

Police in schools: Why are they there?

By Greg Botelho and Ralph Ellis, CNN

Tens of thousands of them patrol American schools every day. They are law enforcers. They are mediators. They are educators.

This week, a school resource officer in Columbia, South Carolina, was captured on a video that's been replayed across the nation. The video shows him forcefully yanking down a 16-year-old female student, then flinging her across the floor before her arrest. The student allegedly refused to leave her desk.

Richland County sheriff's Deputy Ben Fields has been fired.

About 43 percent of all U.S. public schools – including 63 percent of middle and 64 percent of high schools – had such officers on their grounds during the 2013-14 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics noted in May. This includes more than 46,000 full-time and 36,000 part-time officers.

School resource officers, or SROs, supervise lunchrooms, coach sports, promote drug and alcohol awareness and become confidants to teens who might have never thought they'd befriend a police officer. SROs may build relationships at a key time in many young people's lives.

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