughout the United States with many researched incidents occurring in the State of Texas. Learning from incidents across the nation continues to be the one of the best instructional design techniques and proves to be invaluable for the 56 officers who attended the course. A full day of shooting focused on greater distances,

shooting in crowded areas and shooting moving targets. The range staff designed a simulated hallway which allowed officers to engage bobbing targets upwards of 35 yards. Day two offered weapon retention, counter measures and team movement exercises, along with environment-specific arrest techniques, to include school buses and locker rooms. The third day was comprised of reality based training including an active shooter scenario using marking cartridges, Redman gear and juvenile role players from the Fort Worth Police Explorer Post. As an awareness and cognitive skill-building exercise, officers were also required to draw detailed schematics of the primary school in which they occupy.

The subject matter experts who contributed to the needs analysis phase of the course design are all current school resource officers, along with SWAT/Active Shooter instructors from Texas, Tennessee and Michigan. This course was initially offered as a pilot program and is a one of a kind, hands-on training experience.

For more information regarding *Firearms and Tactics Training for the School Resource Officer* contact police trainer and consultant Lou Ann Hamblin, MA at louannblackwidow@aol.com

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