

Salt Lake schools, city sign contract clarifying roles of school resource officers on campuses

By Marjorie Cortez

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SALT LAKE CITY — Salt Lake City's mayor, superintendent of schools, a state lawmaker and a police sergeant signed an agreement Tuesday that clarifies the roles of school resource officers in the city's schools.

Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski said the agreement was reached after a year of discussion about improved training, cooperation and compliance with HB460, sponsored by Rep. Sandra Hollins, D-Salt Lake City. The 2016 legislation calls for best practices and training to clarify the roles of police and schools when interacting with students for disciplinary or other reasons.



"There is a difference between a student with a cellphone in the classroom and a student with a weapon in the classroom," Biskupski said.

The mayor said it is important that school resources serve all Salt Lake schools and that the numbers of positive interactions between police and student continue to increase.

"What we know about our kids is this: Those who experience disciplinary problems at school that result in suspensions and negative interactions with police are at risk. Research and statistics show these kids are three times more likely to drop out of high school. They're also three times more likely to be incarcerated as adults. We want to help prevent students from heading down this path," Biskupski said.

Biskupski said Hollins' legislation "makes Utah one of only 12 states to set in law best practices and training standards for both law enforcement and schools."

Hollins thanked the city and school district "for leading the way in protecting what is in the best interest of our youth and our community. This is an important step to avoid criminalizing students and to help all our students to succeed."

Salt Lake City Schools Superintendent Lexi Cunningham expressed her gratitude to city officials and the police department for "their hard work in working with us to making sure we have an agreement that is supportive of students, teachers, communities and Salt Lake City as a whole."

Salt Lake Police Sgt. Phil Eslinger, who oversees 11 school resource officers and one civilian employee who work in Salt Lake schools, said the police department is dedicated to improving relationships with students, faculties and school communities.

In the past, police contacts with students at school involved making arrests or dealing with something that had happened at the school, he said.

Over time, that has evolved into "positive contacts," Eslinger said.

"Now when we show up in a school, the students aren't asking us 'Who's in trouble or who's being arrested?' They're now asking us if we'll be there for recess, if we're there for lunch, that we're going to have that positive contact with them," he said.

The contract calls for cost sharing between the school district and city for law enforcement services.

The contract will enable officers to be available to the school district and to serve students through summer. It also calls for equal placement of school resource officers at all middle and high schools.

Training is a key component of the contract using curriculum provided by the Utah State Board of Education, the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice and the Utah Board of Juvenile Justice.

The contract also sets standards for police access to students, student records and videos, including "clear articulation of what are exigent circumstances" and a protocol if there is a disagreement between a school administrator and law enforcement regarding access to a student."

The contract calls for creation of an oversight committee that will publish a yearly report that includes a review of school-based diversions, arrests and interventions. It also creates a mechanism for community members to raise concerns and a means to review them.