

Training Needs Analysis
TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS OF TEXAS ISD POLICE DEPARTMENTS

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ABSTRACT

One of the fastest growing areas of law enforcement in the state of Texas today is school district policing, with the majority of the Independent School District (ISD) police departments having been created within the past 10-12 years. Without a formal structured plan of its own, in-service training programs for the school district police officer have often followed the model used by other municipal, county, and state policing organizations to determine their in-service training needs. Unfortunately, following the training templates utilized by these public policing organizations has led, in many instances, to training that is not always indicative of the school district police officers specific, and often unique, training needs.

The current research project reports the results of a training needs analysis of ISD police officer training needs in 37 selected Texas ISD police departments, and identified specific organizational constraints, such as budgetary and time issues, a lack of training support both from within and outside the agency, no statewide training analysis, and non-specific legislatively mandated in-service classes, were hindering ISD police in-service training. The study also identified 28 police officer tasks unique to the ISD police officer which should be included in the design of any ISD police officer in-service training.

INTRODUCTION

Currently one of the fastest growing areas of law enforcement in the state of Texas is school district law enforcement. School district policing in Texas at present consists of 117 independent school district (ISD) police departments, the vast majority of which have been formed within the last 10-12 years. Along with this rapid period of growth has come a multitude of issues that have needed to be addressed in a relatively short period of time, not the least of which is campus police officer in-service training. Generally, police in-service training may be defined as the additional, ongoing post police academy training programs designed primarily to inform and instruct police officers in a myriad of important topical areas. These areas, for example, may include training in general police procedures and processes (ex., self defense, newly legislated laws, child physical and sexual abuse) to more advanced topic areas, such as officer street survival. The more intensive training sessions may involve multiple class sessions for police officer to achieve competency.

As is often the case, when faced with a multitude of decisions in a rather short period of time, organization management finds it useful to search for models, or templates, that they may follow from organizations similar in structure and responsibility to serve as a guide. Regarding school district policing, the model that was chosen may be referred to as a model based significantly on the training requirements established primarily for the typical police officer employed by local city, county, and state law enforcement agencies. Historically the formation of this general model of policing training arose primarily from several outside environmental sources, such as the turbulence and events of the 1960's, the anti-war protests of that same period, the civil rights movement, and other social

issues (Etter, 2000, pp. 1-2). The passage of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act during this period also caused many states to examine their current police training and strategies. While this training template may have assisted the school district policing organization and its employees in the preliminary and formative growth years, it has also led to a dependence by the ISD organization to a police training model that is not designed to meet the specific and often unique problems which must be addressed by the campus police officer.

Additionally, school district law enforcement has also often relied heavily on available civilian outside training sources to provide the instructional programs for its in-service training needs. These sources range from outside private vendors to local colleges and universities, both of which have often promoted law enforcement training programs that are not always topically specific to the school campus, or based on the needs of the school district police officers specialized needs. By attempting to be a one stop service provider for in-service training, serving all categories of law enforcement officers, they have often designed their training programs around the aforementioned needs of the conventional policing organizations.

The purpose of the current study was to provide school district law enforcement agencies with valuable information regarding ongoing administrative training constraints on a departmental and state level, and to provide specific and unique ISD police officer task information, from which a sound in-service training program may be developed. Current practice for determining in-service training needs has resulted in training programs dependence on outside sources to determine training needs of school district policing, which can be argued, has its very own, and unique, training needs.

In this research effort it was recognized the many of the tasks the school district police officer was required to do are, in fact, closely related to those of the conventional police officer. For example, Benardin (1988), when summarizing the results of four independent job analysis efforts that were completed in four large American cities argued that many of the tasks of the police officer, patrol officer, highway patrolman, county patrol officer, university security, or municipal jurisdiction, perform many of the same important tasks. The current research supported Benardin's assumption (many of the police officer tasks were found to be stable). However, when the significantly unique tasks required of the school district police officer were identified, a clear picture emerged indicating that there were 28 additional school district police officer tasks that were unique and specific to the school district police officers job, which were not being attended to, and were found to be critical to the position of the school district police officer.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this research is the McGehee and Thayer (1961) model, first published in their now classic text "Training in Business and Industry". This model was the first systematic treatment of needs analysis, and has been used as a guide for many of the newer needs analysis and assessment models that have since emerged. McGehee and Thayer (1961) introduced their framework as consisting of three critical and interrelated components: organizational analysis, operations (or task) analysis, and person analysis. Using this framework requires that the researcher start with an organizational analysis, which Goldstein (1986) states "begins with an examination of the short and long term goals of the organization, as well as trends that are likely to affect those goals" (p. 17). It is recommended that the organizational analysis be completed

before the task or person analysis, to identify the constraints operating on the organizational level.

The second step of the McGehee and Thayer (1961) model is the task analysis, of which Gordon (1994) comments that “Traditionally, [the] task analysis has been accomplished by breaking down a job to be trained into a list or hierarchy of components, such as duties, tasks, and subtasks” (e.g., Goldstein, 1986; Merrill, 1987; Rothwell & Kazanas, 1992). The task analysis generally begins with a task description, followed by a detailed specification of tasks and a scaling of tasks on various dimensions, such as criticality, frequency of occurrence, and so on.

The last step of the McGehee and Thayer (1961) model is termed the person analysis, of which McGehee and Thayer explain is concerned with how well a specific employee is carrying out tasks which make up the job. This directly relates to the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform the tasks needed by the employee for successful job performance. Person analysis faces potential problems, not the least of which being that it is very costly and also complex, and management’s ability to make accurate judgments/performance ratings are questionable (DeSimmone & Harris, 1998; Herbert & Doverspike, 1990). To date, there is no evidence of any empirical work regarding this phase of the training needs analysis.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the specific internal and external organizational constraints that are encumbering Texas school district police in-service training needs?
2. What are the unique tasks and competencies required of the successful Texas ISD police officer, above and beyond those of the average police officer?

Research Design

This research used two separate questionnaires developed by the researcher to address the two research questions. A total of 37 Texas ISD police chiefs were sent an ISD administrator questionnaire, along with accompanying correspondence, which explained the purpose and objectives of the administrator questionnaire. The ISD police officers were sent the police officer task analysis questionnaire, which was accompanied by a brief explanation of the purpose and objectives of the task analysis.

Sample

The population for this study consisted of the chiefs of police for the 37 selected ISD police departments in Texas for the organizational analysis, and the 858 patrol, campus officers and sergeants, who were employed by those same 37 departments, were chosen for the job task analysis. Officers working in administrative and specialized positions, such as DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and detective units were excluded from the selected population of officers and sergeants, since their tasks are often much different than those of the campus and patrol officers and sergeants. The ISD departments were selected from a master list of ISD police departments supplied by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE), which

licenses and regulates Texas peace officers, and only those departments with less than ten officers were excluded.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was provided to the 37 selected ISD police chiefs as a data collection instrument to identify the current goals, practices, trends and constraints which are affecting the police in-service training programs in Texas. Additionally, a job task analysis (inventory) was conducted with approximately 858 police officers within these same 37 selected ISD police departments. The police officer task questionnaire used for this study was designed from a pilot study completed previously within the Houston Independent School District by the researcher.

The final questionnaire developed for the police officer job task analysis included the addition of 28 unique tasks (tasks primary to the ISD police officers job, which have not been identified by past analysis using conventional policing as a template), which were identified with the assistance of four focus groups of police officers chosen by the researcher from the Conroe, Houston, Katy and Spring ISD Police Departments. The groups consisted of Subject Matter Experts (SME's) from the rank of sergeant and police officer, and all group participants were either current or past field training officers (FTO) or certified police instructors within their respective departments.

Response Rate

A total of 34 ISD chiefs responded, for a return rate for the administrator questionnaire of 92 percent. The same list of ISD police departments provided by TCLEOSE for the administrator questionnaire was also used to send questionnaires regarding the police officer task analysis to those same 37 law enforcement agencies for

responses by their 858 ISD police officers. The return rate for the ISD police officer questionnaire of 425 responses represented a total response rate of 50 percent. The response rates of the ISD police officers to the questionnaire was less than expected, and were affected by many of the ISD police officers and police chiefs being absent during the summer months when the questionnaire was completed and returned. The extensive time required for completion of the lengthy 111 task survey was also a factor in the low response rate.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and correlations, were used to describe and interpret the questionnaire results. Comparison of the data used the Chi Square test and ANOVA to test for significant differences in questionnaire responses and for the analysis of the task responses from the ISD police officers. The statistical analysis of the accumulated data was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-11.0).

Findings

The data collected from the 34 ISD police chief's revealed several organizational constraints that may be hampering the formation and support of ISD police officer training. Organizational constraints, such as budgetary issues, time issues (time officers are away from their normal policing duties), lack of administrative training support, absence of a recent training needs analysis by the department, and other outside constraints (such as legislated training mandates) were found to be common within the ISD police departments. Identification of specific organizational constraints and

strategies designed to reduce those constraints, are important to improving training within an organization.

Organizational Constraints

The analysis of the data returned by 34 of the ISD chiefs of police indicate that the primary constraints with which school district police departments must contend with are:

- Budgetary issues- 52 percent of the chiefs had a training budget of less than 5 percent of their total budget. Twelve percent stated that their budget was between 6 and 8 percent and 35 percent stated that their training budget was between 8 and 10 percent of their total departmental budget.
- Time issues- Although time constraints was not a directed question asked in the questionnaire, many of the chiefs indicated that time both to allow for officers to take training and time to plan for training was a major issue affecting in-service police training.
- Lack of training support from the state and local school district administration- 18 percent believed that other school officials unfamiliar with officer training needs hampered their departments training issues. Fifteen percent stated that funding from the administration was inadequate to meet training needs. Another 24 percent felt that a lack of general support for the administration who viewed policing as a secondary issue hampered training needs. Forty four percent answered the open ended question indicating other miscellaneous administrative level constraints.
- No training needs analysis to identify important training needs- 24 percent of the chiefs had conducted a needs analysis within the past year, while 24 percent also

stated that it had been over a year since the last needs analysis was completed. Another 9 percent stated that it had been over two years since such an analysis was completed, and the remaining 44 percent stated that they do not use a training needs analysis at this time to determine training content.

- Other outside training constraints- 20 percent felt that legislative mandates and requirements take up too much training time, 65 percent felt that the lack of a statewide needs assessment designed for school district policing has hampered training, and 12 percent answered the open ended question and provided their own answer.

Other relevant in-service training issues to be considered that may be affecting ISD police officer in-service training is that 53 percent of the chiefs indicated they had not conducted a job analysis to determine training needs, and only 24 percent indicated that one had been completed within the past year. Sixty-five percent felt that the lack of a statewide needs analysis specifically designed for school district policing has also hampered training.

After identifying campus officer training needs, 53 percent indicated that their department usually finds available classes that best met their training needs from local training academies, which may or may not offer the best alternative to their department's training needs. A majority of the chiefs (56 percent) felt that the state mandated training classes seemed to be constructed by the legislature around whatever topic was "hot" at the time, and that little effort was made to determine if the classes would be beneficial (or needed) by campus police officers.

Task Analysis Results

The identification of the tasks unique to the ISD police officer provided insight into the specific and unique tasks required of the Texas ISD police officer that is over and above those that would be considered of the customary Texas peace officer. Table one is a summary of these unique tasks that were identified from the study.

Table 1
Unique ISD Police Officer Competencies

Type of Activity and Description of Task Activity

Disturbance:

- Disturbance of classroom activities.
- Disruption of school activities.
- Disruption of transportation.
- Dispersing and controlling crowds at sporting events.
- Dispersing and handling disorderly juvenile groups.

Service Activities:

- Assist in school crossing duties.
- Advising/mentoring children (on and off campus).
- Patrolling schools and district property.
- Notification of criminal activity off campus.

Traffic and Auto Activities:

- Issuing moving violations near school grounds.
- Assisting motorists on school grounds.

Miscellaneous Non-Criminal Activities:

- Speaking to parent groups (PTA's, etc).
- Presentations to faculty groups.
- Presentations to student groups.
- Making contact with juvenile offenders.
- Handling irate parents on school grounds.
- Assisting/conducting fire drills.
- Emergency Preparedness.
- Assisting faculty in non-criminal disciplinary actions.
- School records checks of students.
- Security meetings with faculty.
- Enforce student code of conduct regulations.
- Hallway security monitoring.
- Lunchroom security monitoring.

Duties Involving Crime and Crime Related Activities:

- Bomb threat calls at school.
- Domestic disturbances involving parents/teachers/children.
- Drug usage/overdose on school grounds.
- Arrest due to administrative searches.

Note: Competencies compiled by the researcher with assistance of a group of subject matter experts (SME's) from Conroe, Houston, Katy and Spring (Texas) ISD Police Departments.

These tasks were identified as being a core part of the school district police officers' responsibilities. It should be noted that inclusion of these tasks into the school district police department's training regimen are important for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which is to protect the school district police department from legal repercussions based on Title 42 U.S.C. 1983 for failure to train, as cited in the case of *City of Canton, Ohio v. Harris*. In this incident the City of Canton was sued because it was argued that the city failed to adequately train its police officers about providing proper medical assistance. Improper training, or a failure to instruct the ISD police officer in tasks that are determined to be core to their job, may subject the ISD police officer to unnecessary litigation risks, by not providing the officer with the basic knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the identified core tasks.

Additionally, it should be noted that the legal significance of job analysis, particularly in the public sector, was established in the 1978 Federal Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures. These guidelines set forth technical standards for validity studies that demonstrate the job-relatedness of testing methods, while also expanding the scope of job analysis application to all primary employment decisions, such as selection, training, evaluation, and compensation (Kriebel, 1996).

DISCUSSION

The data from the research provide the school district police department with valuable information from two separate, but connected, sources. These sources are the overall organizational issues that are negatively affecting police in-service training in Texas ISD's, and the identification of 28 unique and core tasks that are required of the Texas ISD police officer. The data also provided a clear indication that the current process of

determining the in-service training needs for the ISD police officer is not effective, and that the needs of both the department and the individual police officer, were not being met.

The identified organizational constraints (budgets, time, administration not understanding police training needs, poorly chosen and designed legislative mandates, and no statewide analysis of in-service training needs of ISD police officers) are hindering training progress, and should be considered before additional training issues are addressed. Following the general template previously provided by other law enforcement agencies external to the ISD police departments was determined to be valuable, but also somewhat inefficient, when considering that school district policing provides a completely different environment and perspective with its own unique training needs.

The police chiefs also acknowledged that many of the ISD organizations had some of the same issues that were impeding other organizations outside of ISD law enforcement training progression, such as time constraints, budget constraints, lack of training support from administrators who knew little of police training needs, no training needs analysis to identify training issues and needs, and state legislatively mandated training that takes up valuable training time. The recommendations made to overcome these issues, which are presented in the next section of this paper, should prove valuable to the ISD police departments.

The outcomes of the focus group sessions with the ISD police trainers, which yielded 28 unique ISD police officer tasks, should prove useful to the trainer when designing training programs for ISD police officers from around the state of Texas. At the current time, it is unknown exactly how many of the agencies train in any of the identified areas,

as a number of the 28 unique tasks may overlap with other current police training opportunities to some extent. However, it should be recognized that policing environments are not always the same, and the unique ISD police officer tasks should be considered in the design of the training program for the individual ISD police department. For example, while patrolling and patrol related functions are a commonly instructed course in law enforcement, a course revolving around the school environment might take into account the youthful age and important psychological issues specific to the student victims and suspects, or the emergency response program designed with the search of a building as a part of the curriculum may take into account the specific layout of the schools and surrounding properties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having presented the major findings of the study, and discussed some important implications for future training practice, this section will offer recommendations for improvement informed by this study. The first set of recommendations pertain to those resulting from the organizational analysis, and specifically include budgetary factors, time constraints, lack of training support and training needs analysis. The second set relates to the identified ISD police officer unique tasks.

Recommendations resulting from the organizational analysis:

- Budgetary factors-. Due to the research revealing that many of the agencies having minimal training budgets, outside funding sources (such as grants), along with identifying training opportunities with other local agencies and educational providers, may provide the agency with some relief from budgetary constraints. Another alternative would be for the school district police agencies to have their training

directors meet within a given regional area and design training programs for those participating departments, therefore sharing the costs and identifying particular training needs of school district police departments. It may also be appropriate for the ISD organization to exploit training opportunities within their own school district, as many school district training issues may overlap with ISD police officer needs (an example would be training on how to deal with mentally challenged juvenile students in a campus setting).

- Time constraints- Time, at least in this sense, often impacted other important needs, such as manpower issues and not having the personnel to “cover” for officers who are away from their normal duties attending training programs. Also identified as a time constraint was the mandatory classes required by the state’s licensing authority, the chiefs felt that mandatory classes took time away from providing their officers with training designed for meeting specific school policing issues. Recommendations would be for the chiefs to use the influence of their statewide ISD police chief’s organization, the Texas School District Police Chiefs Association, to request of the state legislature in Texas if specific changes in the mandatory training programs can be made to accommodate their specialized training needs identified in this study.
- Lack of training support – These support issues arose from two primary sources. The state licensing authority (TCLEOSE) and the school district administration. The lack of support from TCLEOSE was evident in that 65 percent felt that a statewide needs assessment specifically designed for school district policing agencies had not been completed. The chiefs felt that the state needed to address their particular concerns regarding training issues specific to their needs, and that a statewide needs analysis

should have been commissioned by TCLEOSE for ISD police departments in order to identify their specialized training needs. On a more localized administrative level within the states ISD's the chiefs felt that their administrator (the superintendent or other person responsible on an administrative level) was often unfamiliar with officer training needs (18 percent), and 24 percent felt that the administration did not see police training as a primary issue with which they should be concerned. Both the state and the administration need to be allied behind the department's training plans to be successful. Regarding the school administrative concern of lack of training support keeping the administrator involved, even if indirectly, is one option to garner support, while a program designed to educate the administrator in school policing issues offered by the police agency, or an organization like the Texas School District Police Chiefs Association offered on a regional basis, could be of great benefit.

- Training needs assessment- Only 18 percent of the school district policing agencies surveyed in Texas are currently using training needs assessment information to determine training needs. However, when asked what was hampering the training of school district police on a statewide basis 65 percent stated that they felt a statewide training needs analysis needed to be completed to help guide their police training. The reason that most had not completed a needs analysis or assessment most likely had to do with lack of qualified and knowledgeable personnel to conduct such an assessment, as well as prohibitive costs to seek an outside assessor to complete an assessment.

Recommendations related to the ISD police officer unique tasks:

The results of the task analysis provided the ISD police departments with a listing of 28 unique competencies, which should be useful in designing and selecting in-service training opportunities for their officers. While using the general training models provided by other policing organizations and other educational institutions in the past has provided useful classes, no attempt has been made on a larger scale to determine what other training opportunities should be provided for ISD police officers. Although there have been local attempts to provide information, such as local training needs assessments and analyses, data resulting from this research effort clearly indicated that conducting a training needs analysis was not a normal and routine process for most of the departments. This may be due to lack of funds for such a study or lack of qualified or interested personnel to provide these services within the individual ISD department.

CONCLUSIONS

School district police training has found itself relying almost exclusively on the template utilized by conventional policing organizations. This reliance has caused the specific and unique tasks that the school district police officer is required to perform to go unchallenged, most likely due to the costs of conducting a statewide analysis of the school district policing organizations and the lack of trained personnel to complete such a wide ranging analysis. This general police training model was found to be useful for attending to some in-service needs of the school district police officer, but often deficient in attending to the unique tasks that the school district officer is often required to perform.

The results of the current analysis has provided the school district police agency with identified administrative constraints and specific police officer tasks information from

which a comprehensive in-service training program may be developed. Administrative restraints, such as budgetary, time, lack of training support from both inside and outside sources, and the lack of a training needs analysis were identified and discussed.

Additionally, 28 specific and unique tasks of the ISD police officer were identified.

These tasks should offer the school district police agency with the task related information needed to design specialized classes essential to meet the specific training needs of their police officers.

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