

MASSACHUSETTS STATE POLICE ACADEMY ASSESSMENT

**A Comprehensive
Operational and
Cultural Assessment**



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ACRONYMS

ABLE	Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement
ACADIS	Automated Criminal Justice Information System
ACSM	American College of Sports Medicine
ALEC	Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition
ALERRT	Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training
APTA	American Physical Therapy Association
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
COPS	Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (U.S. DOJ)
CPR	Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation
CSCS	Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist
CTP	Cadet Training Program
DI	Drill Instructor
DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
DT	Defensive Tactics
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
EAU	Employee Assistance Unit
ERST	Emotional Resilience Skills Training
EVOC	Emergency Vehicle Operations Course
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLETC	Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers
FTO	Field Training Officer
FTU	Firearms Training Unit
HFU	Health and Fitness Unit
HR	Human Resources
HRC	HR Consultants, Inc.
IACP	International Association of Chiefs of Police
IADLEST	International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training

ICAT	Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics
LE	Law Enforcement
LEISTP	Law Enforcement In-Service Training Program
MDC	Mobile Data Computer
MPAC	Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission
MPTC	Municipal Police Training Committee
MSP	Massachusetts State Police
MV	Motor Vehicle
PA-C	Physician Assistant–Certified
PERF	Police Executive Research Forum
POP	Problem-Oriented Policing
POST	Peace Officer Standards and Training
PowerBI	Microsoft Power Business Intelligence
PowerDMS	Policy and Training Management System
PT	Physical Training RISNet
RISNet	Regional Information Sharing Systems
RMS	Records Management System
ROC	Recruit Officer Course
RTT	Recruit Training Troop
SFST	Standardized Field Sobriety Testing
SHIELD	Safety and Health Integration in the Enforcement of Laws on Drugs
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SORB	Sex Offender Registry Board
SPA	State Police Academy (Massachusetts)
SPPADS	State and Provincial Police Academy Directors Section
STU	Special Tactical Unit (STOP Team)
TDY	Temporary Duty Assignment
TXDPS	Texas Department of Public Safety

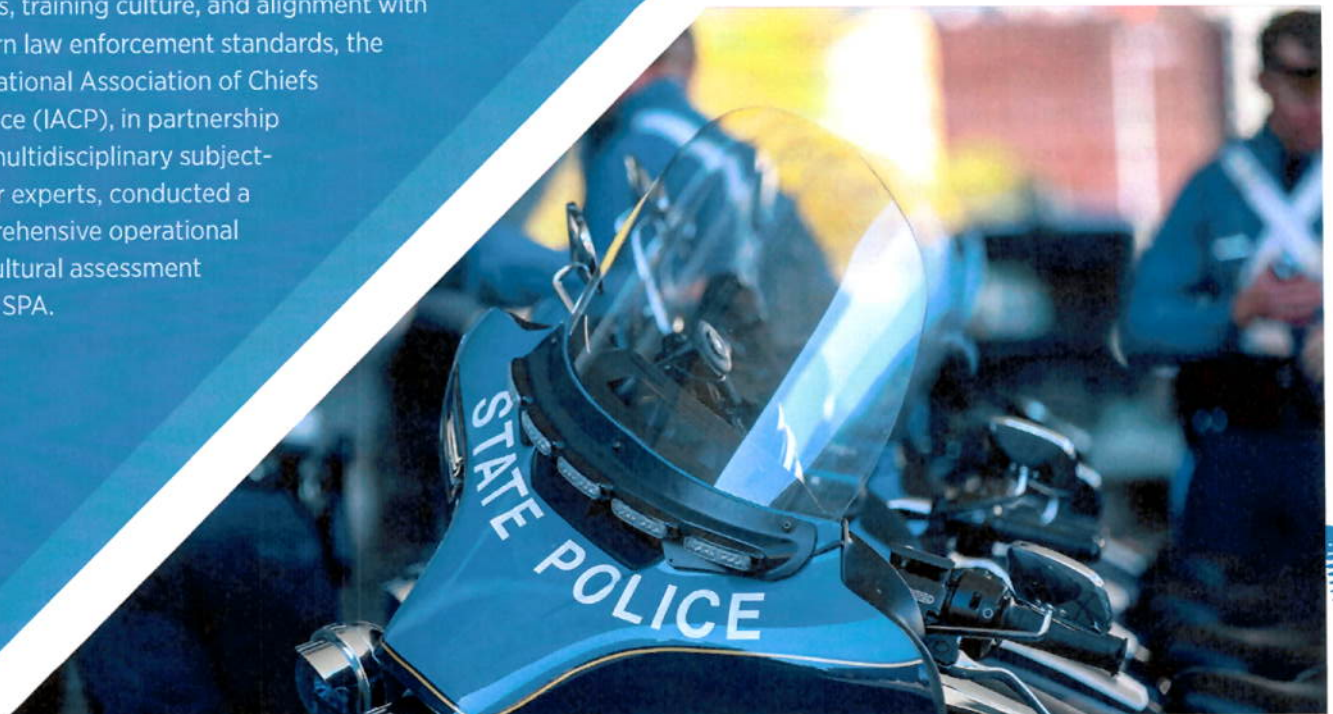
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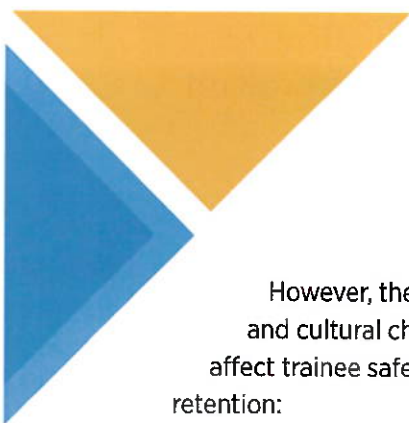
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Massachusetts State Police Academy (SPA) plays a critical role in preparing sworn personnel to meet the Commonwealth's public safety needs while upholding constitutional policing, professionalism, and public trust. In response to concerns regarding trainee attrition, injuries, training culture, and alignment with modern law enforcement standards, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), in partnership with multidisciplinary subject-matter experts, conducted a comprehensive operational and cultural assessment of the SPA.

This review included multiple on-site observations during the 91st Recruit Training Troop (RTT), structured interviews with SPA leadership, instructors, support units, focus groups with trainees, and a comparative analysis against national standards and leading practices. The assessment examined organizational structure, leadership continuity, training philosophy, stress-exposure practices, instructor development, wellness integration, facilities, records management, and data analytics.

The assessment determined that the SPA meets statutory training requirements established by the Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Commission and the Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC). The SPA benefits from highly dedicated staff, a strong sense of institutional pride, robust on-site medical capability, and a comprehensive curriculum that addresses contemporary policing requirements.





However, the review identified systemic and cultural challenges that significantly affect trainee safety, learning, morale, and retention:

- ▶ **Leadership and Staffing Instability:** The SPA has experienced substantial turnover in command and key staff positions, resulting in limited continuity, inconsistent training philosophy, and constrained capacity for sustained reform. Over the past three decades, frequent leadership changes have impeded innovation and reinforced reliance on tradition rather than evidence-based practice.
- ▶ **High and Accepted Attrition:** Trainee attrition—particularly during the earliest phases of training—exceeds national and peer-state averages. Attrition is often treated as an expected outcome and, in some cases, culturally reinforced. The SPA lacks robust analytics to identify root causes of resignations, injuries, or remedial needs.
- ▶ **Overreliance on Non-Purposeful Stress Exposure:** While stress exposure is a legitimate component of police training, the SPA relies heavily on high-intensity, scripted, and punitive stress practices that are not consistently tied to defined learning objectives. Observed practices raise concerns regarding physical safety, psychological well-being, and effective skill acquisition.

- ▶ **Disparities in Training Climate:** Training environments varied markedly depending on instructor assignment. Subject-matter instructors routinely demonstrated professional, supportive, and effective adult-learning practices, while drill instructor-led periods were often characterized by chaos, humiliation, and limited instructional feedback.
- ▶ **Instructor Development and Oversight Gaps:** The SPA lacks a formalized instructor development framework grounded in adult learning theory, coaching, and role modeling. Drill instructors wield significant influence over trainee socialization, yet their conduct does not always reflect the professional behaviors expected of troopers in the field.
- ▶ **Facilities, Technology, and Data Limitations:** Aging infrastructure, limited classroom capacity, lack of Wi-Fi connectivity, fragmented records systems, and minimal use of analytics constrain training effectiveness, compliance, and long-term planning.

Conclusions

The SPA's current training model reflects a tension between tradition and modern policing expectations. While discipline, resilience, and esprit de corps remain essential, the prevailing reliance on excessive stress, punitive rituals, and attrition-driven socialization undermines learning outcomes, increases injury risk, and limits the SPA's ability to adapt to contemporary law enforcement demands.

Evidence from national research and comparable academies demonstrates that purposeful, well-designed stress exposure—applied incrementally and tied to job-relevant skills—produces stronger, safer, and more resilient officers than indiscriminate or humiliating practices. Trainees are adult learners, and training environments must reflect the professionalism, judgment, and ethical conduct expected on patrol.

Strategic Recommendation

To ensure lasting reform and accountability, the assessment recommends that MSP employ an independent, external audit and evaluation team for a minimum of five years, with annual reporting requirements. This team should monitor implementation of the IACP recommendations, assess outcomes related to attrition, injuries, and performance, and support continuous improvement of the SPA's training model.

By stabilizing leadership, modernizing instructional practices, strengthening wellness integration, and embracing evidence-based training methodologies, the SPA has a clear opportunity to evolve into a national model for state police training—one that produces resilient, service-ready troopers while safeguarding dignity, safety, and public trust

Summary of Key Findings

1. Statutory Compliance Does Not Equate to Training Effectiveness

- ▶ The SPA meets or exceeds all POST and MPTC statutory training requirements. However, compliance alone does not ensure optimal learning conditions, trainee safety, or alignment with evidence-based training practices. Several observed practices exceed minimum standards but do so in ways that may undermine instructional effectiveness and long-term outcomes.

2. Leadership Turnover Has Undermined Continuity and Reform

- ▶ Frequent changes in SPA leadership and reliance on temporary duty assignments for critical roles have resulted in inconsistent training philosophy, limited institutional memory, and reduced capacity to implement and sustain meaningful reform. This instability has reinforced reliance on tradition rather than continuous improvement.

3. Trainee Attrition Is High and Culturally Normalized

- ▶ Trainee attrition, particularly during the earliest phases of training, exceeds national and peer state police academy averages. Attrition is widely viewed as an expected or even validating feature of training rigor rather than a diagnostic indicator of systemic issues. The SPA lacks sufficient analytic tools to identify root causes of resignations or early failures.

4. Stress Exposure Is Frequently Decoupled from Learning Objectives

- ▶ While stress exposure is an appropriate and necessary component of police training, observed practices were often scripted, punitive, and not consistently tied to defined learning objectives or job-relevant competencies. Some stress-based activities presented unnecessary risks to physical safety, psychological well-being, and effective skill acquisition.

5. Training Climate Varies Significantly by Instructor Assignment

- ▶ The assessment identified stark contrasts between instructional environments. Subject-matter instructors routinely demonstrate professional, supportive, adult-learning approaches. In contrast, drill instructor-led periods were often chaotic, punitive, and limited in constructive feedback, resulting in inconsistent trainee experiences and outcomes.

6. Instructor Role Modeling Does Not Always Reflect Field Expectations

- ▶ Drill instructors and SPA staff play a central role in shaping trainee behavior and professional identity. In some instances, instructor conduct did not consistently model professionalism, restraint, communication skills, and judgment expected of troopers in operational settings.

7. Wellness Supports Exist but Are Underutilized in Early Training

- ▶ The SPA benefits from strong on-site medical capabilities and access to employee assistance, peer support, chaplaincy, and liaison resources. However, these supports are not fully integrated into the early phases of training, when trainees are most vulnerable to injury, stress, and resignation.

8. Facilities, Technology, and Data Limitations Constrain Effectiveness

- ▶ Aging infrastructure, limited classroom capacity, lack of connectivity, fragmented records systems, and minimal use of analytics hinder instructional delivery, trend analysis, compliance responsiveness, and long-term capital planning.

9. Cultural Reliance on Tradition Impedes Modernization

- ▶ A persistent cultural emphasis on traditional training rituals—reinforced by senior leadership presence and approval during high-stress exercises—continues to shape SPA practices. This dynamic presents a significant barrier to adopting contemporary, evidence-based training models aligned with 21st-century policing expectations.

INTRODUCTION

Police academies are critical in shaping individuals entering the policing profession, serving as the initial step for training and indoctrination into agency and profession culture. This process has become increasingly vital due to changing expectations for police services and negative public perceptions of law enforcement. Agencies face fewer recruiting resources and intense competition for qualified applicants.

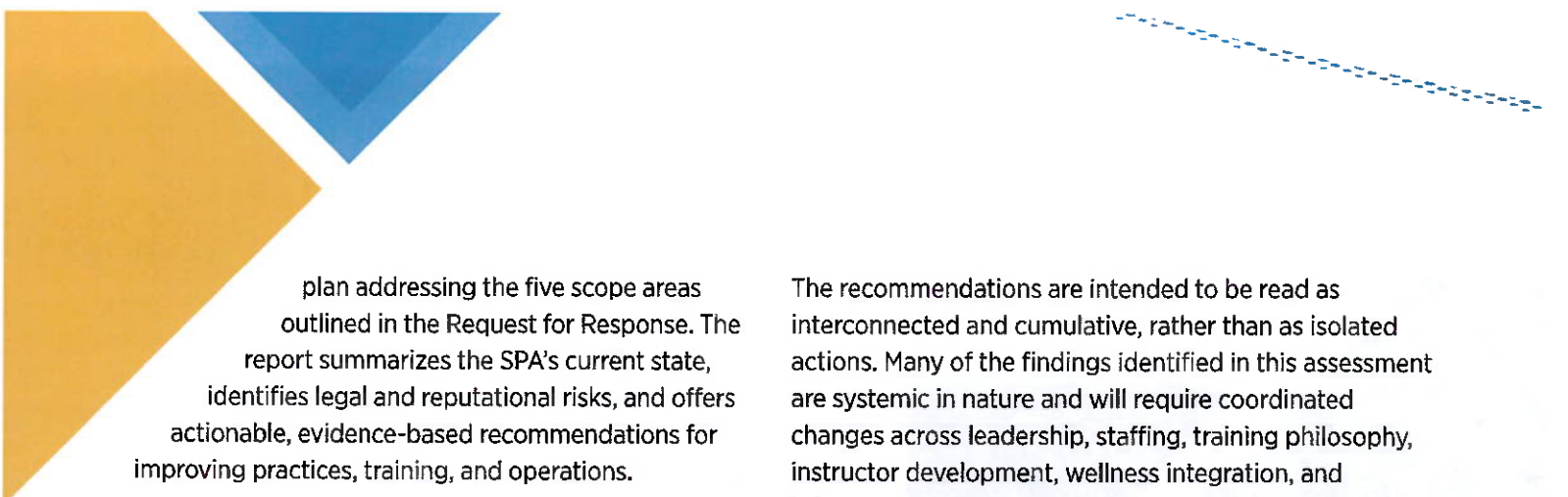
This assessment aims to conduct a comprehensive review of the Massachusetts State Police Academy to ensure its programs, policies, and practices align with modern law enforcement needs, evolving societal expectations, and effective practices for training, equity, and accountability. The initiative seeks to identify areas for improvement and align training practices with the best national practices for modern policing. This included evaluating programming, training methodologies, and organizational culture to provide actionable recommendations that enhance safety, improve trainee retention, and maintain excellence in law enforcement training

Methodology

For this review, the IACP partnered with the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and HR Consultants, Inc. (HRC) to strengthen the validity of the findings and recommendations. This multidisciplinary approach integrates IACP's policing expertise with medical and human resources perspectives, ensuring the recommendations reflect leading practices and research across all relevant fields—not solely policing.

The study team conducted extensive onsite work, including interviews and focus groups with current and former MSP leadership and personnel, key state government stakeholders, and law enforcement partners. Team members also made direct observations during multiple phases of the 91st Recruit Training Troop (RTT), beginning in May 2025. Collected data—both historical and newly generated—was analyzed and compared against prior projects, professional standards, leading practices, and contemporary policing challenges. A review of recommendations from a 2006 study of the SPA was also included. This process informed the development of the report and implementation





plan addressing the five scope areas outlined in the Request for Response. The report summarizes the SPA's current state, identifies legal and reputational risks, and offers actionable, evidence-based recommendations for improving practices, training, and operations.

The study team conducted three comprehensive site visits during the 2nd, 8th, and 11th weeks of the 91st RTT. Across these visits, nine team members participated, with some attending more than once. Each visit included direct observation of trainee training, tours of the SPA grounds and the Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC), and a series of joint and individual interviews with SPA leadership and training staff. Additional interviews were conducted with personnel from the Recruitment & Diversity Unit, Employee Assistance Unit, Chaplaincy Corps, the Field Training Coordinator, and the Internal Affairs Unit. The team also facilitated focus groups with both veteran troopers and members of the 91st RTT, supplemented by a survey of recent graduates. Detailed sitevisit narratives are provided in Appendix H.

How to Use this Report

This report is intended to serve as a practical and strategic resource for SPA executive leadership, and key oversight stakeholders. It presents findings, recommendations, and an implementation roadmap designed to enhance SPA operations, improve training outcomes, and align practices with leading national standards in law enforcement training.

The report is organized by thematic sections that examine the SPA's organizational environment, training operations, instructional practices, wellness integration, facilities, and data systems. Each section includes a summary of key findings, relevant background and context, and a set of actionable recommendations. At the end of each section, the recommendations made throughout that section are consolidated and assigned a priority level by the study team to assist leadership in sequencing and planning implementation efforts. A comprehensive list of all recommendations is provided in Appendix B.

The recommendations are intended to be read as interconnected and cumulative, rather than as isolated actions. Many of the findings identified in this assessment are systemic in nature and will require coordinated changes across leadership, staffing, training philosophy, instructor development, wellness integration, and infrastructure. Readers are encouraged to consider how recommendations in one section may support or depend upon those in another.

Appendix A provides an implementation roadmap that outlines suggested sequencing, time horizons, and considerations for resourcing and accountability. This roadmap is intended to support MSP leadership in translating recommendations into a structured, multi-year action plan rather than a series of standalone initiatives.

This report is designed to support multiple audiences:

- ▶ **Academy and MSP leadership** may use it to guide strategic planning, policy development, staffing decisions, and resource allocation.
- ▶ **Training staff and instructors** may use it to better understand the rationale for recommended changes to instructional methods, stress exposure practices, and professional role modeling.
- ▶ **Executive and oversight stakeholders** may use it to assess progress, monitor accountability, and evaluate alignment with statutory obligations and contemporary policing expectations.



Finally, this report should be viewed as a living framework for continuous improvement. Implementation of the recommendations will require sustained leadership attention, transparent communication, and periodic evaluation. To support this process, the study team recommends the use of ongoing assessment and external review mechanisms to monitor progress, measure outcomes, and ensure that reforms are embedded into the SPA's culture and operations over time.

Overview of Priority Levels

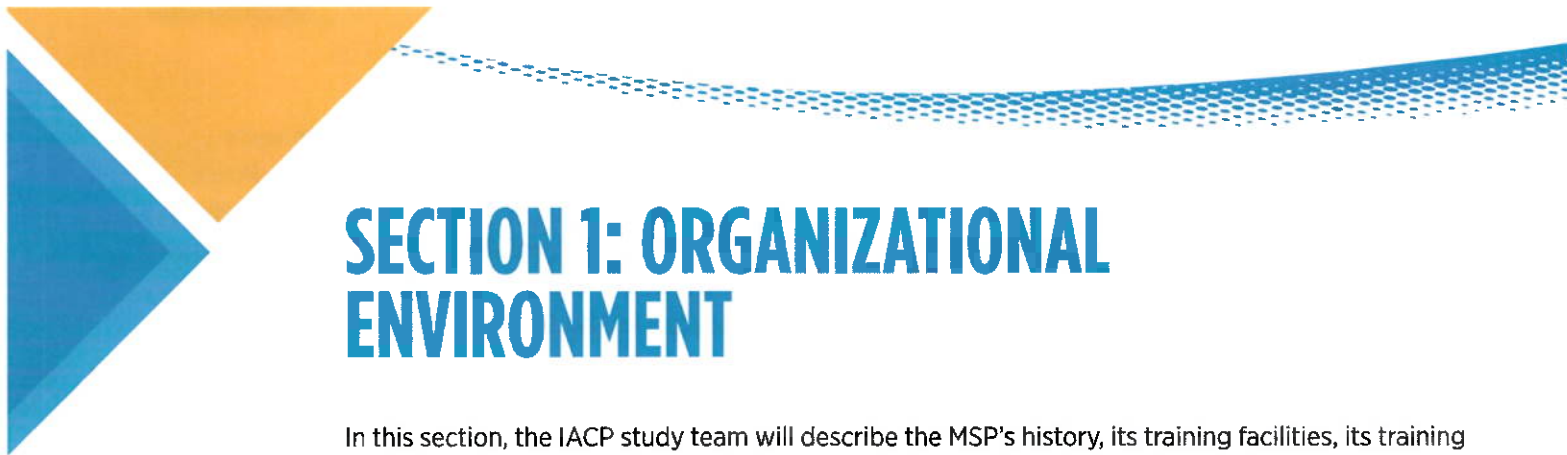
To support effective implementation and sequencing of the recommendations in this report, each recommendation has been assigned a priority level based on its relative importance and urgency. This framework is intended to assist MSP leadership and oversight stakeholders in planning, budgeting, and accountability by clearly distinguishing actions that require immediate attention from those appropriate for phased or long-term implementation.

- ▶ **Critical** recommendations represent the highest level of importance and urgency. These actions address conditions that, if left uncorrected, are likely to result in negative operational, safety, legal, or reputational consequences. Where feasible, Critical items should be implemented within the current budget year, even if doing so requires supplemental appropriations, reallocation of existing resources, or executive-level intervention.
- ▶ **Priority 1** recommendations are highly important but allow for modest sequencing. These actions should be planned and implemented within the next one to two budget cycles. While not as time sensitive as Critical items, failure to address Priority 1 recommendations may still result in negative outcomes and hinder broader reform efforts.

- ▶ **Priority 2** recommendations support medium-term improvements and organizational maturation. These actions should be incorporated into planning and implementation efforts over a three- to five-year horizon. Priority 2 items often require coordination across units, policy development, or infrastructure investment and are best addressed through deliberate, phased implementation.
- ▶ **Priority 3** recommendations represent longer-term strategic initiatives. These actions should be incorporated into the Department's five-year strategic planning process and addressed as resources, capacity, and organizational readiness permit. While less urgent, Priority 3 recommendations contribute to sustainability, resilience, and continuous improvement over time.

Together, these priority levels provide a structured roadmap for action, enabling MSP leadership to balance immediate risk mitigation with sustainable, long-term reform while maintaining transparency and accountability throughout the implementation process.

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SECTION 1: ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In this section, the IACP study team will describe the MSP's history, its training facilities, its training philosophy and values, compliance with state mandates and statutory obligations, and the training academy's organizational structure and staffing overview.

Organizational Environment Key Findings

► Lack of Staff Stability and Continuity

- In addition to the constant change in the Commandant position there is also turnover in the various component units' leadership and with training staff. In many cases the staff members are on "TDY" (temporary duty assignment) to the positions at the SPA.
- The only consistency in staffing is two civilian positions that support the operation of the SPA. The Business Management Specialist position is staffed by an employee who has 25 +/- years of service at the SPA. The Administrative Assistant who supports the Medical and Fitness Unit has 30 years of service.
- The turnover of staff feeds into the lack of direction and contributes to the stagnant culture of the SPA. If deliberate and strategic change is to occur at the SPA, there needs to be a stabilized leadership team and a commitment to adequate staffing component positions. There was also feedback from staff that some positions, such as curriculum staff, could be filled by non-sworn professional staff resulting in more consistency and better outcomes.

► Lack of Department Commitment and Support

- There is an apparent lack of commitment to providing permanent staff at the SPA. The unit must continually rely on improvised and stopgap staffing measures, reflecting a lack of sustained institutional commitment to ensuring adequate personnel coverage. There is also a hesitation

for command level staff members to step into leadership roles at the SPA based on what is described as a history of wholesale leadership change when there is an incident at the SPA that reflects poorly on the agency. If a negative incident occurs, in lieu of identifying systematic failures, the leadership team has historically been transferred out. The SPA assignment is widely perceived as a posting with limited opportunities for advancement and an elevated risk of career-ending disciplinary exposure, making it an undesirable placement for many personnel. This creates little incentive to challenge the status quo or to innovate. It also adds to the lack of consistency needed to initiate and manage change.

► Lack of Succession Planning

- Another common theme identified by staff members is that there are no plans to develop the next component leaders. There are "single points of failure" in many of the components. As an example, a trooper was recently promoted to Sergeant who had valuable experience in a component area. To maintain the needed level of expertise for the incoming RTT, the Commandant had to ask to keep the Sergeant in a "TDY" position that did not exist. A constant theme identified to keep sufficient expertise and support for the training program is often solved by using "TDY" positions. This would not be an issue taken as a single incident, but combined with the history of leadership turnover, this lack of consistency exacerbates the lack of innovation and creativity.

► **Lack of Strategic Capital Planning Limits Academy Modernization**

- The SPA lacks a dedicated capital improvement plan, formal replacement schedule, or long-term facilities modernization strategy. Budget authority for facilities and infrastructure is centralized outside the SPA, leaving leadership with limited visibility or ability to advocate for strategic investments. As a result, infrastructure upgrades are largely reactive—driven by failures or emergent needs rather than long-range planning. This absence of structured capital planning hinders modernization efforts, increases operational risk, and constrains the SPA's ability to align facilities with contemporary training standards and future instructional requirements.

► **Infrastructure and Technology Gaps:**

- The SPA lacks an auditorium or classroom large enough to accommodate all trainees; the gymnasium is the only large space. There is no WiFi in classrooms, despite trainees having laptops; a VPN is also needed. Training records are managed via outdated systems (Microsoft Access, limited PowerDMS use), making compliance with Rule 14 requests difficult.

Through Chapter 22C, the Commonwealth vests the Department—and by extension the State Police Academy—with statutory authority and responsibility for the recruitment, training, discipline, and professional development of state troopers, providing the legal foundation for the SPA's mission and operations.

The department evolved significantly throughout the 20th century, growing from a small patrol force into a comprehensive law enforcement agency responsible for traffic enforcement, criminal investigations, tactical operations, marine and harbor patrols, Logan Airport Troop, and other specialized units (e.g., K-9, bomb squad).

In 1992, the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles, the Capitol Police and the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) Police merged to form what is currently known as the Department of State Police. As of 2024, the MSP consisted of approximately 2,500 sworn troopers and 600 non-sworn personnel.

The MSP is led by a Colonel who serves as the Superintendent and reports to the Secretary of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security. The organizational structure of the MSP includes several divisions, specialized units, and operational components set forth as follows:

Command Staff: The Colonel is supported by a Deputy Superintendent and Division Commanders (at the Lieutenant Colonel rank) who oversee various aspects of the agency's operations.

Troop Headquarters: The MSP consists of six Troops (regional jurisdictions) that handle specific geographic areas of the Commonwealth. Each Troop is headed by a Troop Commander, typically at the rank of Major. The individual troops are each responsible for policing distinct geographical areas across the Commonwealth. The deployment structure ensures coverage of highways, urban centers, Logan Airport, and rural regions.

Each troop has a combination of patrol and tactical support elements that operate out of barracks scattered throughout the state. The structure enables a swift response to both emergency situations and routine law enforcement duties.

1.1 Agency and Academy History

History of the Massachusetts State Police

The Massachusetts State Police (MSP) was established in 1865, originally formed as a small force to provide law and order to areas underserved by existing local police agencies. Over time, the MSP's responsibilities expanded to include highway patrol, criminal investigations, and coordinated emergency response throughout the Commonwealth. The organization's modern authority, structure, and governance are grounded in statute, most notably Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 22C, which formally establishes the Department of State Police and defines its powers, leadership, and operational responsibilities. Today, the MSP plays an integral role in ensuring public safety across Massachusetts—serving both urban and rural communities—and has historically been a key partner in federal, state, and local law enforcement collaborations.

In addition to general patrol and enforcement, the MSP has specialized units that handle specific law enforcement areas. These include:

- ▶ **Division of Investigative Services:** Investigates serious crimes like homicide and organized crime
- ▶ **Special Tactical Unit (STOP Team):** Provides tactical support for high-risk operations
- ▶ **Air Wing:** Assists in aerial surveillance, search and rescue, and transportation
- ▶ **K-9 Unit:** Specializes in search and rescue, drug detection, and suspect apprehension
- ▶ **Marine Unit:** Patrols Boston Harbor and other state waterways
- ▶ **Traffic Safety Programs:** Manages highway safety programs to include Governor Highway Safety Programs
- ▶ **Support Services:** Across MSP, units that handle essential administrative and logistical support include the Crime Laboratory, Dispatch Center, and the MSP Training Academy

1.2 Infrastructure

MSP's New Braintree Academy Facility and Grounds

The Massachusetts State Police Training Academy sits on an approximately 800-acre property in rural New Braintree. Originally built in 1965 as a Seventh-day Adventist boarding school, the site included two large dormitories and 19 single and duplex staff homes for the former Pioneer Valley Academy. When the school closed due to financial issues in the early 1990s, the state acquired the property and began converting it into a minimum-security prison. Following significant renovation work and strong opposition from local residents, the state ultimately chose instead to relocate the MSP Training Academy to the site¹.

Today, the SPA complex includes an administration building, residential housing for trainees, a chow hall and kitchen, a medical facility, and critical utilities infrastructure. The property features both a wastewater treatment plant and the water supply system that also services the nearby town school, requiring two maintenance personnel to hold certified water and wastewater credentials.

Training facilities on the grounds include a state-of-the-art indoor firearms range with 24 shooting points and a 100-yard rifle range, which also houses range staff, armorers, and weapons storage. A well-equipped gymnasium houses modern weight and cardio equipment, a padded Ju-Jitsu room, and a multipurpose physical training space that also serves as an auditorium with bleachers. Because the SPA does not have a dedicated auditorium or a classroom large enough to accommodate all trainees, this gym is the only available large-group space. The facility includes locker rooms and showers but lacks air conditioning, despite being used frequently for both physical training and instructional sessions.

Several of the original houses on the property have been rehabilitated—some in partnership with the National Guard—and are used for trainee scenarios, in-service training, SWAT, and K9 exercises. Others remain in significant disrepair. There is no WiFi in classrooms, despite trainees having laptops; a VPN is also needed. The grounds also contain paved roads for traffic-stop practical exercises, a fleet of training vehicles, and a separate building housing the regional 24-hour Emergency Communications Center.

Budget and Capital Planning

SPA leadership reported that budget authority for facilities, grounds, and infrastructure is centralized under the Department's Chief Administrative Officer. While this structure ensures organization-wide fiscal control, it limits the SPA's ability to plan proactively or advocate for long-term facility improvements. Leadership indicated there is no formal capital replacement schedule, capital improvement plan, or multi-year modernization strategy specific to the SPA.

¹ United Press International, "Small Town Balks at Prison Proposal," UPI Archives, August 17, 1986, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1986/08/17/Small-town-balks-at-prison-proposal/6424524635200/>

As a result, infrastructure investments are largely reactive—triggered by system failures, safety concerns, or urgent operational needs. Given the size of the campus, the age of the buildings, and the specialized nature of the facilities (e.g., dorms, gymnasium, firearms range, water/wastewater systems), the absence of structured planning restricts the SPA's ability to modernize training environments, integrate new technology, expand capacity, or anticipate lifecycle requirements. This challenge also reflects broader organizational issues, including inconsistent leadership continuity and difficulty sustaining long-term modernization efforts.

Records Management

SPA staff noted that training records have only recently been digitized, with electronic records reliably available for approximately the past two years. Older records remain in hard-copy form, stored in file cabinets that may not always be accurately organized. Current documentation is dispersed across multiple platforms—including physical storage, Microsoft Teams, and PowerDMS—leading to inefficiencies and increasing the risk of incomplete recordkeeping. Staff identified the need for a comprehensive records-scanning effort and adoption of a modern records management system to ensure proper retention, organization, and retrieval.

1.3 Mandates and Statutory Obligations

As is further elaborated in the *Curriculum Review Section*, the MSP meets or exceeds all Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Commission requirements and all Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC) statutory training mandates. Training standards and requirements were codified after the implementation of the Massachusetts Police Reform Law.

Massachusetts Police Reform Law

Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020 in Massachusetts is commonly known as the [Police Reform Law](#) and is focused on justice, equity, and accountability in law enforcement. It includes provisions like banning chokeholds, limiting no-knock warrants, and creating duties to intervene and de-escalate for police officers. The law also bans racial profiling and removes the requirement for police officers in schools.

A core element of the law was the creation of the Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Commission, an independent state entity which would oversee the certification and decertification of police officers, and investigations into police misconduct. At the time it was established, Massachusetts was then one of only a handful of states that did not have a certification or licensing process for police. The bill established two divisions within the Commission—the Division of Police Certification and the Division of Police Standards. The Division of Certification would be responsible for developing training standards and standardizing the certification process for law enforcement agencies and officers, while the Division of Police Standards would primarily investigate and adjudicate complaints of officer misconduct.

The Division of Training and Certification is responsible for establishing uniform policies for certification of all law enforcement officers. The Commission established minimum certification standards and provided for the creation of agency policies regarding use of force and use

of force reporting, officer codes of conduct, officer response procedures, criminal investigation procedures, juvenile operations, internal affairs and officer complaint procedures, detainees, and collection and preservation of evidence.²

New Recruit Training

According to Section 96B of Chapter 41 of the General Laws, all newly hired full-time police officers in Massachusetts are required to complete an entry-level training curriculum approved by the MPTC. This training curriculum, known as the recruit officer course (ROC), is an 800-hour training program composed of 358 hours of classroom instruction and 442 hours of skill development training. The ROC is delivered in 46 lessons conducted by MPTC-certified instructors.³

The MSP recruit training (RTT) program meets and exceeds all the hourly training mandates prescribed by the MPTC.

In-Service Training Requirements

All Massachusetts police officers, including state troopers, are required to complete 40 hours of training annually to stay updated on new policies and legal changes. Of the 40 hours, 24 hours of subject-specific training are created and provided by the Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC). Departments will be able to choose the delivery methods for in-service training either in-person, online through ACADIS, or by a hybrid of the two methods. All mandated in-service training must be an MPTC-approved curriculum taught by MPTC certified instructors

The training year begins on July 1st and ends on June 30th of the following year. The MPTC required in-service training for training year 2025 includes the following topics:

- ▶ Freedom of Speech—(3) hours
- ▶ Freedom and Hate: Speech, Crimes, and Groups—(3) hours
- ▶ Use of Force—(3) hours
- ▶ Freedom of Assembly: Crowd Management—(3) hours
- ▶ Unload Your Backpack (Officer Wellness)—(3) hours

- ▶ Freedom to Communicate: Deaf/Hard of Hearing & Victims of Human Trafficking—(3) hours
- ▶ Legal Update—(6) hours
- ▶ Annual CPR/First Aid Requirement—(6) hours
- ▶ Annual Firearms Qualification & Training—(8) hours
- ▶ Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition (Online Only)—(2) hours
- ▶ Total Hours:—(40) hours⁴

The SPA meets all requirements established by the MPTC for annual in-service training.

1.4 MSP Training Philosophy and Values

The MSP Training Academy's Staff Training Manual outlines the fundamental training values for RTT classes and the SPA's training philosophy. The following information is contained in the Staff Manual from March 2025. The extent to which these values are exhibited in the training environment and culture are discussed later in this report.

Fundamental Training Values

*"The Massachusetts State Police Academy utilizes the fundamental training values of public service, respect, integrity, discipline, and equality. The **PRIDE** model is integrated into all formal and informal training at the Academy. The model is applied as follows:*

- ▶ **Public Service**
 - ▶ *Massachusetts State Police recruit training instills a "spirit of public service" in trainees. Trainees are training to become public servants responsible for addressing the public safety needs of those they serve. Training focuses on problem solving and preparedness to identify and develop solutions to public safety issues, in concert with those impacted by their decisions.*
- ▶ **Respect**
 - ▶ *Trainees shall exhibit and reinforce behavior that demonstrates a sense of respect towards all individuals.*

2 Norris, Murray & Peloquin, LLC, "What You Need to Know About the New Massachusetts Police Reform Law," January 17, 2021, <https://nmplabor.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-massachusetts-police-reform-bill>.

3 Massachusetts Office of the State Auditor, "Audit Report – Municipal Police Training Committee," n.d., <https://www.mass.gov/doc/audit-report-municipal-police-training-committee/download>.

4 Massachusetts Municipal Police Training Committee, "MPTC Training Year 2025 In-Service Syllabus," n.d., <https://www.mass.gov/doc/mpctc-training-year-2025-in-service-syllabus/download>.

► **Integrity**

- Trainees shall exhibit “excellence in character” and an adherence to a strict ethical code. Trainees shall be polite, courteous, and professional.

► **Discipline**

- Training reinforces the importance of attention to detail. Self-control and incident specific demeanor is an integral part of all instruction and training.

► **Equality**

- Trainees shall model and reinforce an attitude that fosters uniformity, impartiality, and equality.”⁵

Additionally, the manual requires that *“Instructors shall integrate these fundamental training values in their lesson plans and presentations. Instructors may use personal situations, real or contrived scenarios, role-playing, or other approved training means to convey and reinforce these values.”*⁶

Moreover, the manual details the department’s training philosophy, as follows:

Philosophy of Training

*“The Department’s training program prepares the recruit for the unique demands that will be placed on him or her as a Massachusetts State Trooper. It serves to develop the trooper’s self-confidence, pride, competence, and esprit de corps. It forms the recruit’s identification with the organization and helps him or her internalize the organization’s core values.”*⁷

The study team will provide a more in-depth analysis of its observations and assessment of the effectiveness and efficacy of the MSP’s training practices, based on their training philosophy, elsewhere in this report.

1.5 Organizational Structure & Staffing

The IACP study team was briefed on the organizational structure of the SPA. The SPA falls under the executive leadership of a Lieutenant Colonel who is the Commander of the Division of Training and Standards. This position is part of the senior leadership team of the MSP and answers directly to the Superintendent/Colonel. The overall training mission, to include recruit training, is under this command.

Below the Lieutenant Colonel is the position of Deputy Division Commander that is filled by an individual holding the rank of Major. This position is responsible for overall training of the department to include in-service SPA training as well interfacing with the MPTC/POST for certification of the sworn staff.

The operation of the SPA recruit class training is under the command of the Commandant of the SPA, who currently holds the rank of Captain. The Commandant is supported by two Lieutenants, an Executive Officer and Administrative Officer. The study team found the Commandant’s primary focus is on recruit training.

The staff at the Academy are divided into operational components.

► **The Drill Staff (Drill Instructors)**

- A new drill instructor staff is chosen each time there is an RTT. This requires an application and interview process that includes a PT test.

► **Operations Unit**

- The Operations Unit is seen as the catch all component. The focus is on the daily coordination of the function(s) of the SPA. This includes such tasks as classroom assignments, support vehicles, equipment ordering, etc.

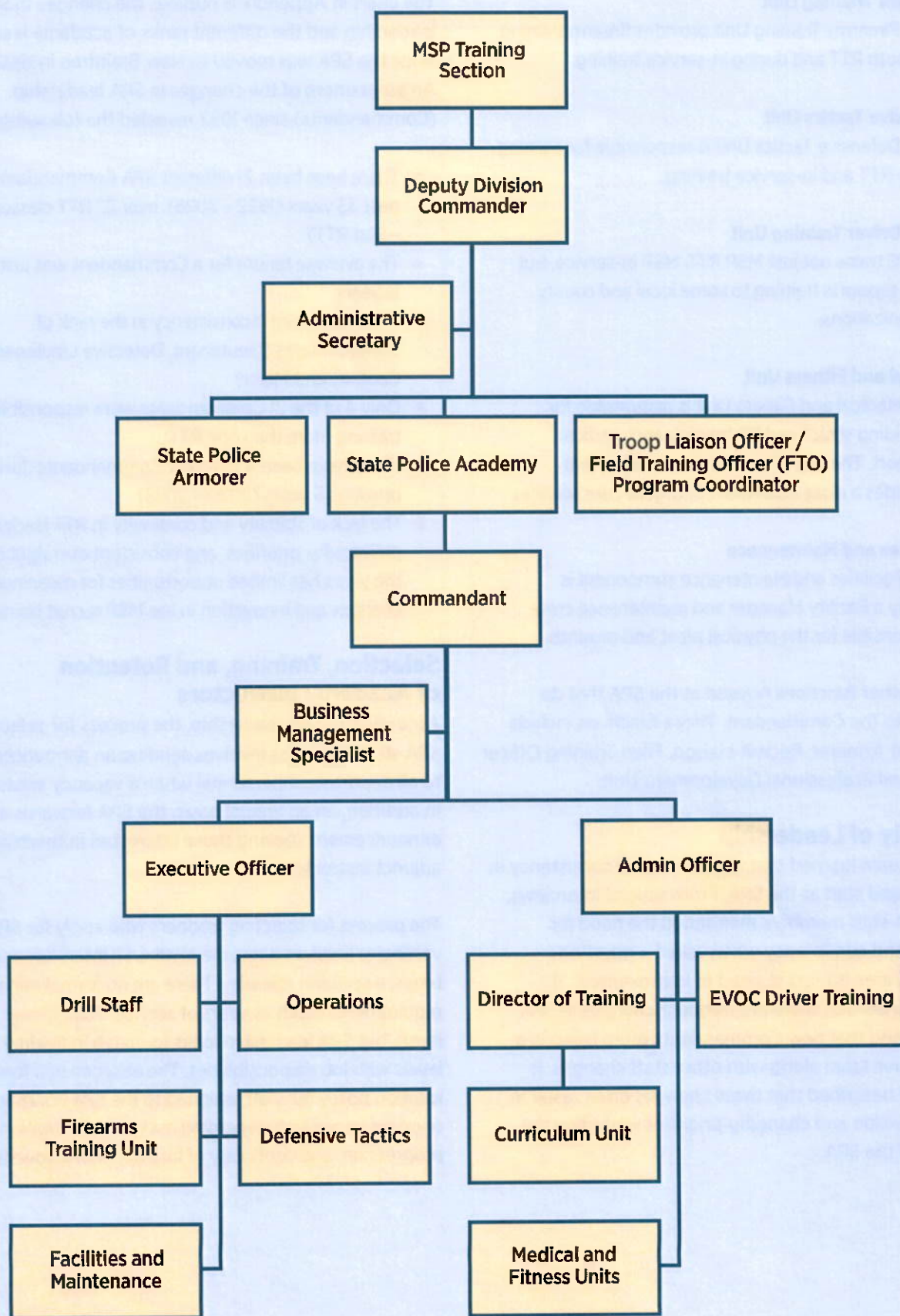
► **Curriculum Unit**

- The Curriculum Unit coordinates curriculum not just for the RTT, but for all the training in the MSP. The unit also assures the curriculum meets POST standards.

⁵ Massachusetts State Police, *Massachusetts State Police Academy Staff Manual*, March 17, 2025, 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



► **Firearms Training Unit**

- The Firearms Training Unit provides firearm training for both RTT and during in-service training.

► **Defensive Tactics Unit**

- The Defensive Tactics Unit is responsible for training both RTT and in-service training.

► **EVOC Driver Training Unit**

- EVOC trains not just MSP RTT, MSP in-service, but also supports training to some local and county organizations.

► **Medical and Fitness Unit**

- The Medical and Fitness Unit is responsible for providing structured PT training and medical support. The unit is housed in a location that provides a close equivalent of urgent care services.

► **Facilities and Maintenance**

- The Facilities and Maintenance component is led by a Facility Manager and maintenance crew responsible for the physical plant and grounds.

There are other functions housed at the SPA that do not report to the Commandant. Those functions include Department Armorer, Recruit Liaison, Field Training Officer Program, and Professional Development Unit.

Continuity of Leadership

The study team learned that there is lack of consistency in leadership and staff at the SPA. From several interviews, various SPA staff members mentioned the need for continuity and consistency when asked a question about what area is most in need of improvement. It was mentioned that there are frequent changes in SPA leadership and that new Commandants often bring in a new executive team along with other staff changes. It was further described that these changes often result in a different vision and changing priorities regarding the direction of the SPA.

The chart in Appendix G outlines the changes in SPA leadership and the different ranks of academy leaders since the SPA was moved to New Braintree in 1992. An assessment of the changes in SPA leadership (Commandants) since 1992 revealed the following:

- There have been 21 different SPA Commandants in the past 33 years (1992 – 2025), over 22 RTT classes (70th – 91st RTT)
- The average tenure for a Commandant was just over 1 ½ years
- There has been inconsistency in the rank of Commandants (Lieutenant, Detective Lieutenant, Captain, and Major)
- Only 4 of the 21 Commandants were responsible for training more than one RTT
- There have been 4 different Commandants during the previous 5 years (2020 – 2025)
- The lack of stability and continuity in RTT leadership, philosophy, priorities, and consistent oversight over the years has limited opportunities for meaningful changes and innovation in the MSP recruit training

Selection, Training, and Retention of Academy Instructors

According to SPA leadership, the process for selection of SPA staff vacancies involves sending an announcement to all department personnel when a vacancy exists. In addition, on an annual basis, the SPA forwards an announcement seeking those interested in teaching as adjunct instructors.

The process for selecting troopers who apply for SPA vacancies involves a resume review, an interview and, at times, a scenario role play. There are no formal minimum requirements (such as years of service, educational level), but SPA leadership looks to match individual skill levels with job responsibilities. The absence of a formal rotation policy for staff assigned to the SPA contributes to ongoing uncertainty regarding assignment duration, career progression, and continuity of instructional leadership.

Additionally, several SPA staff members, including those in key operational and instructional roles, are assigned on a temporary duty (TDY) basis. The continued reliance on temporary assignments for positions critical to the SPA's success limits continuity, slows innovation and culture change, and reduces the SPA's capacity to develop and sustain external professional relationships—such as active engagement with national training networks including IACP's State and Provincial Police Academy Directors Section (SPPADS). The absence of permanent assignments in these roles signals a lack of long-term institutional commitment to training operations.

Medical Personnel and Treatment Facility

The SPA on site medical facility resembles a modern Urgent Care facility. It is staffed by a sergeant and 6 troopers, all of whom are either EMS or Paramedic certified. These troopers work in concert with and under the medical supervision of a non-sworn, part-time licensed Physician Assistant (PA-C) who is also the Medical Director for the MSP on-site ambulance and who can assess, diagnose, and treat injuries. This ability to obtain results at the time of delivering care significantly reduces the amount of training time lost when trainees are injured. Since the PA-C is an employee of the UMass Memorial Hospital, he has immediate access to hospital records, can read x-rays from the SPA facility, and can prescribe and issue medications. The PA is physically on-site daily for only the first few weeks of an RTT; thereafter, he is present one morning per week for sick call.

While the practice of having personnel on-site with advanced medical training is an effective practice, as will be further described in *Section IV: Injury Prevention and Fitness Standards*, the study team is recommending that the department substitute the use of sworn troopers with non-sworn personnel with appropriate certifications in order to provide better oversight of physical training and injury prevention and treatment.

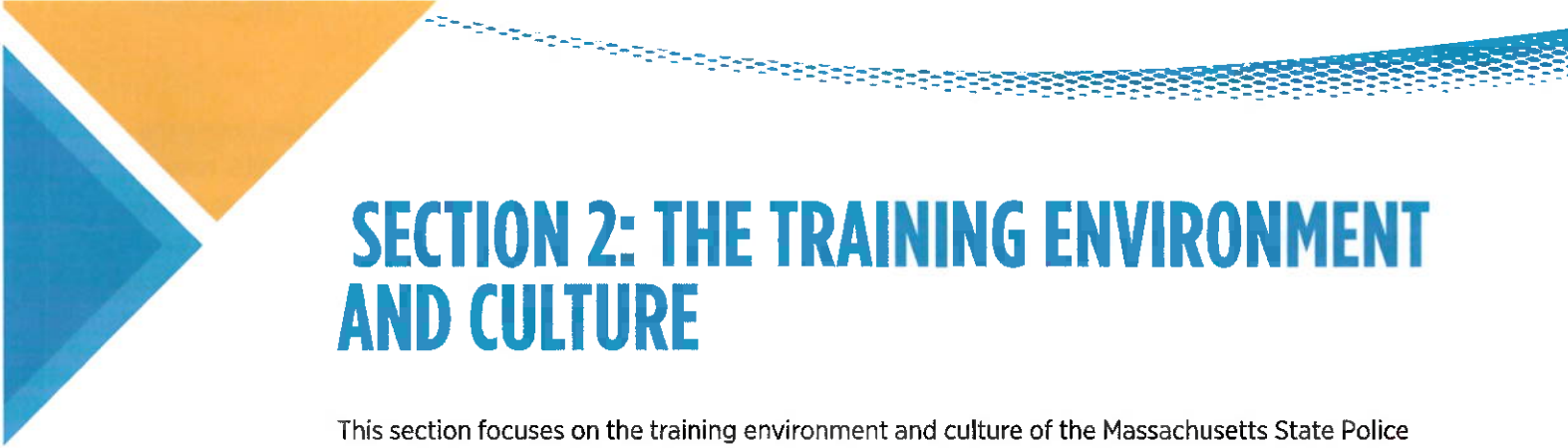
Summary

The IACP study team found the staff at the SPA to be extremely dedicated and highly committed to their work. Through no fault of the training staff, there is significant turnover in both leadership and line staff positions, which creates a lack of stability and continuity, and which also inhibits innovation. An overriding theme that was identified is that frequent changes in SPA leadership result in the reliance upon rituals and traditions to guide the recruit training philosophy rather than endorsing evidence-based effective practices and adapting to changing societal expectations.

Additionally, almost every person interviewed by the study team shared a similar philosophy about trainee training—that surviving the high level of stress exposure and the rituals that have been passed down from RTT classes over the years amounts to having achieved a “badge of honor” for completing the training. While having pride in achieving a challenging training environment is commendable, it has also been identified by the study team as likely the biggest hurdle to implementing the changes necessary to reflect 21st century expectations for a leading state police agency. These two primary themes, along with additional recommendations to convert some sworn positions to civilian professional staff, will be further expanded upon elsewhere throughout this report.

Recommendations

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0001	Critical	▶ Ensure consistency and continuity of SPA leadership to advance and maintain future training philosophy.
R0002	Critical	▶ Hire a non-sworn professional position, with a background in education and training and at the equivalent to the sworn rank of lieutenant or sergeant, to support and enhance continuity at the leadership level. Consideration should be given to creating a non-sworn professional "Director of the Academy" to add stability.
R0003	Priority 1	▶ Conduct a capital improvement assessment and create a modernization plan. (ex., including gymnasium, EVOC facility)
R0004	Priority 1	▶ Adopt centralized, digital systems for curriculum, training records, and evaluation tools.
R0005	Priority 2	▶ Conduct an assessment to identify the core positions required for effective training delivery and training support, and transition those roles to stable, permanent assignments. Eliminate the routine practice of filling essential SPA functions through lengthy TDY placements, particularly in positions that require continuity, specialized expertise, and sustained accountability.
R0006	Priority 2	▶ The Department should communicate, at the executive level, that serving at the SPA is a mission-critical assignment and a professional development pathway, not a career-ending venture. This commitment should be reinforced through transparent selection criteria, stable tour lengths, recognition and promotion credit for SPA service, and leadership messaging that elevates training roles as central to the Department's operational readiness and public trust.
R0007	Priority 2	▶ Expand delegated SPA budget authority for defined categories of recurring training needs (with thresholds and reporting) to enable timely, high-impact improvements while retaining centralized oversight for capital projects.



SECTION 2: THE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

This section focuses on the training environment and culture of the Massachusetts State Police Academy and the extent to which the environment and culture embody the philosophy and values set forth in the SPA's Staff Training Manual and align with modern police training practices.

Training Environment and Culture Key Findings

► **Stress Exposure Practices Are High-Intensity, Scripted, and Inconsistently Linked to Learning Objectives**

- During early phases of trainee training, particularly during designated stress exposure exercises, the SPA relied on intense, scripted stress-induction protocols characterized by shouting, whistle use, chaotic commands, and forced physical exertion. Senior command staff were present and visibly supportive of these exercises, reinforcing their institutional acceptance. Trainees were repeatedly encouraged to consider resignation as an easy option, increasing psychological pressure during already high-stress periods. Several observed practices raised safety concerns, including chaotic movement in confined spaces, risk of injury from furniture and environmental hazards, and physical distress resulting from overexertion.

► **Variability in Instructor Role Modeling and Professionalism**

- The assessment identified stark contrasts in training climate depending on instructor assignment. Drill instructor-led periods were consistently characterized by high stress, punitive approaches, and limited constructive feedback. In contrast, subject-matter instructors conducting “Round Robin” training sessions demonstrated professional, structured, and supportive learning environments in which mistakes were treated as part of the learning process and constructive feedback was routinely

provided. These observations indicate that effective, positive training environments already exist within the SPA but are largely confined to settings outside drill instructor oversight. Drill instructors and SPA staff play a central role in shaping trainee behavior and professional identity. In some instances, instructor conduct did not consistently model professionalism, restraint, communication skills, and judgment expected of troopers in operational settings.

► **Inconsistent Application of Standards Impacts Equity, Morale, and Cohesion**

- Variability in drill instructor conduct and inconsistent application of expectations have created uneven trainee experiences and raised concerns about equitable treatment across training groups. While the existing stress-based model can support discipline and resilience, its uneven and sometimes punitive implementation heightens the risks of morale degradation, burnout, injury, and emotional disengagement. Support resources—such as the Employee Assistance Unit and Chaplaincy—are available but underutilized in early training phases, limiting opportunities to mitigate stress, support well-being, and enhance retention.

► **Health, Safety and Wellness Concerns**

- Concerns related to health, safety, and overall trainee wellness were also observed. Trainees were subjected to excessive physical exertion (e.g., constant movement, indoor running, repetitive seating drills) without clear safety oversight.

One trainee was observed vomiting from stress during mealtime, an environment considered inappropriate for nutrition and recovery. Trainees often report feeling uninformed about their performance, with feedback frequently delivered solely through yelling rather than constructive guidance. Some feel individually targeted by certain drill instructors, although others describe their instructors as highly professional, humane, and caring. Gender equity is generally respected, though female trainees report logistical challenges—such as limited accommodations during bathroom breaks. Additional concerns include late-evening physical training after showers, which is viewed as counterproductive to rest and recovery. The Liaison Sergeant role is viewed positively and offers a helpful channel of support. Across perspectives, trainees consistently indicated a preference for a structured paramilitary training environment over a fully non-stress academic model.

► **Curriculum and Instruction**

- The curriculum unit is dedicated to providing high quality curriculum development but lacks formal training in lesson plan development and testing. Scenario-based training at the SPA is a strength.

2.1 Stress Exposure and Emphasis on Paramilitary Training Techniques

Stress exposure is an important and legitimate component of police training and can help prepare trainees for the realities of law enforcement work. However, this exposure must be intentionally designed, carefully controlled, and clearly limited to prevent physical injury and mental or emotional overexertion. Stress-based training should be purposeful, tied directly to defined learning objectives and job-relevant competencies, and introduced progressively. It should not be shaped by tradition, ritual, or a desire to create chaos, nor should it rely on messaging that normalizes suffering or encourages resignation as a sign of commitment.

Teamwork and self-discipline are developed in a command-and-control environment through strict conformance to orders, daily inspections, and military drill. This model of law enforcement training became

the norm for most American police agencies during the 1960s. Since then, training academies in the U.S. have continued to evolve regarding their training philosophies and curriculum, including the introduction of enhanced focus on community policing, terrorism, unbiased policing, and the development of new technologies, all which have impacted training protocols. One area that has not evolved as much with the changing times is the quasi-military, high-stress environment that still exists in some basic trainee academies.

From previous studies and collaboration with training academies in which the IACP has been involved, the primary reason identified by those agencies that practice the quasi-military, high-stress model in their academies stems from the belief that it is important for the socialization of the new trainee to “break them down, so they can build them up again” and that a stressful training environment is necessary in order to better prepare trainees for dealing with challenges they will encounter as troopers on patrol. Most MSP staff who were interviewed for this study expressed the same opinion. A concern that has been identified when academies operate under this model is that abuses can occur when the behavior of some drill instructors degrades into harassment, intimidation, and tradition-based practices of trainees.

Trainees are adult learners with diverse life experiences and professional backgrounds. Stress-exposure activities should therefore have clearly defined purposes. SPA leadership and DIs should uphold a mutual covenant: DIs maintain order and provide instruction, trainees show respect and follow direction, and DIs in return treat trainees professionally. While stress exposure will occur at times, its purpose should be to prepare trainees for real-world pressures—not to humiliate, degrade, or arbitrarily punish. The overarching goal must always be to facilitate learning and support success within a structured, professionally run training environment.

The study team’s findings highlight the urgent need for the SPA to reevaluate its reliance on extreme stress-inducing training. While resilience is a vital trait for troopers, a balance must be struck between challenge and psychological safety. Evidence points to more effective results when trainees are trained in professional, respectful environments that reinforce discipline without

humiliation or risk. The SPA's leadership and staff have an opportunity to reshape the culture into one that sustains morale, minimizes injury and attrition, employs purposeful exposure to stress, develops resilience, and fosters enduring professional excellence.

SPA culture profoundly shapes trainee socialization and, ultimately, how troopers will perform their duties in the field. For MSP to produce troopers who uphold public trust through ethical leadership, sound judgment, and positive role modeling, the training environment must be intentionally designed to reinforce professional norms—not only technical competence. Training is not simply preparation for the job; it is a primary mechanism for shaping how that job will be done.

Stress exposure is a legitimate and important component of trainee training, but it should be purposeful, strategically applied, and limited to scenarios where it supports clearly defined learning objectives. Outside of controlled stress simulations, trainees should be treated professionally and respectfully to promote psychological safety, effective learning, and team cohesion. Transitioning from traditional drill instructor methods toward coaching-based and adult-learning models does not mean lowering standards. Rather, it enables a more balanced and thoughtful training environment that can strengthen camaraderie, pride, and teamwork without compromising discipline or accountability.

Achieving consistency in training climate and instructor conduct also requires sustained leadership stability at the SPA. The study team observed that changes in Academy command can significantly influence staffing composition and instructional approach—particularly as Commandants often determine the selection and assignment of key personnel, including Field Instructors and other SPA staff. Without consistent leadership continuity and a stable staffing model, training philosophy and expectations can shift from class to class, limiting the SPA's ability to institutionalize standards, ensure uniform role modeling, and sustain long-term reform.

Observations and Findings

Training activities requiring instructional and safety alignment

During the first two days of observation, the study team noted several activities whose instructional value was not clearly defined and that were not aligned with effective, professional training practices. Certain methods also presented avoidable health, safety, and wellbeing risks for recruits. Representative examples included:

- ▶ Recruits were directed to use a standardized verbal prompt while moving between locations. The recurring script lacked an articulated learning objective or performance measure and appeared to function primarily as a compliance cue rather than a component of a defined instructional sequence.
- ▶ Recruits who diverted attention from the forward line of travel were assigned corrective running around the Chow Hall while repeating a set phrase. This approach was applied inconsistently and without reference to documented coaching or remediation protocol linked to stated objectives.
- ▶ Recruits were directed to conduct rapid, repeated sit to stand movements from wooden chairs over an extended period. In the absence of a documented training purpose, the activity introduced an unmanaged safety risk — repetitive, uncontrolled contact with wooden seating surfaces increased the potential for injury should a chair break or tip.
- ▶ Multiple recruits were assigned simultaneously running around the Chow Hall on a hard floor surface during a congested movement period. The combination of pace, surface conditions, and crowding created a measurable risk of slips, falls, or collisions that was not mitigated through spacing, sequencing, or floor safety controls.

Taken individually and cumulatively, these activities did not demonstrate a clear linkage to defined learning outcomes and tended to function as informal compliance drills, reinforcing positional authority rather than structured skill development. Staff indicated that a primary objective early in training is to challenge recruits under stress; however, the current design relies on open-ended, unscripted tasks

that may produce perceived futility rather than targeted learning. Additionally, the cumulative physical load generated by these unplanned activities is not captured in the injury tracking process, representing an unmonitored source of preventable musculoskeletal risk and limiting the Academy's ability to manage total training dose.

Overly punitive training environment.

The training environment observed was highly disciplined and rigorous, but also overwhelmingly punitive. Many DI-led activities lacked any discernible instructional value or significantly exceeded their intended purpose. Staff stated that the training is designed to “create stress” to determine who truly wants to be there, push trainees to their limits, and build resilience. Staff also indicated that during the initial phase “nothing” trainees do will be correct, reinforcing the perception of futility and arbitrary punishment.

Lack of situational awareness and cumulative punishment.

Many DIs demonstrated limited situational awareness, contributing to a chaotic and punishing atmosphere. DIs frequently piled on physical or verbal punishments—sometimes without realizing that another DI had just imposed similar consequences on the same trainee or group. This created a frenzy-like environment rather than a structured learning context. The notable exception was the Executive Officer Lieutenant, who remained calm, maintained awareness of the broader environment, and redirected trainees appropriately.

Dependence on outdated quasi-military models.

Overall, the study team found the SPA to be heavily reliant on outdated and punitive disciplinary strategies. Many law enforcement academies continue to mirror military structures, emphasizing hierarchy, command-and-control, and stress-inducing discipline. This model, rooted in the 1960s, promotes teamwork and obedience through drills, inspections, and pressure-based protocols. Although other areas of law enforcement training have modernized, the quasi-military culture has remained largely unchanged. While some staff defend this “break them down to build them up” approach as necessary for building resilience, such environments also heighten the risk of authority misuse, harassment, demeaning conduct, and intimidation.

Summary

Most law enforcement agencies have characteristics that resemble the military including a rank structure, a clearly defined chain of command, and at times, its troopers operate in a command-and-control environment. For these reasons, it is not surprising that many training academies have developed curriculum, training exercises, and disciplinary practices in their entry-level recruit training classes that also closely resemble military recruit training of old.

2.2 Academy Leadership and the Role of Instructors in Fostering a Safe and Professional Environment

Psychological studies show that individuals in positions of authority may misuse their power when placed in poorly supervised, pressure-filled environments. Institutions must create ethical cultures that balance performance demands with fairness and integrity. Trainees exposed to punitive modeling may struggle to treat civilians with the expected empathy and respect after graduation.

Studies of human behavior indicate that some people who are put into positions of power will abuse that power. Unfortunately, there have been recent examples of such bad behavior occurring in law enforcement academies and in military basic training programs. In an article about the abuse of police authority, the authors offer more perspective about this condition:

“Even good people, placed in the wrong situation, will do the wrong thing. Bad supervision, intense peer pressure, and an organizational culture that sends unclear signals can cause honorable men and women to behave in dishonorable ways. The key moral problem for police departments is the same as it is for corporations, universities, labor unions, and government agencies: how can you create a culture that will induce members to strike the right balance between achieving an organizational goal and observing fundamental principles of decency and fairness?”⁸

⁸ David Weisburd, Rosann Greenspan, Edwin E. Hamilton, Kellie A. Bryant, and Hubert Williams, *The Abuse of Police Authority: A National Study of Police Officers' Attitudes* (Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 2001).

There can be additional negative influences on the socialization of trainees when instructors abuse their positional power. In a 2015 National Institute of Justice and Harvard Kennedy School article, Sue Rahr, the then-Executive Director of the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission and former King County Sheriff, wrote the following regarding the behavior modeled by instructors in some quasi-military stress academies:

"Another more insidious problem in a military-style academy is the behavior modeled by the academy staff. Those without power (recruits) submit without question to the authority of those who have power (academy staff). Rule violations are addressed by verbal abuse or physical punishment in the form of pushups and extra laps. Upon graduation, we send our newly trained recruits out into the community—they finally have power. Despite the way they were treated during their training, we expect them to treat the powerless people they encounter in the community with dignity and respect."⁹

The previous comments reinforce the importance of the role of academy drill instructors. Many educators believe that students will often model the same behaviors projected by their teachers during their training experience. Regardless of the type of academy environment that exists, the conduct of the training staff will leave a lasting and memorable impression on trainees. Trainees learn many new ideas and concepts and must demonstrate mastery of numerous academic, physical, and cognitive skills during their training. To be successful, the environment needs to be more highly structured than training for veteran troopers. The primary focus should be ensuring that trainees are well trained and well prepared for patrol assignments after graduation. However, it is even more important to ensure that they are exposed to exemplary role models and positive behaviors that they will be expected to model when interacting with the public on patrol.

The Importance of Training Instructors as Positive Behaviors

There are more effective methods that can be employed for preparing trainees for the challenges of law enforcement duties than emulating what some perceive to be similar to outdated military basic training. Transitioning from a quasi-military model to one emphasizing adult learning does not equate to a reduction in high standards or challenging training. Training intended to purposefully induce stress should remain part of the curriculum but does not need to be integrated into most aspects of the training. The key is to present the training curriculum in a balanced, professional manner and in such a way that allows the trainees to learn effectively. Regardless of whether the SPA employs a high-stress/quasi-military model, a low-stress model, or a blended approach, the study team strongly recommends that drill instructors be required to consistently model and reinforce the highest standards of professionalism in all interactions with trainees. While SPA leadership may intend for professional conduct to be the norm, the study team observed variability in tone, corrective methods, and role modeling across training settings, underscoring the need to formalize expectations, supervision, and accountability to ensure consistent practice.

Role modeling is one of the most effective instructional practices used in the basic academy. Since newly hired trainees learn the values and performance expectations of their departments and of the law enforcement profession while in the basic recruit training program, it is critically important that the academy's culture reflects the most positive examples of what the law enforcement profession values. The behaviors exhibited and reinforced by drill instructors and academy staff have a major influence on new trainees. The impressions and influence that academy staff can have on new trainees is further demonstrated by the following information contained in a leadership training publication utilized at the United States Military Academy at West Point:

"The influence of role models is exerted in many ways. Role models demonstrate behavior which contains several kinds of information for the

⁹ Sue Rahr and Stephen K. Rice, *From Warriors to Guardians: Recommitting American Police Culture to Democratic Ideals, New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2015), NCJ 248654.

observer. The first is information about how to behave. A subordinate thus may learn new behavior by observing the leader as a model. The behavior of the role model may also serve to tell the observer what behavior is appropriate under which circumstances. If the leader (model) is rewarded or not punished for specific acts, this may be taken as a cue by the observant subordinate that the role model's behavior is desirable or at least acceptable in that situation.”¹⁰

Trainees look at instructors as positive trooper role models and, as such, drill instructors and training staff should always strive to model those positive behaviors (integrity, professionalism, respect, compassion, fairness, and empathy) that the department wants trainees to exhibit to members of the public once they graduate from the SPA. While there will be times that drill instructors will need to make corrections regarding student performance, it is important that this always be done in a professional manner and that instructors remain approachable to students.

Observations and Findings

Instructor role modeling does not always reflect field expectations.

Drill instructors and SPA staff play a central role in shaping trainee behavior and professional identity. In some instances, instructor conduct did not consistently model professionalism, restraint, communication skills, and judgment expected of troopers in operational settings.

Presence of senior command staff at stress exposure exercise.

As the study team has learned through observations and interviews, the department's culture appears to reflect the perspectives and behaviors modeled by its leadership. During the exercise, several senior leadership members observed the activities and were generally positive in their reactions. Some offered encouraging comments and gestures, which suggested they viewed the high stress, fast paced scenario favorably.

To the study team, this visible engagement by senior staff appeared to signal overall support for the training activity. Their involvement also seemed to reinforce aspects of the SPA's longstanding training traditions and practices, rather than serving as a moderating influence that might help shape or adjust the conduct of training staff.

Mealtime practices undermine recovery, nutrition, and psychological safety.

Observations during multiple training weeks revealed that mealtimes were routinely used as extensions of stress-based training rather than as opportunities for recovery and nourishment. Disorganized movement, yelling, forced tray-holding, and punitive group discipline disrupted nutrition and recovery. Public spotlighting of individual trainees—particularly during disciplinary moments—raised concerns regarding peer alienation and group punishment dynamics. The display of resigned trainees' baseball caps in the Chow Hall signaled pride in attrition and reflected a culture that may conflate training standards with tradition and ritual, potentially discouraging perseverance and fostering emotional alienation.

Variation in role modeling and instructor impact.

Drill instructors play a profound role in shaping trainee behaviors and attitudes—trainees often imitate the conduct they observe. During the assessment, the study team observed meaningful variation in role modeling depending on setting. In drill instructor-controlled periods, trainees were frequently directed through high-pressure interactions characterized by raised voices, rapid commands, and public correction; in contrast, during subject-matter (“Round Robin”) instruction, trainers generally demonstrated professional coaching behaviors, including structured guidance, tolerance for mistakes, and constructive feedback. This disparity matters because instructor conduct can unintentionally normalize communication styles and conflict behaviors that trainees may later replicate on patrol. Consistent modeling of professional virtues—empathy, fairness, respect, and calm control—is essential to developing well-rounded troopers and aligning training with expected field behavior.

10 Paul M. Bons et al., *Leadership in Organizations* (New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1988), 452.

Summary

Regardless of the training model employed—high-stress, low-stress, or blended—professionalism and consistency from SPA staff must be non-negotiable. SPA leaders and drill instructors, in particular, must consistently embody and reinforce integrity, fairness, and respect throughout the SPA experience. When these standards are modeled and consistently upheld, trainees are more likely to internalize the values and behaviors essential to effective policing and sustaining public trust.

2.3 Instructor Development, Oversight, and Remediation Processes

The Massachusetts State Police Training Academy plays a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of state troopers, emphasizing leadership, discipline, and a commitment to excellence. Its comprehensive training program aims to instill self-confidence, resilience, and a deep connection to the organization's values. However, the SPA's instructor oversight, accountability, and remediation processes present a mix of strengths and challenges.

The Academy's paramilitary training approach is widely praised by senior leadership for fostering rigorous discipline, resilience, and esprit de corps. The emphasis on leadership development and professionalism serves as the SPA's foundation in preparing trainees for the demands of law enforcement.

Conversely, the SPA faces criticism for practices that conflict with its stated goals and philosophy of respect for human dignity. Observations during site visits identified training methods that were at times disorganized, disproportionate in intensity, and disconnected from defined instructional objectives. These included interactions between instructors and recruits that did not align with the boundaries of structured stress exposure and the professional conduct standards set forth in the SPA's own Training Manual. The environment produced by such methods risks undermining the intended goals of resilience and cohesion, and may instead contribute to unnecessary psychological stress, self-doubt, and

disengagement among recruits. Additionally, the absence of a structured process to allow resigning trainees an opportunity for reflection and reconsideration highlights a gap in the SPA's support and remediation framework.

According to the Massachusetts State Police Training Academy Manual, "The Department's training program prepares the trainee for the unique demands that will be placed on him or her as a Massachusetts State Trooper. It serves to develop the Trooper's self-confidence, pride, competence, and esprit de corps. It forms the trainee's identification with the organization and helps him or her internalize the organization's core values."

According to a 2006 report of the Massachusetts State Police Academy Commission, "Leadership development is the cornerstone of Massachusetts State Police recruit training and is essential to ensure a healthy, professional, and effective training environment. All Academy staff and instructors shall exhibit the highest values and standards of the Massachusetts State Police, as role models and mentors for trainees.

Training methods that conflict with the training philosophy of the Massachusetts State Police Academy are not tolerated. Any act that demonstrates a lack of respect for human dignity is strictly forbidden."

While the Massachusetts State Police Training Academy demonstrates a strong commitment to excellence, addressing these challenges in oversight and accountability will be essential to aligning its practices with its core values and ensuring a professional and effective training environment.

Observations and Findings

The analysis of instructor development, accountability, and remediation processes reveals several important findings. Instructor oversight is hindered by inconsistent onboarding and qualifications, with some instructors lacking formal POST certification and specific training for their roles. The absence of a formal mentoring program further exacerbates inconsistencies in teaching techniques, training management, and evaluation practices. Additionally, understaffing and unclear task ownership dilute oversight and hinder performance monitoring.

The mechanisms for accountability are underdeveloped, featuring limited performance tracking and inconsistent documentation of issues and corrective actions. The governance structure is still maturing, with processes and metrics being established. Similarly, remediation processes are inconsistent and do not adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), which should guide corrective actions, establish time-bound plans, and define objective success criteria. Follow-through on remediation is not systematic, and while wellness resources are valued, they are not fully integrated into remediation pathways. Common challenges include resource constraints, which affect the quality of oversight and training, and increased organizational risk due to variability in qualifications, documentation, and follow-through. Despite these difficulties, there is positive momentum. Leadership is focusing on improved communication and is committed to expanding staff and formalizing policies, which lays a solid foundation for progress.

Strengthened training support through specialized resources.

Some instructors have received specialized training—such as GRIN, suicide-prevention, or peer-support-related content—enhancing their ability to support trainees beyond classroom instruction. The SPA has also benefited from the establishment of a Training Academy Liaison and the integrated support systems of the Employee Assistance Unit (EAU), promoting early intervention and reinforcing wellness-focused programming.

Improved leadership communication and collaboration.

Recent leadership changes have resulted in better communication between SPA leadership and staff, with several personnel noting improvements in collaboration and organizational climate compared to previous years. Leadership across divisions also recognizes staffing and workload challenges, demonstrating awareness of the needs required to maintain quality training environments.

Absence of a standardized instructor evaluation and feedback system.

There is no documented, standardized evaluation system to assess instructor performance. Additionally, the academy lacks meaningful feedback loops from trainees to command staff, limiting the ability to identify strengths, detect issues early, and drive instructional improvements.

Lack of formal mentoring, remediation, and professional development for instructors.

New instructors receive limited structured onboarding or mentoring, resulting in highly inconsistent instructional quality. When issues arise, there are no formalized procedures for instructor remediation, retraining, or progressive accountability. Ongoing professional development is not systematically required, and many instructors lack POST certification or external instructional credentials, contrary to IADLEST model standards.

Inconsistent instructor qualifications and variable adherence to standards.

Many drill instructors lack sufficient experience or formal training in instructional methods, contributing to inconsistent doctrine, misunderstanding of adult learning principles, and deviation from policy. Command level staff overseeing training demonstrated strong professionalism and situational awareness, but this standard was not uniformly mirrored by the wider drill instructor cadre.

Lack of clear policies, standardized procedures, and documentation systems.

Policies for addressing instructor deficiencies or misconduct are either unclear or nonexistent. The SPA also lacks uniform documentation systems to track instructor issues, trainee corrective actions, and remediation outcomes—making accountability difficult to enforce and trends nearly impossible to monitor.

Staffing shortages contributing to instructor overextension and reduced oversight.

Insufficient staffing levels in some units have led to instructors being overextended, reducing opportunities for supervision, coaching, and professional development. Staffing gaps have also forced reliance on inadequately prepared personnel, increasing the likelihood of inconsistent training delivery.

Limited mechanisms to ensure curricula align with effective practices and field needs.

The SPA has limited processes for ensuring curriculum remains current with operational needs, emerging effective practices, or real-world lessons learned. Missed opportunities to incorporate case studies and contemporary field scenarios reflect a broader gap in strategic curriculum modernization. Additionally, the SPA lacks an overarching strategic plan to advance its training doctrine.

Summary

The Massachusetts State Police Training Academy is staffed by experienced and dedicated leaders who are taking steps to improve staffing and communication. However, the absence of consistent leadership, formal oversight, accountability measures, and remediation systems presents risks to the quality, effectiveness, and consistency of instruction. Without standardized evaluation tools, documented corrective processes, and consistent certification requirements, the effectiveness of training and public confidence may be compromised.

2.4 Trainee Mental Health & Support Systems

This assessment provides a concise, evidence-informed picture of how trainee mental health and support functions operate within the MSP Training Academy and where targeted improvements will yield the greatest benefit.

Findings were derived from structured interviews, on-site observation of SPA routines, review of available materials (e.g., resignation/exit processes), and synthesis of practitioner guidance on police wellness and recruit training. Particular attention was paid to the trainee experience during high-stress phases, the clarity of roles among EAU/Peer/Chaplain/clinician personnel, points of confidential access, and the presence (or absence) of data systems that support learning and continuous improvement.

The SPA has critical assets to build on: early wellness touchpoints (e.g., Week Zero wellness talks), on-site chaplain availability, a structured multi-step resignation/exit interview process, a dedicated Training Academy Liaison, and embedded medical capability (on-site EMS/PA). The EAU is staffed by sworn personnel, peer supporters throughout the agency, and part-time clinicians, demonstrating commitment and capacity.

At the same time, system gaps constrain effectiveness and create avoidable risk. Trainees have limited after-hours/weekend access to EAU and few drill instructor-free, confidential touchpoints during the most stressful periods of training. Formal SOPs governing engagement, confidentiality, and role clarity are not yet in place. There

is no mandatory or clearly criteria-based post-critical-incident debrief policy. Help resources are disseminated manually, and there is no integrated analytics tying resignations, recycles/deferrals, injuries, and help-seeking to training activities or outcomes. Stress-exposure practices are inconsistently applied and may be perceived by trainees as punitive or arbitrary-adjacent, while public “resign” messaging risks normalizing withdrawal and deterring help-seeking. Resilience education is front-loaded with minimal structured follow-up, and tech-enabled access (telehealth/app, anonymous self-checks) is limited.

Relevant to trainee mental health and support systems, we noted: (1) early wellness touchpoints (Week Zero talks; limited on-site chaplain availability; a structured, multi-step resignation/exit interview process), (2) an EAU staffed by sworn personnel, peer supporters, and part-time clinicians, and (3) strong medical support (on-site EMS/PA). Gaps include limited trainee access to EAU outside business hours, absence of formal SOPs governing EAU engagement and confidentiality, minimal protected time away from drill instructors for help-seeking, no mandatory post-critical-incident debrief policy, manual/inefficient dissemination of help resources, and insufficient analytics on attrition, injuries, and help-seeking.

Employee Assistance Unit / Peer Support Program

A lieutenant oversees the Employee Assistance Unit and the Peer Support Program. The staffing team consists of 13 sworn staff members and two part-time clinicians, with plans to hire an additional clinician. The part-time peer support team includes 33 members, 20 of whom are actively engaged. The unit also has one full-time chaplain to assist with its duties. Staff members also assist local departments alongside their primary responsibilities, while part-time clinicians assist with Employee Assistance Unit (EAU) debriefs.

The unit members expressed a desire to have more time with the trainees (outside from the view of drill instructors). EAU members do teach a block during the first week of RTT to the trainees on Employee Wellness. One EAU member is an adjunct instructor at the SPA and is very active as an EAU advocate for the trainees, but the trainees reportedly almost never contact him during their trainee training.

The unit members discuss stress inoculation and resiliency training in the block during the first week of RTT but when asked about the stress exposure resiliency training that the SPA provides, the unit members were not sure where that training originated from. The primary goals of EAU members include improving trainee relations and program visibility through more structured engagement. The unit aims to establish a mandatory debriefing process, ensure weekend accessibility, and enhance protocols for sensitive scenarios, such as resignations.

The SPA also has a Liaison Officer (Sergeant) assigned to act as an ombudsman / resource person to trainees who may be experiencing either personal or family issues during their RTT training. This position reports directly to the Major assigned to the SPA and is outside of the SPA's chain-of-command.

In spite of the efforts of EAU, Peer Support, Chaplains, and the Liaison Sergeant, continuing support for the wellbeing of trainees and their family members throughout the 25-week program needs to be more robust.

Observations and Findings

Access and availability.

Trainees lack after-hours/weekend access to EAU; contact information is shared manually; few confidential, DI-free touchpoints exist during the most stressful phases.

Policy and process.

No formal SOPs define EAU/Peer Support roles with trainees; no mandatory (or clearly criteria-based) debriefing policy; resignation protocols occur within earshot of high-stress activities, which may inhibit reconsideration and help-seeking.

Culture and stigma.

Stress-exposure practices are inconsistently applied and sometimes perceived as punitive or initiating-adjacent; frequent public messaging to “resign” can normalize withdrawal and deter help-seeking.

Lack of family support.

State police academies are increasingly recognizing the importance of wellness in law enforcement training. Through a combination of mentorship, professional support, structured education, and family engagement, these programs aim to build resilience, reduce stress, and foster a supportive environment for trainees. The diversity and depth of these resources reflect a growing commitment to holistic development and long-term well-being in the profession.

A 2025 survey of state police academies conducted by the IACP determined that 89 percent of agencies that responded to the survey (34 out of 38 agencies) permitted trainees to contact family members via telephone after training hours and during their personal time, though the methods, timing and restrictions varied across agencies. Some agencies allow liberal access while others provide fixed daily time slots for telephone calls.

Programs and training.

One-time resilience education occurs early with little structured follow-up; limited use of evidence-based psychological skills training (e.g., mindfulness, emotional intelligence, stress first aid), and few tech-enabled access options (telehealth/app).

Assets to build on.

Embedded medical capability, active chaplaincy, a dedicated Training Academy Liaison, and motivated EAU/Peer Support leaders provide a strong foundation for a comprehensive, best-practice wellness system.

Summary

A modern, best-practice trainee wellness system does more than add services, it reduces preventable attrition, improves learning and safety, and normalizes early help-seeking without undermining legitimate, purposeful stress training. Aligning the SPA's promising assets with a clear policy architecture, 24/7 private access, a progressive, career-long wellness curriculum, and routine data feedback loops will position MSP to meet national expectations and the operational realities of contemporary policing.

MSP has key building blocks for a modern trainee mental-health ecosystem but lacks the policy architecture, protected access channels, continuous curriculum, and data systems that leading practice requires. Re-anchoring trainee wellness to national guidance (IACP, PERF, DOJ/COPS/BJA, ICISF) and integrating low-friction access (24/7, private, tech-enabled) will reduce preventable attrition, improve safety/learning, and normalize early help-seeking without diminishing legitimate, purposeful stress training.

2.5 Costs/Benefits of Communal Living Arrangements on Trainee Health and Performance

The Massachusetts State Police Training Academy operates a residential/barracks model for trainees and some staff, with on-site lodging at New Braintree and frequent overnight travel to off-site venues (e.g., EVOC and aquatic training). Communal living can strengthen cohesion and standardization, but without strong governance can degrade sleep, elevate stress/injury risk, amplify infection transmission, and burden instructors after hours. Contemporary guidance from IACP and PERF emphasizes wellness, adult-learning, fatigue risk management, and clear policies that limit initiating type behaviors, protect sleep, and normalize help-seeking (PERF, 2022; IACP/Police Chief fatigue guidance).

Residential campus (>800 acres) with trainee/staff lodging, strong on-site medical support, and high-stress culture in early weeks. Aquatic and EVOC training off-site, often requiring long travel or overnights.

Reported issues relevant to communal living: aging/isolated quarters (e.g., female housing), basement alarms and HVAC concerns, minimal free time, inconsistent quiet hours, limited off-hours access to EAU/Peer Support/Chaplains, and high early attrition.

Staff cite shortages, fragmented capital planning/budget authority, and lack of analytics to track deferrals/recycles/injuries; EAU seeks more structured and confidential contact with trainees away from DI oversight.

Observations and Findings

Team cohesion and peer support.

Living together can accelerate horizontal bonding, shared identity, and timely communication factors associated with performance and resilience in uniformed settings. Evidence in military/police research links cohesion and social support with better coping and mental-health outcomes.

Training control and logistics.

On-site housing enables early starts, schedule flexibility, uniform standards, and rapid muster for scenarios—advantages often cited by centralized/residential academies.

Safety and oversight.

A controlled campus can support consistent supervision, rapid medical response (MSP TA has robust on-site EMS/PA care), and standardized policy enforcement.

Sleep disruption and fatigue.

Communal quarters, alarms, noise, and 24/7 oversight can impair sleep. Sleep loss degrades decision-making, reaction time, and mood; policing studies link insufficient sleep to errors, injuries, and health risks. Agencies are urged to institute fatigue-risk management, predictable schedules, and protected quiet hours.

Infectious disease spread.

Shared rooms, bathrooms, and dining elevate respiratory illness transmission; CDC and USG guidance for shared housing call for ventilation, cleaning, isolation capacity, and symptom reporting.

Privacy, dignity, and inclusion issues.

Communal living without adequate privacy/amenities disproportionately affects women and other under-represented groups; defense/DoD literature shows design and policy (separate secure spaces, gender-sensitive staffing, harassment control) are critical to morale and retention.

Instructor workload and morale.

Residential models can blur off-duty boundaries, creating after-hours supervisory burdens that reduce rest and elevate burnout among drill instructors and support staff; fatigue guidance includes clear limits and shift design.

Facility and operating costs.

Communal housing requires sustained investment in HVAC, noise control, life-safety systems, cleaning, and upkeep; federal assessments show poor barracks conditions erode readiness and morale, implying real cost to institutional effectiveness.

Summary

The SPA's communal living environment delivers cohort benefits and operational control, but current conditions (facilitation conditions, sleep disruption, limited protected time, constrained off-hours wellness access, dated facilities, gender-sensitive layout gaps) likely impose avoidable costs on health, learning, and morale. National guidance urges academies to embed wellness, fatigue management, inclusive facilities, and "no-initiating/clear purpose" stress exposure, while protecting study/sleep time and access to confidential support.

Recommendations

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0008	Critical	▶ Establish a balanced stress / non-stress model to lower attrition and improve performance. ▶ Insist that high stress exposure be limited to purposeful training exercises and linked to an identified learning objective.
R0009	Critical	▶ Reduce reliance on high-stress training; integrate stress in realistic, job-related contexts and tied to specific learning objectives in the curriculum.
R0010	Critical	▶ Educate the trainees about the purpose of and the learning objectives related to intentional stress exposure prior to implementing stress exposure and throughout the training.
R0011	Critical	▶ Create opportunities for trainees to decompress between training exercises (e.g., mealtimes, evening personal time).
R0012	Critical	▶ Promote a supportive learning environment emphasizing mentorship, guidance, and professionalism.
R0013	Critical	▶ Maintain professional discipline in accordance with the Instructor's Code of Conduct while eliminating traditional methods of humiliation, dehumanizing, or arbitrary punishments.
R0014	Critical	▶ Have a written instructor remediation policy grounded in job tasks and minimum standards. ▶ Remediation should be defined as targeted, time-bound instruction to address specific skills or knowledge deficiencies. It should be implemented quickly when deficiencies are identified. ▶ Policies must align with job-task analyses and clearly state pass/fail criteria, re-testing rules, the appeals process, and conditions for repeating topics or releasing trainees from training.
R0015	Critical	▶ Instructor selection, preparation, and oversight. ▶ Attract capable instructors with clear criteria and incentives; train them in adult learning and evaluation. ▶ Implement a QA process and regular instructor refreshers aligned with curriculum changes.
R0016	Critical	▶ Clear thresholds for extension, re-test, or separation. ▶ Provide structured and consistent opportunities to re-test after remedial instruction; set limits on the number/timing of re-tests; when remediation fails, use documented processes to extend training or separate the trainee.
R0017	Critical	▶ Emotional Intelligence. ▶ Introduce evidence-based modules (emotional intelligence, mindfulness, sleep/fatigue, stress first aid) across SPA phases and into FTO.¹¹
R0018	Critical	▶ Quiet hours & lights-out policy. ▶ Posted and enforced in all barracks, aligned with fatigue science (e.g., 7–9 hrs. opportunity to sleep); designate “study hours” separate from sleep hours. ▶ Model on higher-ed & federal dorm policies and fatigue risk frameworks.
R0019	Critical	▶ Shift/supervision design. ▶ Rotate after-hours duty, cap consecutive late nights, and prohibit unscheduled “motivational” formations during established quiet hours.
R0020	Critical	▶ Inclusion, Privacy & Safety in Barracks. ▶ Gender-sensitive assignments: Provide two qualified female staff per deck during high-stress phases; privacy partitions; secure access; clear antiharassment rules and reporting).

¹¹ D. W. Grupe et al., “The Impact of Mindfulness Training on Police Officer Stress, Mental Health, and Salivary Cortisol Levels,” National Institute of Justice, n.d., <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/impact-mindfulness-training-police-officer-stress-mental-health-and-salivary>

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0021	Priority 1	▶ Early identification through structured evaluation and quality assurance. ▶ Standardize evaluation tools and performance tests, ensuring consistent training across instructors before evaluations. Implement internal quality assurance for assessors and document instructor standards.
R0022	Priority 1	▶ Align SPA remediation with field training (FTO) to avoid mixed messages. ▶ Build SPA and field training “in tandem,” centralize FTO management, select experienced high-performing FTOs through rigorous processes, and ensure field training reinforces academy learning (not undermine it).
R0023	Priority 1	▶ Private Access to Care. ▶ Publish EAU access card/QR in every trainee packet; Stand up an on-call rotation and a confidential hotline; enable secure telehealth and a wellness app to remove logistical barriers (model: large-agency telehealth pilots).¹²
R0024	Priority 1	▶ Integrate Wellness support into trainee remediation. ▶ EAU/Peer Support “warm handoffs” after any remedial assignment; confidential access (incl. off-hours); routine resilience micro-sessions; family-aware supports. (IACP Officer Safety & Wellness).
R0025	Priority 1	▶ Embed a Progressive, Career-Long Wellness Curriculum. ▶ Integrate recurring modules (sleep/fatigue, mindfulness, moral injury, family readiness, suicide prevention, stress first aid), starting in Week Zero and recurring through SPA phases and FTO. ▶ Evidence shows mindfulness/resilience training can lower stress biomarkers and improve mental health.¹³
R0026	Priority 1	▶ Normalize Help-Seeking Through Leadership & Messaging. ▶ Use monthly wellness messaging; commander-led endorsements; supervisor coaching; integrate wellness goals into performance expectations.^{14, 15}
R0027	Priority 2	▶ Establish Data & Evaluation Loops. ▶ Deploy a wellness dashboard (e.g., in Power BI) tracking exit reasons, injuries (with training-activity link), EAU contacts, and utilization; use IACP assessment tools.¹⁶
R0028	Priority 3	▶ Implement telephone privileges during personal time. ▶ The MSP should implement a policy to allow trainees to contact family members after training hours.¹⁷

12 Police Executive Research Forum, *Critical Issues in Policing*, February 12, 2021, <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues12feb21>.

13 D. W. Grupe et al. The Impact of Mindfulness Training on Police Officer Stress, Mental Health, and Salivary Cortisol Levels”

14 U.S. Department of Justice, *Report on Best Practices to Advance Officer Wellness*, n.d., [https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-05/Sec.%204\(a\)%20-Report%20on%20Best%20Practices%20to%20Advance%20Officer%20Wellness_FINAL.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-05/Sec.%204(a)%20-Report%20on%20Best%20Practices%20to%20Advance%20Officer%20Wellness_FINAL.pdf).

15 International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Monthly Wellness Messaging Toolkit for Law Enforcement*, n.d., https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/274939_Wellness_Messaging_Toolkit_508c.pdf

16 International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness*, n.d., https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/258181_IACP_22_LE_Mental_Health_p3.pdf.

17 David M. Blumberg et al., “New Directions in Police Academy Training: A Call to Action,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 24 (December 6, 2019), <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/16/24/4941>.



SECTION 3: RECRUITMENT, HIRING, AND ATTRITION

Recruitment, Hiring, and Attrition Key Findings

► Front-End Hiring and Selection Misalignment

- Recruitment pathways—especially the reliance on civil service lists without structured MSP-led interviews or realistic job previews—are viewed as admitting candidates who are not well-suited for the role. These gaps lead to higher attrition, downstream remediation, and a belief among SPA staff that they must “self-correct” hiring errors during training.

► Attrition-Driven Academy Culture and Training Dynamics

- A long-standing culture that normalizes—or even celebrates—high attrition (e.g., symbolic displays and traditions) conflates rigor with dropout rates. This environment can discourage perseverance, undermine psychological safety, and foster emotional alienation among trainees, contributing to unnecessary resignations.

► Data, Analytics, and Visibility Gaps Across the Pipeline

- MSP lacks integrated, routine analytics to track deferrals, recycles, failure points, and detailed reasons for resignation. Limited data systems obscure where and why candidates exit the pipeline, weakening program evaluation and evidence-based improvements.

► Background Processing and Operational Capacity Strain

- High background investigation volumes, elevated rejection rates, and insufficient coordination with HR overwhelm current staffing. Delays in processing and communication contribute to under-prepared trainees, SPA instability, and increased administrative burden on training staff.

► Fragmented Governance and Interagency Coordination

- The absence of a clearly designated MSP representative for routine engagement with POST limits structured feedback, slows issue resolution, and reduces alignment on standards, assessments, and training changes. Shared decision-making and data exchange are minimal and informal.

► Inconsistent Exit, Feedback, and Continuous Improvement Mechanisms

- While the existing resignation/exit flow has promise as an effective practice, its effectiveness is undermined by drill instructor pressure during exits and narrow data capture tools. Without neutral, post-separation follow-ups and robust evaluation instruments, valuable insights for systemic improvement are lost.

3.1 The Recruitment and Hiring Process

This assessment examines how MSP's current hiring and onboarding processes impact outcomes at the SPA. Specifically, it focuses on trainee readiness, early attrition, scheduling challenges, facility strain, instructor workload, and enterprise-wide coordination. The study synthesizes interview and observation data collected from MSP personnel and SPA staff, along with national effective practices from organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ COPS Office), and other authoritative sources. The goal is to identify actionable improvements that can reduce avoidable attrition, enhance training quality and safety, and align hiring practices with modern, evidence-based police training.

The MSP relies on two different hiring processes. The first is the Recruit Training Troop (RTT) hiring process. Civil Service and Administrative Services manage this process. Under this process, MSP is not involved in hiring the applicants, except for conducting their background investigations. This selection process consists of a review of disqualifying factors and of appropriate medical clearances. Once the applicant meets all the requirements, their name will be added to the eligibility list, which will be sent to the MSP's senior command and training academy, who will ensure that the applicant meets the age requirements. Upon meeting this requirement, the applicant is automatically accepted into the RTT.

The MSP Cadet Program provides a paid, full-time civilian position with benefits and is open to Massachusetts residents between the ages of 19 and 25 who are interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. Cadets who successfully complete the program and pass the statewide Civil Service Law Enforcement Exam—administered by the Human Resources Division (HRD) and commonly referred to as the Police Officer Exam or Law Enforcement Exam—may be eligible for direct appointment to a Recruit Training Troop (RTT) at the SPA. Massachusetts does not administer a separate MSP-specific written entrance examination; instead, this single statewide civil service exam is used to establish eligibility for both municipal police departments and the Massachusetts State Police. Candidates from the Cadet Program are interviewed

by MSP staff as part of the appointment process and, if selected, are assigned to the next available RTT alongside non-Cadet candidates who enter the SPA through the standard civil service eligibility process.

The hiring process presents several challenges related to sometimes inaccurate and unfair characterizations of applicant qualifications. There has been a long-standing belief among SPA staff that the hiring process is so flawed, that the responsibility to properly “weed out” unfit candidates should fall to the SPA staff. A history of high attrition in RTT is consistently justified in support of this belief. While not a part of the scope of this study, further examination of the hiring process is highly recommended.

Observations and Findings

Recruitment and trainee quality.

Statewide civil service testing and other aspects of the MSP hiring process is perceived by staff to negatively affect the quality of MSP trainees and to contributing to high attrition rates. This perception has resulted in a belief by SPA staff that it is their responsibility to “weed out” unqualified trainees, thus justifying a long history of high attrition at the SPA.

Front-end selection gaps drive downstream attrition and cost.

The RTT pathway largely depends on civil service lists and disqualifier screenings but lacks a structured interview process by MSP leadership. Additionally, there is a limited realistic job preview and insufficient analytics on deferrals and recycles. This combination raises the chances of admitting applicants who are not well-suited for the job, leading to higher rates of early resignations and the need for remediation during training. As a result, certain SPA staff may feel compelled to eliminate candidates they consider unsuitable for employment. This creates an environment characterized by disfunction and an atmosphere of unfairness, which further exacerbates the distrust of the hiring process.

Background processing volume and rejection rates overwhelm current staffing.

A lack of proper coordination with HR increases the time needed to process background applications, leading to delayed notifications for SPA staff and inadequately prepared trainees. This exacerbates instability within the SPA.

Limited data systems obscure the pipeline.

MSP does not consistently track deferrals, recycles, failure points or reasons for resignation at a level of detail needed to correct systemic issues; analytics tools (e.g., Power BI) are not yet institutionalized.

Interagency alignment with POST would benefit from formalization.

The study team found no clearly designated MSP representative responsible for routine engagement with POST, which limits structured feedback loops on standards, assessments, and training changes and can slow issue resolution.

Process design.

RTT hires are largely “opt-in” through civil service with medical/eligibility screening, **but no interview boards**; Cadet appointments include interviews. Backgrounds are handled by MSP, high rejection rates and large volumes strain staff.

Analytics.

MSP lacks comprehensive tracking of deferrals/recycles, attrition reason codes, and detailed failure points.

Coordination.

Minimal MSP presence in POST decision cycles; limited shared, timely data.

Summary

MSP’s hiring pipeline delivers inconsistent fit-for-training, with early-stage failures shifting burden onto SPA staff, inflating remedial load, fatigue, and attrition. Weak analytics obscure root causes and hinder targeted fixes. Peer academy feedback (SPPADS) suggests that agencies are strengthening upstream trainee support and standards alignment—e.g., assigning mentors before day one and using POST liaisons to review lesson plans and testing—while national effective practices further support a more front-loaded, data-driven selection process (structured interviews, realistic job previews, early task simulations) and deliberate capital planning to bring core training onsite.

3.2 Attrition

The Bureau of Justice Statistics’ 2022 national study of law enforcement training academies revealed shifting trends in recruit training philosophies and attrition patterns. Out of more than 60,000 recruits nationwide, 85% successfully completed basic training. However, completion rates at state-level police and highway patrol academies trailed behind at 77%.

Recruit attrition—both voluntary and involuntary—continues to be a challenge, with female recruits experiencing disproportionately higher rates of non-completion due to factors such as injury, physical performance, and skill qualifications. These figures point to a critical need for academies to assess and adapt training environments to promote inclusion, retention, and long-term success.

Academies were asked about the degree to which their curriculum followed a stress model (i.e., military or paramilitary style), a nonstress model (i.e., academic or adult learning), or a combination of both models. In 2022, 60% of recruits were trained under a model using equal parts stress and nonstress training, a higher percentage than in 2018 (49%) and 2013. (34%). All or mostly stress models were used to train 5% of recruits in 2022, down from 11% in 2018 and 23% in 2013.

Additional data from the BJS survey revealed that one in 20 recruits (5%) who started basic training voluntarily withdrew from their program and did not complete basic training and that about 13% of female recruits did not complete basic training due to an involuntary reason, compared to 7% of male recruits.¹⁸

Other notable statistics from the BJS study concluded that:

- ▶ Eighty percent (48,005) of all starting recruits (60,214) were male and 20% (12,209) were female.
- ▶ Fourteen percent of recruits who started basic training were military veterans.
- ▶ In 2022, about 13% of male recruits did not complete basic training, compared to 19% of female recruits.
- ▶ One in 20 recruits (5%) who started basic training voluntarily withdrew from their program and did not complete basic training.
- ▶ About 13% of female recruits did not complete basic training due to an involuntary reason, compared to 7% of male recruits.
- ▶ Three percent of female recruits did not complete basic training due to illness or injury and 2% did not complete due to an inability to meet physical standards, while 1% of male recruits did not complete for each of those reasons.
- ▶ About 3% of female recruits did not complete basic training because they failed to qualify on firearms, driving, or other skills, compared to 1% of male recruits.

TABLE 1. STRESS / NON-STRESS TRAINING MODELS—PERCENT OF ACADEMIES¹⁹

Type of Training Model	2011-2013	2018	2022
All/Mostly Stress	22.6%	6.1%	4.4%
Slightly More Stress than Nonstress	25.7%	16.4%	12.2%
Balanced Stress and Nonstress	31.5%	52.4%	57.7%
Slightly More Nonstress than Stress	12.1%	20.7%	22%
All/Mostly Nonstress	8.1%	4.5%	3.7%

In 2022, almost 60% of all training academies used a balanced stress / non-stress model of training and, nationwide, 85% of recruits who started basic training completed basic training.

▶ National Completion Rates

- ▶ 84.9% of recruits across all state and local law enforcement academies completed basic training in 2022.
- ▶ 77.4% of recruits at state police and highway patrol academies completed basic training—lower than the national average.

▶ Training Model Trends

- ▶ Use of balanced stress/non-stress models rose to 57.7% in 2022, up from 52.4% (2018) and 31.5% (2011-2013).
- ▶ Reliance on all/most stress models dropped sharply to 4.4%, down from 11% (2018) and 22.6% (2013).
- ▶ Most academies now favor blended approaches, reflecting a shift away from traditional paramilitary stress-heavy training.

¹⁸ Emily D. Buehler, State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2024).

¹⁹ Ibid.

► **Recruit Demographics and Attrition**

- 80% of recruits were male; 20% female.
- 14% of recruits were military veterans.
- Overall voluntary attrition rate was 5%.
- Female recruits had a higher involuntary attrition rate (13%) vs. male recruits (7%).

► **Common Reasons for Non-Completion:**

- Illness/injury: 3% (female); 1% (male)
- Failure to meet physical standards: 2% (female); 1% (male)
- Skill qualification failure (e.g. firearms, driving): 3% (female); 1% (male)

Attrition at the MSP Academy

It is up to the MSP to decide how much attrition they are willing to accept. The attrition rate is largely a conscious choice, but comparatively, attrition at the SPA is significantly higher than at most other police academies nationwide. In a 2022 Bureau of Justice Statistics national

survey of 747 police academies, the attrition rate for all law enforcement training academies averaged 15 percent and averaged 23 percent for state police academies.²⁰ A 2025 survey of state police academies conducted by the IACP determined that the average attrition for the previous three classes for each responding agency (38 total responses) was 26 percent.

Table 2 shows the attrition rates and reason for attrition for RTT classes 82-91.

Past discussions have been focused on “what is an acceptable resignation rate” by academy. The percentages of resignation from the ten academies included in this study range from a low of 16.2% to 50.0%. After additional analysis, it is reasonable to conclude the focus should not be on the actual number or the overall percentage of resignations by RTT but on the timing of “when the cadets are resigning” from the assigned SPA as shown in **Table 3**.

TABLE 2. ATTRITION RATES AND REASONS FOR ATTRITION BY RTT (RTT 82-91)

Cadet Count		General Resign Reason						
RTT	Academy Start Date	Medical Related	Training Too Demanding	Misc	Not Specified	GRAD	Grand Total	% of RESIGN by RTT
82	Oct 19, 2015	25			32	158	215	26.5%
83	Aug 14, 2017	25			48	174	247	29.6%
84	Jan 21, 2019	9			24	171	204	16.2%
85	Jan 06, 2020	17			42	239	298	19.8%
86	May 24, 2021	17			45	168	230	27.0%
87	May 09, 2022	20	22	23		193	258	25.2%
88	Feb 27, 2023	23	29	28	10	165	255	35.3%
89	Sep 11, 2023	24			51	75	150	50.0%
90	Apr 22, 2024	27			72	185	284	34.9%
91	May 05, 2025	11			13	100	124	19.4%
Grand Total		198	51	51	337	1,628	2,265	28.1%

²⁰ Ibid.

TABLE 3. RESIGNATION RATES PER RTT BY WEEK

CADET COUNT		RESIGN					
RTT	Gen Resign Reason	WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4	WK 5+	Academy Start Date
82	Medical Related	80.00%	88.00%	92.00%	100.00%	100.00%	Oct 19, 2015
	Not Specified	78.13%	93.75%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	
82 Total		78.95%	91.23%	96.49%	100.00%	100.00%	
83	Medical Related	68.00%	88.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	Aug 14, 2017
	Not Specified	83.33%	95.83%	95.83%	100.00%	100.00%	
83 Total		78.08%	93.15%	97.26%	100.00%	100.00%	
84	Medical Related	66.67%	88.89%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	Jan 21, 2019
	Not Specified	66.67%	70.83%	70.83%	83.33%	100.00%	
84 Total		66.67%	75.76%	78.79%	87.88%	100.00%	
85	Medical Related	23.53%	64.71%	82.35%	100.00%	100.00%	Jan 06, 2020
	Not Specified	76.19%	88.10%	88.10%	92.86%	100.00%	
85 Total		61.02%	81.36%	86.44%	94.92%	100.00%	
86	Medical Related	0.00%	47.06%	70.59%	88.24%	100.00%	May 24, 2021
	Not Specified	31.11%	62.22%	75.56%	84.44%	100.00%	
86 Total		22.58%	58.06%	74.19%	85.48%	100.00%	
87	Medical Related	5.00%	60.00%	65.00%	80.00%	100.00%	May 09, 2022
	Training Too Demanding	27.27%	68.18%	81.82%	86.36%	100.00%	
	Misc	17.39%	69.57%	78.26%	78.26%	100.00%	
87 Total		16.92%	66.15%	75.38%	81.54%	100.00%	
88	Medical Related	39.13%	73.91%	95.65%	95.65%	100.00%	Feb 27, 2023
	Training Too Demanding	62.07%	89.66%	93.10%	100.00%	100.00%	
	Misc	57.14%	75.00%	89.29%	92.86%	100.00%	
	Not Specified	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	60.00%	100.00%	
88 Total		54.44%	77.78%	88.89%	92.22%	100.00%	
89	Medical Related	66.67%	91.67%	91.67%	95.83%	100.00%	Sep 11, 2023
	Not Specified	56.86%	82.35%	88.24%	90.20%	100.00%	
89 Total		60.00%	85.33%	89.33%	92.00%	100.00%	
90	Medical Related	44.44%	77.78%	81.48%	96.30%	100.00%	Apr 22, 2024
	Not Specified	59.72%	75.00%	86.11%	86.11%	100.00%	
90 Total		55.56%	75.76%	84.85%	88.89%	100.00%	
91	Medical Related	9.09%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	May 05, 2025
	Not Specified	46.15%	84.62%	84.62%	92.31%	100.00%	
91 Total		29.17%	91.67%	91.67%	95.83%	100.00%	
Grand Total		53.53%	78.96%	86.50%	91.68%	100.00%	

As indicated by the percentages above, the majority of resignations take place by the second week of the SPA. The highlights are detailed per the legend shown below.

- Total # of resignations between 90% – 99% occurred before the end of WEEK 2
- Total # of resignations between 80% – 89% occurred before the end of WEEK 2
- Total # of resignations between 70% – 79% occurred before the end of WEEK 2
- Total # of resignations between 60% – 69% occurred before the end of WEEK 2
- Total # of resignations between 50% – 59% occurred before the end of WEEK 2

This finding concurs with the findings from the 2006 Academy Commission report which stated:

“The Academy consistently loses approximately 33% of recruits through resignation from the training program. Virtually all of this attrition occurs within the first few days of training and very few if any occurs after the first two weeks. It would appear from testimony heard by the Commission that the single greatest attribute required for success at the Academy is the desire to succeed. Respondents reported that there were times when it would have been easier to quit but that they were determined to carry on. It is also apparent that the vast majority of recruits who resign did so because they are overwhelmed by the program and simply were not prepared for the rigors of Academy life.

The 2006 Commission identified the selection and screening process as the portion of the training process where the greatest improvement could be achieved with the least amount of effort. Despite the many steps involved in this procedure (or perhaps because of them), the process provides a false sense of adequacy. In too many cases, the current system only identifies those capable of meeting minimally acceptable standards but not those who possess the

emotional and physical commitment necessary to succeed in the training program. The Commission believes that this contributes greatly to the high attrition rates at the Academy.

Likewise, there has been no effort on the part of the Department to identify qualities that differentiate successful from unsuccessful candidates that might help focus the selection process.”²¹

A recruit training program can be designed to be so challenging and chaotic that many trainees leave, or so lax that many trainees simply slide through. The balance should be somewhere in the middle ... with the goal being to build/grow/strengthen/train trainees from where they are when initially entering the SPA into troopers prepared to have a maximally successful career. And, the impact of attrition is financial, but it also impacts communities throughout the Commonwealth by having fewer troopers available to do their job. So, the public safety impact is as significant as the financial impact—and both are critical. The SPA staff should thoroughly analyze and question the reasons for attrition and consider what can be done differently to instill success.

The amount of attrition that occurs within the first two weeks in the RTT program also potentially impacts the quality and preparedness of some trainees who complete the training. Several staff members have indicated that due to the high numbers of early resignations during the SPA's initial phase, the SPA leadership is “pressured” to provide as much remedial training as possible to trainees who otherwise might not successfully complete the academic requirements. As noted, this could lead to performance shortcomings and public safety issues.

While the MSP tracks overall trainee attrition and requires departing trainees to complete an exit questionnaire, the structure of the questionnaire relies on a limited set of predefined response options. As a result, the instrument may constrain trainees' ability to fully articulate the underlying or contributing reasons for voluntary separation. The resignation process does not include systematic follow-up analysis to identify patterns, secondary factors, or preventable causes of attrition.

21 Kathleen M. Burke et al., *Report of the Massachusetts State Police Academy Commission* (Boston, MA, March 2006).

Financial Impact of Attrition

An analysis the financial impact of trainee attrition on SPA operations was conducted. By quantifying the costs associated with attrition, the findings illustrate the value of improving early-stage retention and engagement and potential savings. Particular attention was been given to early dropouts—trainees who separate during the first two weeks of academy training as this stage often represents the highest cost per individual relative to time served.

Despite the SPA's best efforts to obtain it, consistent data for each of the last five training academies (87th RTT – 91st RTT) was unavailable. To complete the financial impact analysis, the list of factors in **Table 4** was developed and includes data and estimates provided by MSP and data generated from the attrition analysis phase of this project.

TABLE 4. FINANCIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS FACTORS

Factors	Value	Description
Total Trainees	250	Average total trainees starting an academy
Trainee Bi-weekly Salary	\$2,000	Trainee bi-weekly training stipend during the academy
Academy Training Cost per Trainee²²	\$38,050	Direct training cost
Average Time in Academy	26	Length of academy training (26 weeks)
Attrition Rate (Overall)	33%	Total attrition before graduating academy
Early Dropout Rate (within 2 weeks)	25.6%	Of total trainees
Weeks Before Dropout	2	For early attrition

The Academy Training Cost per Trainee value of \$38,050 was calculated based on the \$60,834 figure provided by MSP as the direct training cost per trainee which included the \$2,000 trainee bi-weekly salary stipend paid during the SPA, in addition to equipment, food services, uniforms, outside trainers, medical and psychological evaluations,

materials, etc. IACP removed \$26,000, representing the total stipend a trainee receives for completing a 26-week academy. A separate Trainee Bi-weekly Salary line-item was created to ensure accuracy of the calculations. IACP also added an additional figure of \$3,216 per trainee to the direct training cost representing State Police Academy drill staff annual base salaries as shown in **Table 5**.

TABLE 5. MSP ACADEMY STAFF COST PER TRAINEE

State Police Academy Drill Staff as of 09 15 25			
Job Title	MSPID	EE CNT	Annual Base Pay
Captain	3341	1	\$205,390.12
Captain Total		1	\$205,390.12
Lieutenant	3116	1	\$190,997.04
Lieutenant Total		1	\$190,997.04
State Police Sergeant	3204	1	\$147,332.12
	3985	1	\$116,860.64
State Police Sergeant Total		2	\$264,192.76
State Police Trooper, 1st Class	3882	1	\$115,011.00
	4005	1	\$110,851.00
	4021	1	\$110,851.00
	4318	1	\$112,308.04
	4477	1	\$107,589.82
State Police Trooper, 1st Class Total		5	\$556,610.86
State Police Trooper	4714	1	\$100,133.28
	5044	1	\$97,700.20
	5078	1	\$97,700.20
	5199	1	\$95,268.68
State Police Trooper Total		4	\$390,802.36
Grand Total		13	\$1,607,993.14
26 Week Academy Cost Per Trainee			\$3,215.99

²² The analysis is dependent on the accuracy of the Academy Training Cost per Trainee figure provided by MSP. Although MSP provided a great deal of SPA operational and administrative financial data, IACP was unable to replicate the data that confirmed the direct training cost figure provided.

To determine the financial impact of early attrition (within two weeks of the start of the RTT class) and late attrition (after two weeks), the number of trainees lost within those two periods was first determined as shown in **Figure 1**.

FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF TRAINEES LOST IN EARLY AND LATE ATTRITION PERIODS

Number of trainees lost overall	
Total Attrition: 250 X 33%	= 82.5 trainees
Early dropouts (within 2 weeks)	
Early Attrition = 250 x 25.6%	= 64.0 trainees
Later attrition (after 2 weeks)	
Later Attrition = 82.5 - 21.1	= 18.5 trainees

Once the number of trainees within each period was determined, the estimated cost of attrition was then calculated as shown in **Figure 2**.

FIGURE 2. COST IMPACT OF EARLY AND LATER ATTRITION

Cost of Early Attrition	
Estimated Dropout Cost:	\$40,050.00 *
Each early dropout cost = (\$38,050 + \$2,000) * 64	\$2,563,200.00
Cost of Later Attrition	
Estimated Dropout Cost:	\$62,050.00 *
Each later dropout cost = (\$38,050 + (12 * \$2,000)) * 18.5	\$1,147,925.00

* Dropout costs do not include the following, cost of overtime to cover vacancies in the field, lodging or facilities operating expenses, or administrative expenses to trainee and fill open academy seats.

FIGURE 3. ESTIMATED COST SAVINGS RESULTING FROM REDUCING ATTRITION

SCENARIO: REDUCE EARLY ATTRITION BY 20%

If early attrition (25.6%) is reduced by 20%, the new early dropout rate becomes 20%:

$$25.6\% \times (1 - .2) = 20\%$$

$$\text{New Early Attrition} = 250 \times 20\% = 50$$

A 20% early dropout rate reduces the number of dropouts within the first two weeks from 64 to 50 trainees.

Reduction by 14 trainees (64 - 50)

ESTIMATED COST SAVINGS (14 trainees x \$40,050):	\$560,700.00
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SCENARIO: REDUCE EARLY ATTRITION BY 30%

If early attrition (25.6%) is reduced by 30%, the new early dropout rate becomes 18%:

$$25.6\% \times (1 - .3) = 18\%$$

$$\text{New Early Attrition} = 250 \times .18\% = 45$$

A 30% early dropout rate reduces the number of dropouts within the first two weeks from 64 to 45 trainees.

Reduction by 19 trainees (64 - 45)

ESTIMATED COST SAVINGS (19 trainees x \$62,050):	\$760,950.00
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The Attrition Financial Impact Analysis highlights the substantial financial impact of both early and later-stage attrition within the SPA training cycle. The analysis demonstrates that early separations have a disproportionately high cost due to the front-loaded investment in recruitment, onboarding, and training.

By modeling various reduction scenarios, the report quantifies potential cost savings associated with improving early retention. The results confirm that modest decreases in early attrition yield meaningful financial benefits and support the Academy's long-term workforce sustainability goals.

Resignation / Exit Interview Process

The study team members observed the process for resignation. A trainee may approach any staff member at any time to request a voluntary resignation. When this occurs, the trainee is led to the lobby and met by a staff member. The trainee signs out on a laptop for time and attendance purposes. Then, the trainee is encouraged to watch a 17 ½ minute video where the Commandant explains that the trainee has an opportunity to reconsider the resignation and what the options and consequences are for resigning. Finally, the trainee completes a limited online questionnaire that seeks to determine the reason(s) for resignation.

After that, a member of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers to speak with the trainee as does a member of the Recruiting & Diversity Unit. Members of these two units are on site for the first two weeks and are available by phone or callback, if requested, any time after the first phase. The stated purpose of this process is to allow the trainee, in a more relaxed setting, to determine if he/she wishes to reconsider the resignation.

While the exit interview / resignation process is highly structured and offers trainees several opportunities to speak with staff outside of the SPA's chain-of-command, during the Chow Hall exercise, the proximity of the activities and sounds of the drill instructors in the adjacent Chow Hall failed to provide the resigning trainees with an environment conducive to rethinking their decisions and / or considering to reverse their course of action. Finally, the constant encouragement to resign by DI staff is unnecessary, overplayed, and not intended to build confidence. It is a likely contributor to the SPA's high attrition rate.

Observations and Findings

Structured resignation/exit flow is a promising effective practice when insulated from drill instructor-related stressors and paired with neutral post-separation follow-ups.

The existing flow—video, EAU, and Recruiting/Diversity—is viewed as a potential model. Its effectiveness, however, depends on shielding the process from concurrent drill instructor (DI) pressure and ensuring neutral, post-exit check-ins that promote psychological safety and accurate data capture.

Celebration of attrition.

Displaying the baseball caps of 20 resigned trainees on the Chow Hall wall signaled pride in dropout rates, reflecting a culture that may conflate training standards with tradition and ritual, discourage perseverance, and foster emotional alienation.

Data and Evaluation.

No integrated, routine analytics on resignations, recycles/deferrals; exit interview instruments are narrow and under-inform program improvement.

Summary

The data suggest that balanced training environments not only reflect evolving standards but may contribute to improved retention and performance, especially as policing adapts to new social, technological, and operational challenges. Agencies are encouraged to consider these findings in shaping future training philosophy and curriculum design.

A primary goal of the MSP is to recruit and hire the highest quality Trooper Trainees. Once these men and women successfully complete the background, physical assessment, and medical processes, these applicants are selected to attend trainee training. While it would be unrealistic to expect that every trainee who enters the SPA will successfully complete the program, the department should still seek the most effective strategies for assisting more trainees to be successful. From studies of a large number of law enforcement training academies across the U.S., those academies that used a balanced stress / non-stress model training environment experienced a lower attrition rate among their trainees.²³

23 Ibid.

The study team has identified a decades old reliance on the protective of, and supportive for, the SPA's culture, its rituals, and its traditions involving the way it conducts stress exposure resiliency training in the recruit training program that is both outdated and inconsistent with the Department's own values and with community expectations. Failure to implement change and innovation due to concerns about the "professional stigma of not having succeeded in the same manner as all other officers" in prior RTT classes will lead to continued and preventable high attrition and injury rates and does a tremendous disservice to the community and to the reputation of the Department.

Recommendations

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0029	Critical	▶ Hiring and Selection System Review (Recruitment-to-RTT Entry). ▶ Conduct a comprehensive review of MSP's recruitment, testing, selection, and appointment process—from application through RTT entry—to improve validity, fairness, readiness screening, and downstream training outcomes (to address the perception hiring is flawed). ▶ This review should strengthen upstream screening, reduce preventable attrition, and align hiring decisions with training capacity, safety, and performance expectations. ▶ Consider reintroducing a State Police-only entrance exam and selection process; Use the exam to identify committed candidates and signal agency priorities.
R0030	Critical	▶ Implement structured, job-related RTT interviews using trained panels, job-analysis-based questions, anchored rating scales, and multiple raters; add scenario/work-sample elements where feasible.
R0031	Critical	▶ Align class size and instructor ratios to training capacity and safety using national benchmarks and MSP injury/attrition data to reduce remedial overload and stabilize outcomes.
R0032	Priority 1	▶ Strengthen candidate care and communications from testing through SPA start (clear timelines, checklists, predictable touchpoints, and digital status tracking) to reduce late-stage drop-off.
R0033	Priority 1	▶ Formalize MSP's alignment mechanism with POST (designated liaison/representation) to strengthen feedback loops on standards, assessments, and training changes.
R0034	Priority 1	▶ Resignation Process: Create protected, quiet space for resignation reconsideration process and EAU contact, physically separated from DI activity.
R0035	Priority 1	▶ Establish a Hiring/Academy Analytics Working Group to define standardized data fields (deferrals, recycles, resignations, fail points) and implement a monthly review cadence supported by dashboards.
R0036	Priority 2	▶ Build a hiring-through-graduation analytics dashboard with standardized codes at each funnel stage and routine reporting to executive leadership and SPA leadership.



SECTION 4: INJURY PREVENTION AND FITNESS STANDARDS

Injury Prevention and Fitness Standards Key Findings

► **Lack of Systematic Injury Documentation and Analysis**

Injury data is fragmented, inconsistent, and insufficiently detailed, with no centralized system or formal process to analyze where, how, and why injuries occur—preventing trend identification and root-cause analysis.

► **Reactive Injury Management Instead of Prevention**

MSP responds quickly once injuries occur, but lacks proactive surveillance, post-incident reviews, and preventive strategies, leading to avoidable injuries, resignations, and increased costs.

► **High and Persistent Injury Burden with No Measurable Improvement**

Musculoskeletal and neurological injuries—especially to lower extremities and shoulders—remain prevalent, with no downward trend despite reforms across multiple recruit training troops.

► **Preventable Attrition and Financial Impact Not Captured**

Over 70% of resignations are linked to preventable physical or psychological causes, yet injury-related costs and attrition impacts to the Commonwealth are not systematically tracked or projected.

► **Inadequate Entry-Level Screening (Physical and Psychological)**

MSP lacks validated, job-specific fitness benchmarks, musculoskeletal screening, injury-risk assessments, and deep psychological readiness evaluations, allowing underprepared trainees to enter training.

► **Absence of Progressive, Occupation-Specific Fitness Assessment**

Fitness testing is not phased, job-task aligned, or used developmentally; instead, assessments lack progression, are sometimes punitive, and fail to mirror real-world policing demands.

► **Excessive and Unregulated Training Load**

High-volume running, boxing, isometrics, unscheduled drills, and supplemental discipline-based PT create cumulative overload, insufficient recovery, and elevated risk of overuse injuries and exertional illness.

► **Structural and Staffing Limitations Undermine Safety**

Reliance on a single fitness staff member, lack of individualized programming, poor load monitoring, and inconsistencies between policy and field implementation contribute to preventable injuries.

► **Cultural and Leadership Gaps in Injury Oversight and Reporting**

Injuries are not systematically reviewed across the chain of command, concussion awareness is absent, and cultural barriers discourage injury reporting, limiting accountability and continuous improvement

4.1 Injury Surveillance, Analysis, and Data Systems

Safety must always be the primary consideration in police training. While realistic training scenarios inherently involve some injury risk, every staff member must strive to reduce preventable injuries. Comprehensive injury surveillance—including systematic tracking, formal analysis, and data-driven decision-making—is essential to identify trends, understand causation factors, and implement timely changes that reduce recurrence.

This section evaluates SPA's injury reporting practices, data collection systems, and analytical capabilities. The IACP study team reviews injury patterns from Recruit Training Troops (RTTs) 82-91 over a ten-year span to assess data consistency, identify trends, and determine the system's capacity for early risk detection and prevention. Based on this analysis, we provide recommendations for establishing a comprehensive injury surveillance infrastructure.

Injury Reporting Procedures

The MSP Trainee Training Manual outlines injury reporting procedures:

At the Massachusetts State Police Academy, the well-being and safety of all trainees is paramount. It is imperative that everyone takes an active role in maintaining a safe and supportive environment.

All sworn members of the SPA staff are Department of Public Health First Responders. The SPA staff also includes personnel with advanced medical certifications.

To prevent further injury or illness, trainees shall immediately report any injury or illness to SPA staff. The staff member will assess the situation and render necessary first aid. The trainee may be sent to the Health and Fitness Unit (HFU) for further assessment. Once addressed by HFU, the trainee shall continuously report with all follow-up information unless directed otherwise. Ignoring or concealing injuries and illnesses can lead to serious health concerns, jeopardize well-being, and negatively impact the training environment. If a trainee observes another trainee displaying signs of illness or injury, they shall notify an SPA staff member. Trainees

who knowingly fail to report another trainee's illness or injury shall be subject to the disciplinary process outlined in ACD-13. There will be no negative consequences for notifying a staff member. Trainees who report concerns about their own health or others' well-being will be treated with professionalism and confidentiality.

All injuries and illnesses incurred during weekend leave shall be immediately reported to drill staff upon return. Trainees shall also submit a To/From to the HFU supervisor and their platoon leader. Any incapacitating injury/illness during weekend leave shall be reported by phone to the SPA front desk (508-867-1000) and the Troop Liaison.

Trainees receiving medical attention at off-site facilities shall provide copies of all documentation and complete the "Notice to Examining Physician." This documentation shall be provided to HFU Staff upon return.

Except for emergency medical transportation, trainees shall sign out with the SPA desk officer before departing for medical appointments. Trainees shall notify the desk officer by phone upon arrival and departure from the medical facility.

Failure to immediately report any injury, illness, medication(s), or medical condition(s) is a violation of the Academy Code of Conduct.

Trainees are not covered by Commonwealth health insurance during the first 60 days of employment or two calendar months, whichever comes first. Trainees employed by the Commonwealth prior to trainee training who have Group Insurance Commission coverage will not have a lapse. All other trainees must comply with M.G.L. healthcare insurance requirements until covered by the Commonwealth.

Injured or ill trainees may be transported to medical facilities for further examination and/or treatment. All approved trainee injuries sustained during SPA training will be reported as job-related injuries. Treatment costs for these injuries are the Commonwealth's responsibility. Costs for treatment of non-training injuries are the trainee's responsibility. Trainees may be required to submit to examination by the State Police Surgeon. Failure to immediately report an injury sustained during training may preclude coverage for treatment costs.

HFU personnel may place injured or ill trainees on restricted duty status appropriate for their condition. Trainees will be advised of their status and applicable restrictions. HFU will issue a Restricted Duty Form indicating restrictions and a reflective safety vest. Restricted Duty Forms must be carried on the trainee's person, and a yellow wristband shall be worn on the left wrist indicating restricted duty status. If the form becomes lost or illegible, the trainee must report to HFU at the next opportunity for a copy. Trainees may appeal their restricted duty status to the Academy Executive Officer.

Importance of Injury Analysis

The IACP examined SPA policies and practices related to injury analysis. Ongoing injury analysis is an effective practice, as described in an IACP Training Key:

*"Understanding the nature of injuries will assist officers and agencies in prevention efforts. Examining how and why officers are getting injured can open conversations about physical readiness and mental resiliency, and how current policies and practices may encourage or discourage safe operations. Agencies and officers should examine how and why they currently operate to determine if practices align with a culture focused on wellness and safety."*²⁴

IACP initial assessment: There is no formal process for injury analysis, and injury reports do not sufficiently describe how and where injuries occur. MSP would benefit by requiring all injuries be reviewed by the entire chain-of-command—from Trainee Training Instructor to Academy Commandant—to ensure comprehensive review. This would help create a "culture of safety" by involving everyone in assessing injury circumstances and whether changes are needed to policies, training, practices, equipment, or environment. This focus would enable the SPA to more quickly assess trends and causes of future training injuries. Since trainee injury costs are the Commonwealth's responsibility, this review would allow complete capture analysis and projection of financial impact, providing injury data and surveillance of cost spikes.

Analysis of MSP Training Injuries

Few studies exist on law enforcement training-related injuries. While determining if injury numbers are excessive is difficult, the IACP study team believes agencies must collect and analyze injury data comprehensively to identify preventable injuries and compare trends over time. Employee injury costs are significant, making injury minimization a high priority. A joint IACP and U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance report states:

*"It is important to collect data [regarding injuries] beyond assault-related injuries for three reasons. First, from a management perspective, officer injuries—regardless of cause—are significant organizational costs including lost wages, medical expenses, and insurance claims. These problems decrease productivity and impact individual officers and families. Second, developing the best policies and training to prevent future injuries requires a complete picture of injury scope and magnitude. Third, despite previous efforts, little is known about the national scope of police officer injuries outside line-of-duty deaths and assaults; consequently, relatively little is known about injury impact on law enforcement agencies."*²⁵

The IACP obtained FBI data on injuries during new agent training. In 2011, the FBI released a study of injury rates and risk factors among 426 male and 105 female new agents during the 21-week FBI Academy program.²⁶ The study found 35 percent of men and 42 percent of women experienced one or more injuries. Activities most associated with injuries were: defensive tactics training (58 percent), physical fitness training (20 percent), physical fitness testing (5 percent), and firearms training (3 percent). This study was instructive in demonstrating that insufficient detail in injury recording made it difficult for the FBI to determine injury-causing events and identify specific training activities involved. This shortcoming reinforces the importance—for all agencies including MSP—of accuracy and specificity when capturing injury data for analysis.

24 International Association of Chiefs of Police, Training Key #708: 21st Century Policing—Pillar Five: Training and Education; Pillar Six: Officer Wellness and Safety, 4.

25 International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Reducing Officer Injuries: A Summary of Data Findings and Recommendations from a Multi Agency Injury Tracking Study* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice), accessed February 18, 2026, <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/Publications/IACP-OfficerInjuriesStudy-FS.pdf>.

26 J. J. Knapik et al., "Injury Rates and Injury Risk Factors among Federal Bureau of Investigation New Agent Trainees," *BMC Public Health* 11 (2011): 920, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-920>.

Since few studies determine when injury numbers or percentages become excessive, the study team recommends the SPA begin systematic injury recording and documentation to establish acceptable levels and conduct regular analysis. Current practice involves expediting treatment and striving for graduation completion once injuries occur. However, this often results in candidate separation, increased costs, and fewer trooper candidates graduating annually.

Injury Patterns Across RTTs 82–91 (2015–2025)

Injury patterns across RTTs 82–91 indicate systemic issues in both training intensity and injury prevention. Trainees commonly experience lower extremity trauma—especially knee and ankle injuries—attributable to repetitive strain and inadequate biomechanical assessment. Shoulder dislocations and tears occur frequently during defensive tactics training, while concussions and rhabdomyolysis highlight risks during high-impact or heat-intensive sessions.

The core issue stems from a fragmented injury tracking system. Injury reports are inconsistently maintained, not centralized, and lack standardized formatting, making longitudinal analysis and early warning detection impossible. Without a centralized data system or full-time Risk Manager, MSP lacks the oversight needed to synthesize trends and prevent avoidable injuries.

Furthermore, training activities that are high-risk—such as sustained running, boxing, and unsupervised calisthenics—have not been systematically evaluated or restructured. These practices continue to correlate with both injuries and attrition. Notably, over 70% of withdrawals between RTTs 87–90 were linked to physical or psychological breakdowns, most of which could have been mitigated through structured monitoring and evidence-based training adjustments.

External benchmarks show that public safety and military institutions with injury surveillance infrastructure experience faster recovery cycles, lower injury rates, and better trainee retention. MSP's current model lacks this capability, leaving the institution in a reactive posture—only responding after critical incidents, rather than proactively preventing them.

While recent safety-related reforms have been implemented (e.g., audits and training reviews), the absence of a comprehensive analytics framework limits the ability to evaluate effectiveness, sustain improvements, and target risk reduction. For example, there is no mandatory pre-screening process for exertion-related vulnerabilities such as sickle cell trait, despite national effective practices recommending such screening.

Need for Centralized Data Infrastructure and Risk Manager

Currently, all training injuries are reported on a To/From Memo. These reports are forwarded to the SPA's Health & Fitness Unit for recordation. Beyond documentation, there is no formal analysis conducted, either at the SPA or department level, of root causes of injuries. As a result, there is a missed opportunity to mitigate injury causes since it is not always apparent in which training venues injuries occur, the specific tasks being performed when injuries occur, or any environmental factors that may be contributing to injuries.

As previously identified regarding other aspects of the SPA's data collection, the way data is collected, shared, and its ability to be retrieved and analyzed for training injuries is inadequate. A process should be established to thoroughly document, evaluate, and follow up on all training injuries, so that trends related to environmental, operational, or procedural deficiencies can be quickly addressed and adjusted. Without injury analysis and regularly scheduled review of such analysis, there may be ongoing root causes of injuries that could be minimized or prevented but which continue to occur due to lack of focus and attention in this regard.

Accordingly, the SPA should make ongoing injury analysis a priority, so that any discernible patterns or systemic problems that may lead to preventable injuries at the SPA can be remediated. This requires both a centralized data infrastructure with longitudinal tracking capabilities and a dedicated full-time Risk Manager responsible for injury analytics and reporting.

Observations and Findings

Need for systematic documentation.

MSP should establish an injury tracking system that specifically lists where, when, and how injuries occur to determine injury levels and identify trends.

No formal injury analysis process exists.

Injury reports do not sufficiently describe how and where injuries occur, missing opportunities to identify root causes.

Current practices are reactive.

While injuries are treated quickly, many lead to trainee separation and increased costs to the Commonwealth.

Injury data lacks detail and specificity.

Reports are inconsistently maintained, not centralized, and lack standardized formatting, making longitudinal analysis impossible.

No centralized data infrastructure.

MSP lacks a comprehensive injury surveillance system or dedicated Risk Manager, preventing synthesis of trends and proactive prevention.

High injury burden persists.

Musculoskeletal and neurological injuries are prevalent, particularly in lower extremities and shoulders.

No downward trend despite reforms.

Despite incidents and reforms, injuries have not measurably declined across RTTs 82-91.

Over 70% of resignations linked to preventable causes.

Physical or psychological issues in RTTs 87-90 were largely preventable through structured monitoring and evidence-based adjustments.

Chain-of-command review is absent.

Injuries are not reviewed by everyone, from Trainee Training Instructor to Academy Commandant, limiting comprehensive assessment.

Financial impact not captured.

Since trainee injury costs are the Commonwealth's responsibility, lack of complete capture analysis prevents projection of financial impact.

No post-incident data reviews.

Serious injuries and withdrawals are not systematically reviewed to identify prevention opportunities.

High-risk activities not systematically evaluated.

Training activities such as sustained running and unsupervised calisthenics continue without data-driven restructuring.

Summary

MSP's policies and procedures demonstrate emphasis on injury reporting, but the SPA lacks a comprehensive injury surveillance system. There is no formal process for injury analysis, and reports do not sufficiently describe how and where injuries occur. The evaluation of RTTs 82-91 reveals persistent and preventable injury patterns sustained by lack of centralized data, absence of analytic oversight, and high-risk training methods. While institutional responsiveness has improved following major incidents, reforms are not guided by data, making injury prevention efforts inconsistent and insufficient. Current practice is reactive rather than proactive, often resulting in candidate separation, increased costs, and reduced graduation numbers. The fragmented injury tracking system prevents longitudinal analysis, early warning detection, and evidence-based decision-making. Establishing a centralized injury surveillance infrastructure with dedicated analytical capacity is essential for creating a data-driven approach to injury prevention.

4.2 Pre-Screening, Entry Standards, and Baseline Assessment

Physical and psychological readiness are foundational to successful law enforcement training. The Massachusetts State Police Academy currently lacks comprehensive systems to assess incoming trainees' risk profiles across multiple domains. This section examines pre-screening gaps, staffing limitations, and misalignment with national standards in both physical and psychological evaluation. Effective pre-screening enables early detection of vulnerabilities, supports tailored training pathways, and significantly reduces preventable injuries and attrition. By implementing evidence-based entry standards and baseline assessments, MSP can better prepare trainees for academy demands while identifying those who require additional support or conditioning before beginning training.

Pre-Screening Gaps and National Standards Misalignment

The SPA currently lacks an evidence-based system to assess incoming trainees' physical and psychological risk profiles. MSP has minimal entry-level fitness screening with a pass/fail 1.5 mile run and a few unscored elements such as push-ups and sit-ups. Because of the limited physical assessments, many trainees enter the training pipeline with poor aerobic capacity, limited muscular endurance, and no assessment of mobility limitations or prior injury history. Furthermore, there is no structured psychological resilience evaluation to assess behavioral health risks or mental preparedness for high-stress, high-stakes policing environments. This absence of multi-domain pre-screening creates blind spots in risk detection and fails to offer early interventions for vulnerable candidates.

The pre-screening and risk assessment tools employed by MSP remain underdeveloped, which has significant implications for trainee success and retention. Research by Denke and Long emphasizes the importance of pre-academy fitness and psychological preparedness as predictors of academy performance and attrition.²⁷ MSP's absence of standardized assessments creates a blind spot in identifying at-risk trainees, contributing directly to higher withdrawal rates and inadequate early support.

Physical Readiness Gaps

A comprehensive review of MSP's trainee selection process highlights multiple deficiencies in assessing physical readiness:

- 1. Insufficient Pre-Entry Fitness Screening:** Minimal or inconsistent pre-entry physical assessments fail to identify trainees' baseline capacity or resilience. Without structured benchmarks—including aerobic, anaerobic, and muscular fitness—many trainees are not physically prepared for training demands. MSP does not apply a standardized, percentile-based fitness evaluation. Entry screenings vary by class and do not adequately measure functional capacity.
- 2. Lack of Phased Conditioning Verification:** There is no structured assessment of fitness progression prior to or during early academy training, limiting the ability to support trainees before injury occurs. MSP does not conduct formal pre-academy or early-stage fitness verification. Mid-academy testing is inconsistent and too late to prevent early injuries.
- 3. Inadequate Injury Risk Screening:** No musculoskeletal screening, prior injury history, or movement quality evaluations are conducted before training. These screening tools are absent from MSP's selection process, despite their known benefit in preventing injuries.

Psychological Readiness Gaps

Current psychological screening practices also fall short:

- 1. Limited Psychological Screening Depth:** MSP's psychological assessments focus on general mental health without evaluating emotional regulation, trauma coping, or stress tolerance. No tools are used to assess critical factors like resilience or prior trauma. Emotional regulation and readiness under stress are not systematically measured.

27 R. Denke and S. Long, "Pre-Academy Fitness and Police Performance," *Law Enforcement Executive Forum* 19, no. 3 (2019): 1–9.

- 2. Inconsistent Evaluation of Mental Wellness and Suitability:** Current screening does not fully address a trainee’s preparedness for the psychological demands of law enforcement work. MSP lacks a structured protocol to evaluate mental wellness beyond basic psychological exams. Data shows an increase in mental health referrals during training.
- 3. Absence of Early Psychological Resilience Training:** Stress resilience and coping strategies are not introduced until after training begins, missing opportunities to prepare trainees before exposure to high-stress conditions. Resilience training is reactive rather than proactive, with candidates only receiving support after symptoms emerge.

Staffing Limitations

Structural vulnerabilities exacerbate these issues, notably MSP’s dependence on a single staff member for fitness-related duties. All aspects of physical training, injury oversight, and adaptation management fall to one individual. This staffing model severely restricts MSP’s ability to conduct individualized baseline assessments or modify programming to support diverse trainee needs. This limitation also prevents the capacity to provide tailored training regimens or effective injury recovery protocols, both critical components for trainee wellness and readiness.

In contrast, national academies with best-in-class outcomes staff certified strength and conditioning specialists, athletic trainers, and wellness professionals

as part of an interdisciplinary training team. To align with effective practices, MSP should adopt a multi-domain screening process that includes physical fitness benchmarks, psychological resilience evaluations, and individualized risk profiling. Expanding the fitness and wellness team with specialists in exercise science, strength and conditioning, and health promotion will facilitate personalized trainee development and allow for timely early interventions. This evidence-based approach is supported by the American College of Sports Medicine guidelines, which highlight the necessity of thorough and standardized assessments to optimize training outcomes.

Comparison to National Models

Federal and state law enforcement academies—such as the FBI Academy, TXDPS, NJSP, and FLETC—employ comprehensive employee screening protocols that include:

- ▶ Standardized fitness testing aligned with occupational tasks
- ▶ Musculoskeletal screening (e.g., Functional Movement Screen or similar)
- ▶ Psychological profiling and resilience evaluation tools
- ▶ Documentation of prior injuries or chronic conditions to guide conditioning plans

These models enable early detection of physical and psychological vulnerabilities, supporting tailored training pathways and injury prevention strategies. In contrast, the Texas Department of Public Safety utilizes a comprehensive and evidence-based fitness and wellness protocol, incorporating multi-dimensional screening processes and broader team involvement.²⁸

TABLE 6. COMPARATIVE DATA SNAPSHOT

Agency	Entry Fitness Test	Phased Conditioning	Injury Prevention Education	Attrition Rate
MSP	Moderate, inconsistent screening	Limited	Partial	30%+
Texas DPS	1.5-mile run + 500m row (>60th percentile)	Yes	Comprehensive	11-22%
New Jersey SP	Degree + Fitness Standards	Yes	Comprehensive	8-24%
Mississippi HP	Competitive Selection	Yes	Moderate	50%

28 Texas Department of Public Safety (TXDPS), *Fitness and Wellness Protocols Manual* (Texas DPS Training Division, 2022).

Impacts on Injury, Attrition, and Program Integrity

Data from RTTs 82-91 highlights the consequences of MSP's insufficient screening systems. With over 70% of withdrawals in RTTs 87-90 tied to injury or psychological strain, a significant portion of attrition is likely preventable through early detection and mitigation strategies. Trainees are exposed to high physical stress loads without a baseline reference for adaptation potential or recovery capacity.

The absence of standardized risk assessments—coupled with insufficient fitness/wellness staffing—has constrained MSP's ability to deliver adaptive, resilient, and safe training environments. High dropout rates during initial training weeks due to mental and physical unpreparedness, elevated injury incidence stemming from inadequate fitness screening and conditioning, and increased mental health issues including burnout, anxiety, and post-academy distress are all direct consequences of these gaps.

Observation and Findings

MSP lacks validated, job-specific physical fitness benchmarks.

No standardized entry-level fitness screening exists, meaning many trainees enter with poor aerobic capacity and limited muscular endurance.

Psychological readiness screenings are inadequate at entry.

Current assessments focus on general mental health without evaluating emotional regulation, trauma coping, or stress tolerance.

No injury risk screening tools implemented.

Tools for stress tolerance and chronic health conditions are absent from the selection process.

Minimal pre-entry fitness screening.

No structured benchmarks exist for aerobic, anaerobic, and muscular fitness assessment.

No phased conditioning verification.

Limited ability to support trainees before injury occurs due to lack of progressive assessment.

Inadequate musculoskeletal screening.

No prior injury history or movement quality evaluations are conducted before training.

Limited psychological screening depth.

Current assessments don't evaluate emotional regulation, trauma coping, or resilience factors critical for law enforcement.

Inconsistent mental wellness evaluation.

Screening doesn't fully address preparedness for the psychological demands of law enforcement work.

Absence of early resilience training.

Stress resilience is introduced reactively after training begins rather than proactively before high-stress exposure.

Insufficient staffing limits individualized programming.

Physical training is supervised by a single staff member, preventing personalized assessment and adaptation.

High withdrawal rates linked to absence of early intervention.

Over 70% of resignations in RTTs 87-90 were tied to preventable physical or psychological causes that could have been identified through proper screening.

MSP not aligned with national effective practices.

Gaps exist in fitness testing, pre-screening, instructor oversight, and injury prevention compared to FBI Academy, TXDPS, NJSP, and FLETC.

Pre-screening protocols less rigorous than peer agencies.

MSP's entry requirements fall short of standards employed by nationally recognized agencies.

Summary

The SPA's lack of structured employee risk assessment and pre-screening tools leaves it vulnerable to preventable injuries, psychological burnout, and poor long-term outcomes. The SPA does not mandate physical or psychological readiness evaluations before enrollment, nor does it document injury risk profiles. Current physical fitness and psychological screening practices fall significantly short of national standards. The lack of validated fitness benchmarks, phased conditioning, injury risk screening, and psychological readiness assessment

contribute directly to high injury and attrition rates. Fitness programming remains overcentralized under one individual, limiting adaptability. These deficits are out of step with national effective practices and undermine efforts to modernize trainee development. Implementing comprehensive pre-screening systems and expanding specialized staffing are essential steps toward improving trainee outcomes and reducing preventable attrition.

4.3 Fitness Standards, Testing, and Occupational Alignment

Physical fitness assessments during law enforcement selection and training are critical to ensuring trainees can meet the diverse and demanding physical requirements of policing. This section evaluates the alignment between current fitness testing protocols and the actual occupational tasks officers face, emphasizing evidence-based practices and operational relevance. Effective fitness testing serves as both a selection tool and a developmental measure, helping to verify baseline readiness, minimize injury risks, predict job-specific performance, and guide training progression. When properly designed and administered, fitness assessments support trainee success while reducing preventable injuries and attrition.

Physical Demands of Policing

Law enforcement officers encounter a wide range of physical challenges, including pursuit and apprehension, use of force, emergency response, and extended shifts that demand sustained physical readiness. These tasks require aerobic capacity, muscular strength, anaerobic power, agility, and endurance. Officers must be prepared to perform physically demanding activities while fatigued, under stress, and often with minimal warning. The unpredictable nature of law enforcement work means officers must maintain a high level of general physical preparedness across multiple fitness domains simultaneously.

Fitness Testing Purposes and Job Relevance

Fitness testing in selection serves multiple critical purposes: verifying baseline readiness for training and fieldwork, minimizing injury risks, and predicting job-specific performance. Trainees who meet established

fitness benchmarks demonstrate lower rates of training-related injuries. Additionally, physical test scores correlate with performance in key tactical domains such as defensive tactics and suspect pursuit.

However, if assessments are generic or poorly designed, they risk excluding capable candidates or failing to identify readiness gaps. Generic fitness tests that don't reflect actual job demands may screen out candidates who would perform well in real-world policing scenarios, while passing candidates who lack the specific physical capabilities needed for the job.

Effective fitness assessments during training should emphasize functional fitness—developing capabilities that mirror real-world physical demands like sprinting, lifting, or dragging. Rather than focusing solely on traditional measures like push-ups or sit-ups, assessments should incorporate job-specific tasks that officers will actually perform in the field. This functional approach ensures that fitness development translates directly to operational capability.

Phased conditioning approaches, which gradually increase intensity and complexity, help trainees adapt safely to job stressors. Progressive assessment throughout training allows instructors to monitor adaptation, identify struggling trainees early, and adjust training loads to prevent injury while ensuring adequate challenge for development.

Stress testing, such as timed obstacle courses or cognitive-physical simulations, reinforces real-time operational readiness and resilience. These assessments that combine physical exertion with decision-making under pressure better simulate the actual demands officers face in the field, where they must think clearly and act decisively while physically fatigued.

National Evidence-Based Models

For example, one nationally recognized evidence-based model combines a 1.5-mile run with a 500m row to measure aerobic and anaerobic capacities. These tests incorporate age- and gender-adjusted percentiles to establish entry benchmarks, ensuring trainees'

readiness aligns with expected field performance. This dual-assessment approach captures both sustained cardiovascular endurance and short-burst power, both critical for law enforcement work.

Leading agencies employ composite fitness tests that assess multiple physical domains relevant to policing. They use normative data adjusted for age and gender to set realistic but challenging standards. These agencies also implement phased testing throughout training to monitor progress and enable early intervention when trainees struggle to meet developmental benchmarks.

Current MSP Assessment Gaps

Currently, MSP's assessments lack standardized, occupation-specific benchmarks and phased progression. This misalignment contributes to higher injury rates and attrition, as trainees encounter sudden, high-intensity physical demands without adequate conditioning. The SPA's fitness testing procedures currently emphasize key fitness components; however, these are not effectively linked to the specific physical demands trainees face in their occupational roles. This misalignment undermines the practical value of testing and training programs.

The use of physical tasks as a form of punishment contradicts established exercise science principles, such as the Goldilocks principle, which advocates for balanced stress exposure followed by appropriate recovery and adaptation. When fitness becomes associated with discipline rather than development, it undermines the positive relationship trainees should have with physical training and can lead to decreased motivation and engagement.

Test Administration and Timing

The SPA's fitness testing lacks functional relevance to actual occupational demands. Current protocols do not follow progressive assessment or integrate with job-task analysis. Fitness tests are often used punitively rather than as tools for structured development.

Moreover, imposing additional physical stress outside the structured curriculum disproportionately affects trainees who enter without sufficient pre-academy conditioning, increasing their susceptibility to musculoskeletal injuries and reduced engagement. Evidence from military and

sports science literature strongly supports the adoption of standardized, functional fitness assessments tailored to job tasks, with progressive and adaptive loading strategies to promote long-term health and performance.

Implementing functional fitness testing aligned with real-world occupational demands facilitates more relevant performance evaluation and targeted development. Integrating structured conditioning programs with individualized recovery protocols ensures that trainees adapt positively, reducing injury risk and attrition rates. Embedding wellness education into training further supports holistic trainee development, shifting the culture away from punitive approaches to supportive and evidence-based practices.

Findings and Observations

Policing requires intense physical activity.

Officers must perform pursuits, use of force, and emergency response under fatigue, requiring aerobic capacity, muscular strength, anaerobic power, agility, and endurance.

Fitness tests are essential for baseline verification.

Testing serves to verify readiness for training and fieldwork, minimize injury risks, and predict job-specific performance.

Functional assessments better reflect real-world demands.

Scenario-based evaluations that mirror policing tasks (sprinting, lifting, dragging) are more operationally relevant than generic fitness tests.

National evidence-based models exist.

Leading agencies utilize composite fitness tests with age- and gender-adjusted percentiles to establish entry benchmarks.

MSP's assessments lack occupational specificity.

Current protocols do not follow progressive assessment or integrate with job-task analysis.

Current protocols lack progression.

Tests are not phased throughout training to support gradual adaptation and monitor development.

Fitness tests used punitively.

Tests are sometimes employed as punishment rather than as tools for structured development.

Additional stress training outside structured programs.

Unscheduled fitness demands risk trainee health, especially for those without pre-academy conditioning.

Absence of standardized assessments increases injury risk.

Without consistent evaluation criteria and progressive loading, trainees face elevated injury, disengagement, and attrition.

Tests don't align with job tasks.

Misalignment between fitness testing and actual policing demands undermines practical value of assessments.

MSP's current assessments contribute to injuries and attrition.

Lack of standardized, occupation-specific benchmarks and phased progression leads to trainees encountering sudden, high-intensity demands without adequate conditioning.

Summary

Physical fitness assessments are vital to preparing trainees for the multifaceted physical demands of policing. When aligned with occupational requirements, these assessments help reduce injuries, improve tactical performance, and promote operational readiness. However, MSP's current fitness protocols lack alignment with real-world policing tasks and fail to incorporate progressive, evidence-based approaches. Current assessments lack occupational specificity and do not support progressive, evidence-based conditioning. The punitive use of fitness tasks and unstructured additional stress training jeopardizes trainee health and retention. To improve outcomes, fitness testing must be functional, standardized, and integrated with occupational demands, emphasizing structured conditioning, recovery, and wellness education. Adopting evidence-based models with age- and gender-adjusted benchmarks, phased progression, and job-task alignment will better prepare trainees while reducing preventable injuries and attrition.

4.4 Physical Training, Injury Prevention, and Safety Protocols

Physical training must balance operational readiness with injury prevention. This section examines MSP's training programming, identifies injury-causing activities, evaluates safety protocols, and provides evidence-based recommendations for sustainable, job-relevant training that protects trainee health. Effective physical training develops the physical capabilities officers need while managing load, ensuring adequate recovery, and minimizing preventable injuries. This comprehensive examination covers programming principles, drill instructor practices, high-risk activities, overtraining issues, safety oversight, concussion awareness, and the culture of safety necessary for long-term success.

Physical Training Programming Principles

The Goldilocks Principle: Balancing Stress and Recovery

The integration of the "Goldilocks principle" into law enforcement academy training advocates for physical stress that is "just right"—sufficient to build resilience and operational readiness yet carefully managed to avoid injury and burnout.²⁹ This approach necessitates data-informed, individualized strategies that accommodate the diverse capacities of trainees while promoting gradual adaptation.

The modern demands of policing require physically capable officers who can perform under stress without compromising their safety or that of the public. However, achieving this capability cannot rely solely on high-intensity physical conditioning. Research consistently shows that improperly dosed physical stress increases the likelihood of musculoskeletal injuries, psychological burnout, and dropout rates.³⁰

Currently, the SPA demonstrates a training paradigm that places trainees under significant physical strain from the outset, often without individualized preparation or monitoring. This model deviates from established effective practices in tactical strength and conditioning, which emphasize periodization, functional training, and recovery-based adaptation.

29 J. R. Hoffmann and N. A. Ratamess, *Periodization: Theory and Methodology of Training*, 6th ed. (Human Kinetics, 2020).

30 J. J. Knapik and R. Pope, "Prevention of Musculoskeletal Injuries in the Military: A Systematic Review," *Military Medicine* 185, no. 11-12 (2020): e1961-e1970.

Individualized Baseline Assessments and Progressive Overload

Individualized baseline assessments are foundational to safe and effective training. Without understanding a trainee's fitness level, it is impossible to scale workload appropriately. MSP's lack of baseline evaluations prevents instructors from proactively managing injury risk.

Progressive overload—the gradual increase of training stress over time—is a core principle of exercise science. Trainees need time to adapt to physical demands through controlled progression. Sudden exposure to maximal loads without adequate preparation violates this principle and substantially increases injury probability.

Load Management and Recovery Science

Recovery is not merely rest—it is when physiological adaptation occurs. Without protected recovery periods, the body cannot repair tissue damage, replenish energy stores, or strengthen systems stressed by training. Continuous high-intensity activity without adequate recovery leads to accumulated fatigue, suppressed immune function, hormonal imbalances, and ultimately overtraining syndrome.

Autoregulation—adjusting training based on individual readiness—is critical for managing diverse trainee populations. Some individuals recover quickly and can handle higher volumes; others require more recovery time. A standardized schedule that doesn't account for individual variation will inevitably overtrain some trainees while under-training others.

Current MSP Training Environment

Official MSP Fitness Program Structure

The SPA's structured physical fitness curriculum incorporates strength training, aerobic conditioning, and mobility work to build foundational physical qualities necessary for law enforcement. While this programming follows scientifically grounded protocols and anticipates necessary recovery periods, the actual training environment introduces complicating factors. The official fitness program includes evidence-based strength and conditioning practices designed to develop trainees' physical capabilities systematically.

Drill Instructor Supplemental Activities and Recovery Disruption

However, drill instructors often impose additional pre- and post-session physical tasks aimed at instilling discipline and mental toughness. These exercises—frequently intense and repetitive—occur during periods designated for recovery, leading to early fatigue, suppressed physiological repair processes, and diminished training quality.

The disruption of homeostasis from continuous stress cycles elevates the likelihood of overtraining, delayed recovery, and increased risk of musculoskeletal injury. Although mobility work and injury prevention strategies are embedded in the curriculum, they are undermined by limited rest, lack of individualized adaptation, and the physical demands outside of formal sessions. The result is a mismatch between the intended training benefits and the trainees' ability to safely achieve them.

Cumulative Fatigue and Performance Issues

Pre- and post-training drills increase cumulative fatigue, which can hinder performance and elevate injury and attrition rates. The official program structure anticipates specific recovery windows, but when these are filled with additional physical demands, trainees never fully recover. This accumulated fatigue degrades movement quality, slows reaction times, impairs decision-making, and makes trainees more susceptible to injury during subsequent training activities.

Use of PT as Punishment

The use of physical training as a form of punishment is explicitly discouraged by leading fitness and tactical training bodies. The practice is not only physiologically unsound but also ethically problematic. Excessive exertion—especially during recovery periods—can compromise long-term durability, mental readiness, and occupational performance. Reform efforts must center on the adoption of fitness protocols that are legally defensible, job-specific, and health-promoting, aligning with public health principles and the mission of the SPA.

High-Risk Activities and Injury Mechanisms

Wall Sits and Isometric Exercises

Wall sits, a standard part of stress inoculation training, involve sustained isometric contractions of the quadriceps. While effective for muscular endurance, these exercises can lead to patellofemoral pain syndrome and tendinopathies, especially when performed for extended durations or with limited rest periods. The sustained loading without movement prevents normal blood flow and recovery, creating conditions for overuse injury.

Continuous Running and Endurance Drills

Continuous running is employed to enhance aerobic capacity but often results in overuse injuries like shin splints, tendonitis, and stress fractures. The uniform pacing dictated by drill instructors can force trainees beyond their safe physiological thresholds, exacerbating fatigue and injury risk. When running volume is high and recovery is inadequate, the repetitive impact forces accumulate faster than the body can adapt, leading to structural damage.

Up-Downs (Chair Stand Repetitions)

This exercise, which requires repeated standing and sitting motions, exerts repetitive mechanical stress on the knees, hips, and lower back. Poor form, high frequency, and limited rest contribute to strains and joint stress. The ballistic nature of the movement—especially when performed while fatigued—increases risk of acute injury in addition to chronic overload.

Boxing and Head Strike Protocols

Training scenarios such as ground fighting, “Red Man” drills, and boxing all have potential for serious head injuries. Due to recent national attention on concussions and traumatic brain injuries (e.g., NFL, NCAA), some law enforcement academies have prohibited all intentional head strikes in training, including boxing and defensive tactics. Other academies allow only very low force levels, usually with open-hand strikes sufficient only to teach proper blocking techniques.

Given the potential for serious injuries resulting from head strikes, including concussions, and the fact that trainees are not sufficiently trained to use reasonable restraint should they be paired with a less-skilled opponent, this practice should be reevaluated. A 2025 IACP survey of state police agencies found more than one-third of responding agencies prohibit or restrict intentional head strikes in recruit training due to potential for serious injuries.

Additional Unscheduled DI-Imposed Exercises

Beyond scheduled sessions, drill instructors often impose extra physical tasks before or after training, including push-ups, sprints, or calisthenics. While intended to build mental fortitude, this additional load significantly reduces recovery windows, increasing susceptibility to overtraining syndrome and reducing movement quality. Collectively, these factors highlight a systemic issue of excessive loading, limited recovery, and technique-related risks, creating an elevated injury environment.

Research on Overtraining and Injury Prevention

Military Studies on Running Volume

Military studies show trainees assigned to units that run greater distances experience more injuries. Bullock et al. discussed overtraining, described as “the physiology of musculoskeletal overuse due to exercise or physical training.” Regarding running volume, Bullock’s study concluded:

“Preponderant military and civilian research and descriptive epidemiology demonstrates that high running volume substantially increases lower-extremity injury risk. During initial military training, approximately 25% of men and 50% of women incur one or more physical training-related injuries. Roughly 60-80% of these injuries occur to lower extremities and are overuse type—a condition from physical training-volume overload (presumably excessive running relative to initial fitness level and individual running capability).”³¹

³¹ S. Bullock, B. Jones, J. Gilchrest, and S. Marshal, *Prevention of Physical Training-Related Injuries: Recommendations for the Military and Other Active Populations Based on Expedited Systematic Reviews* (2010).

Effective Prevention Strategies

According to the study, the most effective injury prevention strategy is avoiding overtraining by reducing running volume, conducting running exercises according to ability-based groups, and implementing more cross-training activities replacing running. The authors believe these interventions can broadly apply to populations similar to the military (police, firefighters, athletes) who also have frequent physical training requirements.³²

Program-Induced Cumulative Overload (PICO)

Further, unintentional physical activities can contribute to increased training injuries. In their Australian Army basic training report, the authors introduced the concept of program-induced cumulative overload (PICO).³³ PICO is “the excessive cumulative physical workload that can be imparted to military personnel by a military training program with an embedded physical training component.” This is unintentional versus planned PT physical workload. It may involve incentive PT, running between classes, or poorly sequenced training activities—such as scheduling PT the same day trainees perform ground fighting in defensive tactics training.

The report concludes PICO “can be acute (accumulating within a single day) or chronic (accumulating across the training program)” and “results in adverse outcomes for affected military personnel, including detrimental fatigue, performance degradation, injuries, or illness.”³⁴ Given these various study findings, the study team asserts ample justification exists for MSP to reexamine using PT as a punitive, corrective, or disciplinary tool and to implement additional trainee physical training program improvements.

Lessons from Army PT Guidelines

Today’s 21st century law enforcement academies can learn from the current U.S. Army physical training philosophy. Too often police academies emulate a military training style dissimilar to today’s military. The Army provides insight on injury reduction in its Physical Training Technical Bulletin, highlighting the importance of reviewing PT procedures and injury data to assess whether changes can reduce training-related injuries.

Requirements for all Army unit commanders supervising PT include:

- ▶ Foster a culture of injury risk reduction in all PT aspects
- ▶ Coordinate with medical subject matter experts for injury prevention consultation
- ▶ Identify and assess PT-related training hazards and musculoskeletal injury, develop and implement prevention interventions, supervise to ensure controls are implemented and monitored, and evaluate effectiveness
- ▶ Ensure Soldiers receive PT appropriate to their physical conditioning levels and follow gradual PT progression to avoid unnecessary overuse injury
- ▶ Prohibit use of PT as a punitive, corrective, or disciplinary tool that can lead to overtraining
- ▶ Ensure Soldiers are monitored for injury, and those with musculoskeletal complaints or signs of injury receive prompt medical attention³⁵

Evidence-based practices from athletic training and military preparation emphasize the importance of load management, structured rest, and movement coaching to minimize preventable injuries. The study team recommends the Academy adopt similar requirements for physical training oversight as currently practiced by the Army.

Concussion Awareness and Head Strike Safety

National Context

MSP should consider implementing Concussion Awareness training to enhance awareness, recognition, and prevention of head injuries. Due to recent national attention on concussions and traumatic brain injuries (e.g., NFL, NCAA), the law enforcement community has begun reevaluating practices involving intentional head contact.

NCAA Pre-Participation Assessment Model

The NCAA utilizes a pre-participation assessment addressing student history of concussion or brain injury, neurologic disorder, and mental health symptoms and disorders, along with baseline testing that can serve as one factor in clinical decision-making after suspected

³² Ibid.

³³ Robin Orr, Joseph Knapik, and Rodney Pope, *Avoiding Program Induced Cumulative Overload (PICO)* (2016).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Department of the Army, TB MED 592

head injury.³⁶ In the event of suspected head injury, the affected person can take an online post-injury test and share results with their doctor, helping medical personnel better determine appropriateness and timeline for return to duty.

FLETC Defensive Tactics Principles

Regarding boxing efficacy in law enforcement training, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) provides these defensive tactics training principles when preparing trainees for violent confrontations:

- ▶ Do not stand-up toe-to-toe
- ▶ Disengage and create distance
- ▶ Escalate use of force by transitioning to a weapon
- ▶ “Bad guys don’t box”
- ▶ Self-defense against violent suspects is not a boxing match, since suspects do not observe boxing rules
- ▶ Do not base training on failure³⁷

Regardless of MSP’s policies on intentional head strikes, this safety concern area should be reviewed given the one-third of peer agencies that now prohibit or restrict such practices.

Safety Protocols and Oversight

Current Safety Measures

The safety protocols currently in place at the SPA include essential measures such as weather monitoring, proper use of safety gear, and protocols for high-risk training environments like the firing range and Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC). Safety equipment and protocols in use at the SPA are similar to sound practices in many agencies the IACP has studied.

Implementation and Oversight Gaps

However, closer evaluation reveals significant implementation and oversight gaps that jeopardize trainee well-being and training effectiveness. Despite efforts to maintain operational safety at the SPA, current practices fall short of modern training standards. While foundational

safety protocols—such as weather tracking, protective equipment, and EVOC/firing range procedures—are appropriately maintained, there are systemic deficiencies that compromise trainee health and training outcomes.

A central concern is the lack of recovery protocols between intense physical sessions. The absence of programmed recovery time, coupled with drill instructors’ frequent use of unscheduled supplemental exercise, undermines physiological recovery and increases the risk of overuse injuries and conditions such as rhabdomyolysis. These practices contradict the principles of sustainable physical development and recovery science.

Need for Full-Time Risk Manager

Operational oversight is further impaired by the SPA’s lack of a full-time Risk Manager and centralized safety data infrastructure. Without a dedicated individual responsible for tracking injuries, analyzing trends, and implementing corrective measures, unsafe practices may go unnoticed or unaddressed until after harmful outcomes occur.

Structural Vulnerabilities

While reforms were instituted following both *the 2006 Report* and the September 2024 incident, structural vulnerabilities persist. The current over-reliance on one staff member for all fitness training presents a clear operational liability, impeding both resilience and redundancy in staff capacity.

Misalignment with Effective Practices

In addition, the SPA’s application of stress inoculation through physical discipline, aligned with the current framework, has become increasingly misaligned with trainees’ physical capabilities and current effective practices in public safety training. Injuries and attrition—hovering at roughly 30% per class—underscore the adverse effects of poorly aligned resilience-building efforts.

36 NCAA Sport Science Institute, *Concussion Safety Protocol Checklist* (updated September 2023)

37 Fabrice Czarnecki, M.D., and Richard Miller, M.D., *Trooper Trainee Active Countermeasures Training Evaluation: Prepared for the Texas Department of Public Safety* (March 2006).

Culture of Safety

Through previous studies and collaboration with law enforcement training academies, the IACP has identified additional training safety effective practices. The most effective method to enhance training safety is creating a “culture of safety” at the SPA.

Integration of Safety Themes

The study team recommends MSP implement a formal program promoting safety themes throughout academy lesson plans, ensuring both trainees and instructors hear, repeat, and reinforce safety messages throughout basic training and all other programs. This would involve the integration of safety themes throughout the SPA’s various lesson plans so that safe practices are discussed, modeled, and consistently repeated and reinforced by staff and trainees alike.

Comprehensive Policy Review

Further, the SPA should conduct a comprehensive review of all written policies regarding safety protocols, including any checklists that are utilized for high-risk training, to ensure consistency across policies. All documented reports or checklists involving safety protocols should include a review by supervisory staff to ensure that the policies are being followed.

Safety Messages and Emphasis Areas

These messages emphasize injury prevention and risk assessment, as well as the importance of wearing ballistic vests, always wearing seat belts, controlling vehicle speeds, avoiding complacency, and promoting overall employee wellness.

Benefits and Sustainability

Program advantages are outlined in the combined IACP Center for Officer Safety & Wellness and Bureau of Justice Assistance Final Report entitled, *Reducing Officer Injuries: A Summary of Data Findings and Recommendations from a Multi-Agency Injury Tracking Study*.³⁸ Creating and sustaining a culture of safety in the training environment also reduces the likelihood that safety focus will diminish over time or with staff turnover.

Field Impact

The establishment of a culture of safety at the SPA, starting with trainee training, would naturally progress out into the field. Common unsafe practices, such as not wearing seat belts and driving too fast, are frequent causes of law enforcement injuries nationally. These injuries are costly in terms of medical costs, missed time from work, workers’ compensation claims, family implications, and reduced staffing. Trainee-level training would be an ideal place to begin to change unsafe practices.

Observations and Findings

Physical Training Programming

No mandated pre-academy fitness assessments.

Trainees enter without baseline capacity evaluation, preventing appropriate load management.

Training begins at high intensity without progressive ramp-up.

Sudden exposure to high physical demands increases risk of overuse injuries and early attrition.

Functional training lacks occupational task alignment.

Current programming doesn’t consistently mirror real-world policing demands.

No robust systems to monitor training load or recovery.

Absence of tracking prevents identification of overtraining before injury occurs.

Schedule doesn’t support autoregulation or individualized rest

Standardized approach fails to accommodate individual recovery needs and adaptation rates.

Education on injury prevention and self-care is limited

Trainees receive insufficient instruction on recognizing warning signs and managing their physical health.

³⁸ International Association of Chiefs of Police, *The Return on Investment for Law Enforcement Officer Safety and Wellness Programs* (2018), https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/IACP_ROI_Final_Report.pdf.

Drill Instructor Activities and Recovery

Structured recovery periods disrupted by supplemental DI drills.

Recovery windows are compromised by additional physical activities imposed by drill instructors.

Pre- and post-training drills increase cumulative fatigue.

Unscheduled activities during designated rest periods elevate injury risk and hinder adaptation.

Additional unscheduled exertional activities during rest periods.

Physical tasks imposed outside planned training undermine recovery and increase overtraining risk.

Use of PT as discipline contradicts effective practices.

Physical training as punishment is physiologically unsound and ethically problematic.

Excessive physical demands under drill instructors.

Overtraining contributes to preventable injuries and attrition.

High-Risk Activities

Wall sits and isometric exercises cause overuse injuries.

Sustained muscle contractions lead to patellofemoral pain syndrome and tendinopathies.

Continuous running linked to stress fractures and tendonitis.

High-volume running without individualized pacing causes lower-extremity injuries.

Up-downs place excessive mechanical stress on joints.

Repetitive standing/sitting motions strain knees, hips, and lower back.

Boxing and full-power head strikes pose concussion risk.

Intentional head strikes create potential for serious injuries including concussions and traumatic brain injuries.

Overtraining Issues

Unintentional physical workload adds hidden strain.

Activities like running between classes or poorly sequenced training days compound physical stress.

Studies show excessive running leads to lower-extremity injuries.

Research demonstrates approximately 25% of men and 50% of women experience training-related injuries, with 60-80% affecting lower extremities.

Program-induced cumulative overload (PICO).

Excessive cumulative physical workload—both acute (within single day) and chronic (across entire program)—results in detrimental fatigue, performance degradation, injuries, and illness.

Safety Protocol Gaps

Lack of structured recovery protocols between intense sessions.

Absence of mandated rest periods increases risk of overtraining syndrome and exertional injuries.

Elevated risk of exertional injuries including rhabdomyolysis.

Inadequate recovery and excessive loading create dangerous conditions for muscle breakdown.

Over-reliance on single staff member for fitness instruction.

One individual cannot provide individualized attention, adaptation management, and injury prevention for entire trainee classes.

Discrepancies between policy and field implementation.

MSP Staff Manual requirements not consistently applied during actual training.

Attrition rate remains high at approximately 30% per class.

Significant portion of separations are injury-related and potentially preventable.

Stress-based physical discipline misaligned with effective practices.

Current approach contradicts modern strength and conditioning principles and Army PT guidelines.

No formal concussion awareness training.

Despite head injury risks in multiple training scenarios, no systematic education on recognition and prevention exists.

Cultural barriers deter injury reporting.

Trainees hesitate to report injuries or request rest due to perceived negative consequences.

Summary

MSP's policies and procedures demonstrate emphasis on safety, but notable shortcomings exist. The SPA's structured physical fitness curriculum incorporates evidence-based strength training, conditioning, and mobility work. However, the actual training environment undermines these efforts through unscheduled high-intensity tasks, disrupted recovery periods, use of PT as punishment, and insufficient safety oversight.

High-risk activities including wall sits, continuous running, up-downs, and boxing—combined with inadequate recovery—create elevated injury risk. Research demonstrates that excessive running volume, program-induced cumulative overload, and lack of individualized pacing substantially increase lower-extremity injuries. The SPA lacks formal concussion awareness training despite significant head injury risks in multiple training scenarios.

Current practices contradict modern strength and conditioning principles and Army PT guidelines, which prohibit PT as a punitive tool and emphasize gradual progression, medical consultation, and injury monitoring. Drill instructors' supplemental activities during designated recovery periods prevent physiological adaptation and increase overtraining risk.

Safety protocols exist but suffer from implementation gaps, including lack of recovery protocols, over-reliance on single fitness staff member, absence of full-time Risk Manager, and discrepancies between policy and field application. Cultural barriers deter injury reporting, and attrition remains at approximately 30% per class with significant injury-related separations.

A shift toward sustainable, job-relevant, ethically sound fitness practices with protected recovery periods, comprehensive safety oversight, formal concussion awareness training, and established culture of safety is essential. Reform must prioritize evidence-based programming, eliminate punitive physical training, ensure adequate recovery, expand qualified staffing, and create systems that proactively prevent injuries rather than reactively responding to them.

Recommendations

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0037	Critical	▶ Establish a centralized injury and attrition data infrastructure: ▶ Develop and implement a centralized injury data system with longitudinal tracking capabilities ▶ Ensure system captures where, when, and how injuries occur ▶ Standardize data formatting and collection procedures ▶ Enable early warning detection and trend analysis to understand the financial impact
R0038	Critical	▶ Appoint a full-time Risk Manager responsible for injury analytics and reporting ▶ Designate an individual to synthesize injury trends and prevent avoidable injuries ▶ Ensure oversight capacity exists to guide data-driven decision-making ▶ Coordinate with all SPA departments for comprehensive data capture
R0039	Critical	▶ Require post-incident data reviews for all serious injuries or withdrawals ▶ Establish formal review process for significant incidents ▶ Identify prevention opportunities and systemic issues ▶ Document findings and corrective actions taken
R0040	Critical	▶ Establish a chain of command continuous review cycle for training-related injuries and attrition causes ▶ Implement regular, formal injury analysis process ▶ Review trends, patterns, and causation factors ▶ Inform changes to training methods, equipment, and environment ▶ Monitor effectiveness of implemented changes and create “culture of safety” through universal involvement in injury assessment
R0041	Critical	▶ Implement multi-domain entry screening protocols ▶ Require pre-enrollment assessments for aerobic/anaerobic capacity, mobility, strength, and injury risk indicators ▶ Develop and deploy standardized fitness and mobility entry assessments ▶ Use percentile-based benchmarks adjusted for age and gender ▶ Establish minimum entry standards aligned with occupational demands
R0042	Critical	▶ Adopt psychological readiness evaluations ▶ Include resilience profiling, trauma history, and behavioral health indicators to assess suitability for stress exposure ▶ Establish psychological screening tools to assess resilience and stress readiness ▶ Evaluate emotional regulation, trauma coping, and stress tolerance ▶ Implement structured protocol for mental wellness evaluation beyond basic psychological exams
R0043	Critical	▶ Create individualized risk profiles for each trainee ▶ Document baseline metrics and risk factors ▶ Include prior injury history, movement quality assessments, and chronic health conditions ▶ Use profiles to customize training intensity and recovery protocols ▶ Enable early identification of at-risk trainees for targeted support
R0044	Critical	▶ Establish musculoskeletal and injury history screening ▶ Conduct movement quality evaluations before training (e.g., Functional Movement Screen) ▶ Document prior injuries and chronic conditions ▶ Use screening results to guide conditioning plans and prevent injury recurrence ▶ Implement biomechanical assessments as part of initial evaluation
R0045	Critical	▶ Integrate ongoing injury prevention education ▶ Focus on mobility, flexibility, and cardiovascular health throughout training ▶ Embed education early and continuously ▶ Teach self-care and injury recognition skills ▶ Promote understanding of recovery importance

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0046	Critical	▶ Monitor mental wellness throughout academy with timely intervention ▶ Implement continuous psychological monitoring during training ▶ Provide early intervention when stress or mental health concerns emerge ▶ Reduce reactive approach by establishing proactive support systems ▶ Ensure confidential, professional treatment of wellness concerns
R0047	Critical	▶ Adopt functional fitness assessments that simulate policing tasks and align with real world job tasks. ▶ Implement assessments based on actual occupational demands (e.g., sprint tests, lifting tasks, dragging simulations) ▶ Replace generic fitness tests with job-specific scenarios ▶ Ensure assessments mirror real-world physical challenges officers face ▶ Develop capabilities that translate directly to field performance
R0048	Critical	▶ Use age- and gender-adjusted normative data to set entry and ongoing training standards. ▶ Establish percentile-based benchmarks that account for demographic differences ▶ Set realistic but challenging standards using evidence-based normative data ▶ Ensure standards align with expected field performance requirements ▶ Apply adjustments consistently across all fitness assessments
R0049	Critical	▶ Immediate suspension of physical tasks used for disciplinary purposes ▶ Prohibit use of PT as punitive, corrective, or disciplinary tool ▶ Align with Army PT guidelines and modern effective practices ▶ Shift from punishment to positive development approach ▶ Remove ethical and physiological concerns of exertional discipline
R0050	Critical	▶ Eliminate or strictly regulate unscheduled physical tasks and training drills imposed by drill instructors ▶ Prohibit supplemental physical activities during designated recovery periods ▶ Require all physical training to occur within structured program ▶ Prevent disruption of planned recovery windows ▶ Reduce cumulative fatigue and overtraining risk
R0051	Critical	▶ Mandate recovery protection through policy and scheduled structured periods with oversight to ensure compliance ▶ Enforce recovery periods as non-negotiable and protected parts of training schedule ▶ Establish clear policies designating recovery time as off-limits for physical activities ▶ Implement supervisory oversight to ensure compliance ▶ Create accountability for violations of recovery protection
R0052	Critical	▶ Implement individualized pacing for endurance runs based on fitness assessments ▶ Use individualized performance metrics to adjust training intensities ▶ Conduct running exercises according to ability-based groups ▶ Prevent forcing trainees beyond safe physiological thresholds ▶ Reduce lower-extremity injury risk from uniform pacing
R0053	Critical	▶ Review practice of allowing full power strikes to the head during training ▶ Consider prohibition or significant restriction given serious injury potential ▶ Evaluate against FLETC principles and peer agency practices ▶ Consider trainee skill variability and inability to exercise restraint ▶ Assess whether training objectives can be achieved through lower-risk methods

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0054	Critical	▶ Implement Concussion Awareness training ▶ Enhance recognition and prevention of head injuries ▶ Consider NCAA pre-participation assessment model ▶ Establish baseline testing and post-injury protocols ▶ Provide education on signs, symptoms, and reporting of concussions ▶ Create clear return-to-duty protocols after head injury
R0055	Critical	▶ Create a “Culture of Safety” at the SPA ▶ Integrate safety themes throughout lesson plan ▶ Ensure both trainees and instructors hear, repeat, and reinforce safety messages ▶ Conduct comprehensive review of all safety policies and protocols ▶ Ensure documented reports/checklists include supervisory review ▶ Emphasize injury prevention, risk assessment, PPE use, seat belt compliance, vehicle speed control ▶ Reduce likelihood that safety focus diminishes over time or with staff turnover ▶ Remove cultural barriers to reporting injuries or requesting rest ▶ Shift understanding from “toughness through exhaustion” to “capability through adaptation”
R0056	Priority 1	▶ Produce quarterly injury trend reports to guide policy and training reforms ▶ Synthesize injury data into actionable reports ▶ Distribute to leadership and relevant stakeholders ▶ Track progress on injury reduction initiatives ▶ Identify emerging trends for proactive intervention
R0057	Priority 1	▶ Review and revise high-risk training modules using injury data ▶ Systematically evaluate activities such as boxing, sustained running, and calisthenics ▶ Use injury trend data and effective practices to restructure high-risk activities ▶ Implement evidence-based modifications to reduce injury correlation
R0058	Priority 1	▶ Expand fitness and wellness staffing ▶ Hire certified strength coaches, exercise physiologists, athletic trainers, and nurses ▶ Reduce reliance on single-staff supervision models ▶ Create interdisciplinary training team for comprehensive trainee support ▶ Enable individualized baseline assessments and program modifications ▶ Increase staff with specialized fitness and wellness professionals
R0059	Priority 1	▶ Offer pre-academy physical and psychological conditioning for trainees not meeting benchmarks ▶ Develop preparatory programs for candidates below entry standards ▶ Provide resources and guidance for self-improvement before academy start ▶ Create structured conditioning pathways to bring trainees to readiness ▶ Reduce early injury and attrition through better preparation
R0060	Priority 1	▶ Conduct mandatory in-academy re-tests to monitor progress and intervene early ▶ Implement phased fitness assessments throughout training ▶ Use progressive testing to identify adaptation issues before injury ▶ Enable early intervention for struggling trainees ▶ Track fitness progression to inform training adjustments
R0061	Priority 1	▶ Embed early and continuous resilience training into onboarding process ▶ Introduce stress resilience and coping strategies before high-stress exposure ▶ Make resilience training proactive rather than reactive ▶ Integrate psychological preparation throughout pre-academy and early training phases ▶ Prepare trainees mentally for law enforcement demands

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0062	Priority 1	▶ Develop and implement phased physical conditioning program ▶ Create progression from foundational training to tactical simulation ▶ Ensure structured assessment at each phase ▶ Build fitness gradually with appropriate recovery ▶ Align conditioning with occupational task demands
R0063	Priority 1	▶ Develop early intervention strategies based on comprehensive risk assessments ▶ Use screening results to identify trainees needing additional support ▶ Implement targeted interventions before problems escalate ▶ Provide personalized training modifications and recovery protocols ▶ Reduce preventable attrition through proactive support
R0064	Priority 1	▶ Incorporate phased, scenario-based fitness evaluations throughout training ▶ Implement progressive testing that reflects operational environments ▶ Gradually increase assessment complexity and intensity ▶ Combine physical exertion with decision-making under pressure ▶ Use timed obstacle courses and cognitive-physical simulations ▶ Monitor adaptation and development throughout training cycle
R0065	Priority 1	▶ Implement longitudinal tracking of health and performance outcomes ▶ Establish longitudinal health and performance monitoring systems ▶ Track trainee fitness progression from entry through field deployment ▶ Use data to inform ongoing improvements to fitness programming ▶ Identify early indicators of injury risk or performance issues ▶ Create feedback mechanisms for continuous program refinement
R0066	Priority 1	▶ Embed wellness education as core component of trainee training ▶ Integrate education on injury prevention, recovery, and self-care ▶ Teach trainees to understand their bodies and recognize warning signs ▶ Promote long-term health and fitness as career-long priorities ▶ Shift from short-term testing focus to lifelong wellness development
R0067	Priority 1	▶ Incorporate structured conditioning programs alongside individualized recovery protocols ▶ Introduce individualized recovery and wellness education programs ▶ Ensure training load matches individual capacity and adaptation rate ▶ Provide personalized support for trainees at different fitness levels ▶ Balance challenge with adequate recovery for positive adaptation
R0068	Priority 1	▶ Provide training for drill instructors on injury prevention, load management and recovery periods ▶ Educate DIs on safe training loads and recovery management ▶ Teach principles of progressive overload and periodization ▶ Provide understanding of individual variation in adaptation ▶ Create shared language around evidence-based training practices
R0069	Priority 1	▶ Adopt Army PT Guidelines principles comprehensively ▶ Foster culture of injury risk reduction in all PT aspects ▶ Coordinate with medical subject matter experts for consultation ▶ Ensure PT appropriate to conditioning levels with gradual progression ▶ Monitor trainees for injury with prompt medical attention for complaints ▶ Implement all six Army commander requirements for PT oversight

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0070	Priority 1	▶ Implement evidence-based cross-training to replace some running volume ▶ Reduce overall running volume to prevent lower-extremity injuries ▶ Introduce variety through swimming, cycling, rowing, circuit training ▶ Maintain cardiovascular development while reducing repetitive impact ▶ Apply research showing cross-training effectiveness in injury reduction
R0071	Priority 1	▶ Embed comprehensive injury prevention and recovery education ▶ Teach trainees to recognize early warning signs of overtraining ▶ Provide education on self-care, nutrition, hydration, sleep ▶ Explain physiological processes of adaptation and recovery ▶ Empower trainees to manage their own physical health proactively
R0072	Priority 1	▶ Engage services of professional specialists ▶ Hire appropriately credentialed Strength Coach, Exercise Physiologist, Athletic Trainer, and Nurse ▶ Qualified strength coach to guide/assist sworn PT staff with evidence-based program ▶ Exercise physiologist to develop exercise plans, monitor progress, help recovery ▶ Athletic trainer and nurse to prevent, diagnose, treat muscle and bone injuries ▶ Positions should prove cost-effective given high injury/attrition costs ▶ Allows reassignment of sworn troopers to front-line positions, improving staffing
R0073	Priority 2	▶ Audit and revise fitness programming annually ▶ Ensure alignment with job duties, safety standards, and legal defensibility ▶ Review effectiveness using injury data and performance outcomes ▶ Update programming based on emerging research and effective practices ▶ Implement all "Actionable Items" outlined in supporting guidelines ▶ Create continuous improvement cycle for physical training program

SECTION 5: CURRICULUM AND TRAINING METHODS

Curriculum and Training Methods Key Findings

- ▶ **Curriculum Design Lacks Coherence and Progression**
 - ▶ The curriculum covers required content but lacks a structured, sequential, building-block framework. Lessons are fragmented, with limited cumulative learning and unclear progression from foundational concepts to advanced applications.
- ▶ **Instructional Delivery Is Insufficiently Integrated and Scenario-Based**
 - ▶ Training relies heavily on siloed, topic-specific instruction rather than integrated, scenario-driven learning models that reflect real-world policing challenges. This approach limits contextual understanding, decision-making development, and applied competency.
- ▶ **Core Competencies and Standards Alignment Are Inconsistently Defined**
 - ▶ Key competencies (legal knowledge, tactics, communication, ethics, community engagement) are not clearly articulated or consistently aligned with POST, MPTC, or national best-practice standards, weakening instructional focus and outcome evaluation.
- ▶ **Lesson Planning, Assessment, and Remediation Lack Standardization and Evidence-Based Frameworks**
 - ▶ Lesson plans vary widely in quality and structure, assessments are inconsistently aligned to objectives, and corrective or remedial training is rarely data-driven or individually tailored. Documentation, progress tracking, and accountability mechanisms are limited.
- ▶ **Staffing Capacity and Specialized Expertise Are Insufficient**
 - ▶ Current staffing levels do not meet operational demands, and the absence of dedicated curriculum developers, instructional designers, and administrative support undermines curriculum quality, assessment validity, and defensible training outcomes.
- ▶ **High-Stress Training Practices Are Inconsistently Aligned with Adult-Learning Research**
 - ▶ Some high-stress “inoculation” events emphasize ritualized adversity or punitive traditions rather than evidence-based learning objectives. In certain cases, stressors overshadow instructional goals and conflict with modern adult-learning principles.
- ▶ **Wellness, Medical, and Injury Prevention Systems Are Unevenly Integrated**
 - ▶ On-site medical care and emerging wellness supports provide a strong foundation, but injury tracking, workload management, and prevention strategies are underdeveloped. Injury data is collected inconsistently and rarely analyzed to inform training modifications.
- ▶ **Data Fragmentation Limits Early Intervention and Organizational Learning**
 - ▶ Decentralized records, disconnected systems, and the absence of analytics dashboards hinder early identification of academic, physical, or behavioral risk factors and reduce the SPA's ability to implement proactive, individualized interventions.

- **Broader Field Trends Highlight Gaps in Professionalization, Retention, and Standardization**
 - Wide attrition variability, inconsistent pre-selection screening, and national variation in academy models reflect systemic challenges. Leading academies are increasingly adopting professional, evidence-based approaches—including non-sworn experts, hybrid stress models, and data-driven reform—underscoring areas where the program lags current effective practices.

5.1 The MSP Academy Curriculum

The IACP study team evaluated the Massachusetts State Police (MSP) Training Academy's trainee curriculum to assess its coherence, instructional quality, and alignment with modern policing expectations and national best practices. While MSP's training exceeds mandated requirements and accreditation standards, the review identified opportunities to enhance curriculum structure, delivery, and integration to better prepare trainees for contemporary policing challenges.

MSP's basic training program exceeds the minimum standards set by the Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (POST), meets all Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission (MPAC) requirements, and in February 2025 satisfied all mandated trainee training obligations. This reflects the agency's commitment to preparing trainees for the realities of modern policing.

A well-designed curriculum should be research-based, adaptable, student-centered, and measurable. National guidance—including the U.S. Department of Justice's Improving Learning Outcomes in Police Academy Training—emphasizes that integrated, clearly structured curricula improve knowledge retention, reduce redundancy, and strengthen real-world decision-making. Integrated curricula intentionally connect topics; structured curricula sequence content logically and align objectives, methods, and assessments.³⁹

Despite MSP's adoption of varied instructional methods—including ICAT, ABLE, Fair and Impartial Policing, leadership instruction, and scenario-based modules—the study team identified key gaps. Lesson plans lack coherence, do not consistently follow a cumulative sequence, and do not explicitly incorporate critical frameworks such as procedural justice. National standards increasingly call for competency-based training grounded in job-task analysis, measurable learning objectives, integration between academy and field training, and stronger emphasis on crisis intervention, communication, cultural responsiveness, and decision-making under stress.

Class size also affects instructional quality. Ideally, smaller trainee classes improve learning outcomes by increasing instructor feedback and supporting a more effective learning environment. MSP's recent move to split large RTT cohorts into smaller classes represents a positive step.

The study team found several underrepresented areas, including procedural justice, which encompasses impartiality, transparency, voice, and fairness. These principles improve both internal organizational climate and external community trust. Their integration across lesson plans—particularly in Leadership Development, Ethics & Integrity, ICAT, Patrol Procedures, and Defensive Tactics—would strengthen the SPA's alignment with contemporary policing expectations.

Findings and Observations

Curriculum lacks structural coherence and sequential progression.

Although the SPA covers required material, lesson plans do not follow a consistent, building-block design. This limits cumulative learning, reduces instructional clarity, and contributes to fragmentation across topics.

Instructional methods remain siloed rather than integrated and scenario-based.

Current delivery relies heavily on traditional, topic-isolated instruction. National effective practices recommend integrated, scenario-driven models that reflect how officers encounter complex, overlapping issues in the field.

³⁹ Dianne Beer Maxwell, Jon Blum, Timothy Bonadies, Jessica Herbert, and Peggy Schaefer, *Improving Learning Outcomes in Police Academy Training* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2023).

Procedural justice principles are not explicitly incorporated.

The review found no systematic integration of procedural justice—an essential framework for internal legitimacy, morale, and community trust—within lesson plans or across instructional content.

Core competencies are not consistently defined or aligned with state and national standards.

Competency areas such as legal knowledge, tactics, communication, ethics, and community engagement need clearer articulation and stronger alignment with POST, MPTC, and national best-practice guidelines.

Lesson plan development is inconsistent and lacks standardization.

Variability in lesson plan structure and quality reduces instructional consistency, diminishes accountability, and creates challenges in evaluating learning outcomes.

Summary

The law enforcement landscape has evolved significantly due to technological change, demographic shifts, mental health and substance use crises, evolving legal standards, and societal expectations of accountability. High-profile incidents have underscored the critical need for trusted, community-aligned policing and for training that strengthens decision-making, communication, and professionalism.

To meet these demands, MSP must modernize both the substance and the structure of its recruit training. This includes integrating procedural justice, strengthening lesson plan design, and adopting intentional, competency-based, scenario-driven instruction that mirrors real-world complexity.

Overall, the IACP study team recommends strengthening the structure, coherence, and content of lesson plans to support a more integrated and effective training program.

5.2 MSP Curriculum Unit—Staffing and Coordination

Interviews with the four members of the Curriculum Unit—primarily responsible for curriculum review and maintenance—revealed that none have received formal training in lesson plan development. Additionally, the current curriculum lacks a clear instructional progression; while staff are aware of the content required before Round Robin 1 and Round Robin 2, the structure does not reflect a sequential, building-block approach to learning. Structured lesson plans were not introduced until approximately two years ago. Despite these constraints, the team has consistently demonstrated strong dedication to enhancing the trainee curriculum and managing evolving responsibilities. Their shared objective remains clear: to graduate trainees who possess a solid understanding of academy content and are better equipped for success as state troopers.

The MSP would benefit from engaging external partners to strengthen the development and maintenance of its training curriculum. While sworn instructors provide essential operational insight, the specialized work of curriculum design requires competencies beyond traditional law enforcement expertise. Modern training programs demand professionals skilled in instructional systems design, adult learning theory, and assessment validation to ensure that lesson plans and evaluations are clear, defensible, and aligned with measurable outcomes.

Curriculum developers with law enforcement experience add critical value by ensuring that each test item ties directly to learning objectives and is free from ambiguity, bias, or leading language. This level of rigor is especially important in high-stakes environments where fairness, clarity, and legal defensibility are essential. Without dedicated curriculum specialists, instructional quality can vary, and alignment with standards becomes more difficult to sustain.

MSP has several avenues for accessing this expertise. Local universities—particularly those with Criminal Justice departments or instructional design programs—offer faculty and graduate students with relevant skills. Community colleges that operate police academies provide further expertise in public-safety-focused instructional design. National organizations such as the

International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST) also provide curriculum development services and Job Task Analyses tailored to law enforcement agencies.

Independent consultants with backgrounds in Instructional Systems Design, law enforcement training, and POST/MPTC requirements represent another resource. These specialists can help develop or refine lesson plans, validate assessments, and create standardized templates that promote consistency across the training program. Leveraging such external support would strengthen MSP's curriculum, improve sustainability, and ease the burden on internal staff.

Further, Curriculum Unit staff could benefit from access to specialized training opportunities—either through attendance or structured review—to support development of a comprehensive lesson plan template. Examples may include instructional design workshops, law enforcement-specific pedagogy programs, or certified online modules in curriculum development:

- ▶ MPTC: Instructor Development Course (IDC), which prepares the officer to deliver training and develop lesson plans
- ▶ Police1's Train-the-Trainer Guide—offers a breakdown of how to build lesson plans with performance objectives and instructional variety
- ▶ FLETC Course Law Enforcement Instructional Skills Training Program (LEISTP)

Key Findings

Staffing levels and skill diversity are insufficient to meet current training program demands.

Current workload requirements exceed available staffing capacity, resulting in operational strain and limiting the unit's ability to maintain high-quality curriculum development, assessment design, and administrative functions. The absence of dedicated instructional designers or administrative support restricts the development of defensible and well-structured training materials.

Limited curriculum development expertise.

The training program lacks dedicated curriculum development expertise necessary for valid, consistent, and instructionally sound training products. Without trained curriculum developers, test items and lesson plans lack consistent alignment with learning objectives, instructional effective practices, and defensible assessment standards. This gap directly affects the accuracy, fairness, and reliability of training delivery and evaluation.

Decentralized training materials/records.

Training materials and records are not managed through a centralized digital platform, reducing efficiency and complicating discovery and administrative workflows. Decentralized or inconsistent storage practices impede quick retrieval of curriculum documents, evaluations, and training records, resulting in delays and administrative inefficiencies.

Summary

Overall, the IACP study team recommends strengthening the structure and content of lesson plans by bringing on a curriculum developer with expertise in law enforcement and integrated instructional design and testing. Adding this professional to the MSP team would position the agency to become one of the premier academic recruit training facilities in the country—while maintaining a clear focus on the rigorous demands trainees face during training.

These recommendations aim to strengthen recruit training by equipping curriculum developers with tools to build a rigorous, integrated program—one that ensures instructional consistency, cultivates modern policing competencies, and delivers measurable outcomes.

5.3 Corrective Remedial Training Practices

This section examines how corrective and remedial training are conceived, delivered, documented, and overseen at the SPA for trainees.

For the purposes of this assessment, corrective training refers to immediate, focused coaching intended to address discrete performance or comportment issues observed during instruction or practical exercises. Remedial training refers to a documented, individualized plan with defined objectives, methods, hours, instructors, and retesting criteria used when a trainee demonstrates a persisting skill or knowledge gap (e.g., academics, EVOC, defensive tactics, physical readiness). The review emphasizes that neither corrective nor remedial measures should be punitive; rather, both should be anchored in adult-learning principles and measurable learning outcomes.

The review identified several concerning themes: high early attrition; fragmented budgeting and capital planning; limited analytics on remediation and recycling; inconsistent application of high-stress “stress exposure resiliency” activities to explicit learning objectives; under-specified EVOC and academic remedial pathways; uneven mentoring and instructor development; partial integration of wellness supports; and disjointed coordination with POST. At the same time, the SPA benefits from notable assets including on-site PA-led medical capability, a maturing Employee Assistance Unit (EAU)/Peer Support and chaplaincy presence, and a structured resignation/exit process that can be leveraged to build a modern, evidence-based remediation system.

This report presents key findings, synthesizes background and operational context, and offers effective practice recommendations with priorities. The intended outcome is a clear, consistent, and data-informed framework for corrective and remedial training that reduces preventable attrition and injuries, strengthens instructional quality, and measurably improves trainee readiness for constitutional, safe, and effective policing.

Contemporary Effective Practices

Contemporary effective practice emphasizes adult-learning methods, scenario/problem-based remediation, documented and individualized remedial plans, clear “no degrading/no punishment” policies, early injury-risk mitigation, decision-making frameworks (e.g., ICAT), robust instructor standards, and strong wellness integration across trainee and in-service phases.

Current MSP Remedial Training Framework

The Massachusetts State Police Academy’s remedial training framework is intended to support trainees who encounter difficulty during recruit training, emphasizing intervention, documentation, and accountability. However, review of the Trainee Manual, Staff Manual, Performance Assessment and Testing/Examinations policy (ACD-20), and the Dismissal from Recruit Training policy (ACD-16) reveals that there is no standardized remedial protocol across all instructional disciplines.

While disciplines such as Firearms and Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC) appear to have robust remedial procedures, academic instruction and “Other Testing” (as defined in ACD-20) merely state that “remedial training may be offered prior to retest,” without specifying the process.

Gaps in Standardization

To enhance the consistency and effectiveness of remedial training, the SPA should establish specific guidelines that clearly outline the steps to be taken when a trainee fails to meet established performance standards. These guidelines should include:

- ▶ Structured review of the trainee’s notes compared to those of a peer who successfully passed the assessment, to identify gaps in comprehension or note-taking skills
- ▶ Targeted review of instructional materials to confirm that all required topics were adequately covered
- ▶ Re-engagement with the instructional objectives to reinforce key concepts prior to the retest
- ▶ Development of alternate test questions or performance measures that align with the original instructional goals, ensuring the integrity and fairness of the remedial assessment

By implementing a standardized, transparent remedial framework across all disciplines, the SPA can better support trainee success while maintaining rigorous training standards.

Observations and Findings

High-stress mass “inoculation” events inconsistently aligned with learning objectives.

At times these sessions incorporate “resign now” language, ritualized adversity, or practices rooted in rite-of-passage traditions rather than modern training research, sometimes including demeaning or contradictory messaging. This diverges from adult-learning standards and can overshadow instructional goals with unnecessary psychological stress.

Limited tutoring, coaching, and scenario-based supports.

Insufficient Problem-Based Learning (PBL) supports lead to reliance on rote study or avoidance of failure rather than true competency-building. National training bodies endorse adult-learning, decision-making, and realistic scenario approaches over punitive or high-pressure academic remediation.

Corrective and remedial training lacks formal, evidence-based framework.

Current remedial actions across academics, EVOC, PT, and comportment are not consistently tailored to the trainee or tied to specific objectives. Plans are rarely data-driven, documentation is limited, and progress is not systematically tracked—limiting both accountability and effectiveness.

Integrated medical and wellness supports provide strong foundation.

On-site medical capability (PA-led urgent care) enables immediate evaluation, reduces time lost to injuries, and supports appropriately timed return-to-training when used with clear protocols and integrated recovery plans. The growing presence of EAU, Peer Support, and chaplaincy—especially in Week 0—strengthens a wellness-informed remediation model by offering early, visible access to supportive resources. Together, these medical and wellness elements foster healthier coping mechanisms, encourage proactive help-seeking, enhance retention, and promote more standardized and humane remediation pathways.

Injury tracking and prevention practices insufficient.

Current practices do not consistently track injury patterns or apply research-supported load management strategies. Given that musculoskeletal injuries—especially lower-limb—are common in trainee PT, structured progression and mitigations would support both prevention and safer PT-related remediation.

Fragmented data systems limit early problem detection.

Absence of integrated analytics, limited visibility into recycles and deferrals, and no operational dashboards (e.g., Power BI) reduce the SPA’s ability to identify trends early. Without consolidated data, triggers for early intervention, individualized plans, and organizational learning are weakened.

Summary

The SPA has dedicated personnel and valuable assets including medical capability, structured exit pathways, and wellness partners. However, corrective and remedial training is hampered by: (1) a stress-centric culture not consistently anchored to explicit learning objectives; (2) gaps in adult-learning methods, coaching, and documentation; (3) weak analytics; and (4) partial integration of wellness supports. Aligning policies and practices with contemporary standards (IACP, PERF, IADLEST) will reduce attrition, increase fairness and transparency, and measurably improve trainee competency and safety.

5.4 Benchmarking Against Peer Institutions

This section summarizes findings from 37 state police academy surveys to identify national trends, emerging effective practices, and opportunities for the MSP to enhance its training model. The results indicate a profession in transition, with many academies shifting away from traditional, high-stress, paramilitary approaches and toward evidence-based, hybrid models that prioritize cognitive learning, professionalism, wellness, and mission-focused stress exposure. The benchmarking data also reveals substantial variation across academies in program duration, staffing, instructional practices, and attrition, underscoring the need for strategic modernization.

The benchmarking analysis reveals major differences across state police academies in structure, staffing, training philosophy, and disciplinary culture.

Training Models and Duration

Training programs range from short, 14-week models to nearly year-long residential academies. Residential programs typically impose stricter restrictions on trainees, while commuter models permit home living and greater personal autonomy. The significant variation in program hours—640 in New Hampshire to around 1,400 in Connecticut—illustrates a lack of uniformity in baseline expectations for officer preparation.

Disciplinary Approaches

Three models predominate: high-stress, low-stress, and hybrid. Most agencies now favor a hybrid model (e.g., Alabama, California, Indiana), blending structured discipline with supportive academic environments. Some agencies maintain traditional, fully high-stress paramilitary models (e.g., Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania). Use of demerit systems is similarly inconsistent.

Instructional and Staffing Practices

Agencies employ diverse approaches to curriculum development. Some rely on sworn instructors; others incorporate external subject-matter experts, civilian curriculum designers with advanced degrees, and

professional exam builders. Practices also vary regarding the role of drill instructors (DIs) and Tactical Officers (TACs)—some combine discipline and instruction, while others separate the roles to enhance learning conditions.

Wellness, Support, and Family Contact

Most academies offer wellness resources such as EAP, chaplains, peer support, and medical staff. However, the degree of access varies substantially. Family contact ranges from unrestricted (common in commuter academies) to severely limited, as seen in some residential programs.

Attrition Patterns

Attrition rates across recent classes are highly variable, from 0% to more than 95%. Consistent reasons—lack of preparation, personal issues, or mismatch with career expectations—suggest that improved pre-academy preparation and realistic job previews could dramatically reduce attrition and training inefficiencies.

Trends in Modernization

A notable shift is occurring toward structured, professionalized, hybrid training models. Agencies such as Missouri, Connecticut, and Minnesota have modernized stress exposure to emphasize learning purpose, consistency, and transparency. Many are separating disciplinary and instructional roles to maintain low-stress academic environments aligned with adult learning principles.

Risk Management and Injury Analysis

While most academies track injuries, fewer systematically analyze the data. Those that do (e.g., Vermont, Arkansas) have reduced specific injuries through training adjustments and risk assessment protocols. Increasingly, agencies are incorporating medical professionals into their academies as full-time staff to support wellness, injury prevention, and long-term officer health.

Head Strikes in Training

A subset of academies explicitly regulate head strikes, requiring written policy, PPE (e.g., headgear), instructor-to-student ratios, medical oversight, and scenario justification. Others prohibit head strikes in training

altogether or confine them to carefully controlled evolutions. Documented head-strike policies are associated with clearer training intent, reduced injury risk, and improved legal defensibility.

External Oversight and Advisory Boards

Some academies integrate external advisory boards or academic partners to prevent stagnation and ensure modernization (e.g., California Highway Patrol, Michigan State Police).

Key Findings:

State police academies are moving away from purely high-stress models toward hybrid approaches.

Many academies now blend structured discipline with low-stress environments designed to support cognitive learning. This shift is associated with improved retention, reduced injuries, and clearer articulation of the purpose behind stress-inducing activities.

Agencies that analyze injury data—not just track it—significantly reduce training-related risks.

While most academies collect injury data, far fewer routinely analyze it to modify training. Those that do have directly mitigated risks such as overexertion injuries, demonstrating a clear effective practice in safety and wellness.

Professionalization is increasing, with more academies integrating non-sworn experts.

Agencies increasingly rely on PhDs, medical professionals, athletic trainers, and curriculum specialists to support instruction, wellness, and data-driven program improvements. This trend reflects a broader shift toward evidence-based, professional policing.

Wide attrition variability indicates systemic challenges in recruitment and realistic job previews.

Attrition rates range from 0% to more than 90%, with common reasons—“not for me,” “not mentally prepared,” “not physically prepared”—suggesting gaps in pre-selection processes. Many academies are effectively serving as expensive screening tools rather than final training institutions.

Training models, program length, and disciplinary structures vary widely across states.

Academies differ significantly in residential vs. commuter models, program duration (14–34 weeks), training hours (640–1,400 hours), and use of disciplinary systems (e.g., “gigs” or demerits). This lack of national consensus reflects the absence of standardized expectations for foundational police training.

Summary

Benchmarking reveals a profession undergoing significant transformation. Many state police academies are modernizing training to be more professional, data-driven, and aligned with adult learning principles. Hybrid stress models, role separation between discipline and instruction, expanded use of professional expertise, and improved injury analysis are emerging as effective practices. At the same time, wide variation in program length, stress structure, staffing, and attrition highlights a lack of national consensus on foundational police training.

For MSP, these findings illustrate both validation and opportunity: validation in areas where MSP is already aligned with national trends, and opportunity to strengthen professionalization, wellness, instructional design, and pre-academy preparation to reduce attrition and enhance learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0074	Critical	▶ Integrate procedural justice principles across training and daily academy life aligned with national effective practices.
R0075	Critical	▶ Promote procedural justice principles for both internal adherence and external community trust. Embed procedural justice concepts into multiple areas of study including Leadership, Ethics, Patrol Procedures, and Defensive Tactics. (highlight the Excellence Initiative)
R0076	Critical	▶ Model professionalism, empathy, and fairness consistently to reinforce procedural justice externally with communities.
R0077	Critical	▶ Strengthening academy curriculum with balanced adult learning. ▶ Align with current guidance emphasizing scenario/problem-based instruction, decision-making under stress, guided practice, and wellness integration rather than purely stress-based approaches.⁴⁰
R0078	Critical	▶ Explicitly prohibit degrading/punitive physical “corrective” exercises. ▶ Codify a clear prohibition on using physical exercises as punishment; ensure that all stress-inducing activities are directly tied to defined learning objectives and job-relevant competencies and are conducted in a manner consistent with professional training standards.
R0079	Critical	▶ Adopt a Phased, Hybrid Training Model ▶ Transition from a uniform high-stress environment to a phased model where stress is introduced strategically and a low-stress environment is maintained for cognitive learning. ▶ The rationale is to improve information retention and directly address the primary reasons for attrition. Implementation should be clearly documented.
R0080	Critical	▶ Formalize Injury and Wellness Analysis ▶ Establish a closed-loop system for injury management. This involves not only tracking every injury but also conducting a regular, formal analysis to identify patterns and causes. ▶ The analysis should be used to directly inform modifications to physical fitness, defensive tactics, and other training areas. This proactive approach, as seen in the Arkansas and Ohio academies, is critical for risk mitigation and cadet well-being.
R0081	Critical	▶ Implement Structured Stress Inoculation Training (SIT) with progressive exposure.
R0082	Critical	▶ Develop integrated mental health programs modeled on RCMP’s ERST approach.
R0083	Critical	▶ Strengthen leadership accountability and institute safeguards against arbitrary disciplinary and harmful practices.⁴¹
R0084	Priority 1	▶ Continue delivering smaller trainee class sizes. ▶ Maintain smaller class cohorts to improve feedback, student engagement, and instructional effectiveness.
R0085	Priority 1	▶ Create a non-sworn professional training leadership role to oversee curriculum modernization and engage curriculum experts or academic partners to develop an integrated, performance-based, scenario-driven program with measurable learning outcomes.
R0086	Priority 1	▶ Consider hiring non-sworn members with instructional design or administrative expertise to supplement existing capacity.
R0087	Priority 1	▶ Increase full-time staffing by one to two personnel to reduce workload and ensure the integrity of assigned responsibilities.

40 Police Executive Research Forum. “Transforming Police Recruit Training.” *Critical Issues in Policing Series*. n.d. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/TransformingRecruitTraining.pdf>.

41 Ibid

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0088	Priority 1	▶ Evaluate and implement a centralized digital platform for storing all trainee/trooper training materials and records to improve the efficiency of training discovery requests
R0089	Priority 1	▶ Adopt a formal Remedial Training Policy & SOP. ▶ Define remedial criteria (e.g., academic exam <80%; EVOC rubric failure; PT/DT skill deficit; comportment concerns), required root-cause analysis, individualized plan (methods, hours, instructor), re-test standards, documentation, and escalation.⁴²
R0090	Priority 1	▶ Integrate External Professional Expertise ▶ Hire or contract with non-sworn professionals, such as athletic trainers, physical therapists, doctors, and specialists in curriculum development. This professionalizes the academy's operations and provides a scientific, evidence-based foundation for training and wellness programs. ▶ Participate in IACP SPPADS to enhance knowledge of emerging approaches by peer organizations.
R0091	Priority 1	▶ Develop a Comprehensive Realistic Job Preview and Mentor Program ▶ To combat the consistent issue of unprepared trainees, agencies must implement mandatory pre-academy programs. These programs should provide a candid, realistic overview of the career, offer a foundational physical training regimen, and establish a formal mentor relationship. The goal is to set realistic expectations and provide a support network, which will reduce attrition at the source.
R0092	Priority 1	▶ Separate Disciplinary and Instructional Staff Roles ▶ The study team observed that, in practice, disciplinary interventions and tone-setting are sometimes carried into instructional periods, undermining consistency and limiting trainees' ability to absorb critical skills in a low-stress learning environment. ▶ MSP should formalize and enforce clear boundaries for when and how disciplinary staff may enter or intervene in instructional spaces, assign explicit "instructional control" to subject-matter instructors during classroom and skills blocks, and confine high-stress delivery to defined stress-inoculation scenarios tied to learning objectives and supervised for safety.
R0093	Priority 1	▶ Expand use of enhanced simulation-based training with structured feedback and debriefing.
R0094	Priority 1	▶ Conduct regular curriculum reviews to ensure alignment with democratic principles and community-focused policing strategies.
R0095	Priority 2	▶ Transition to logically sequenced, integrated, performance-based curriculum.
R0096	Priority 2	▶ Align lesson plans with real-world policing scenarios and modern competencies.
R0097	Priority 2	▶ Formalize lesson plan templates and evaluation tools tied to learning outcomes.
R0098	Priority 2	▶ Standardize lesson plan development ▶ Use a consistent lesson plan template (see Appendix F) with required components to ensure
R0099	Priority 2	▶ Integrate access to specialized training opportunities - either through attendance or structured review—to support the Curriculum Unit
R0100	Priority 2	▶ Develop and implement standardized protocols for real-time auditing of instructional delivery and curriculum adherence

⁴² International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training, *Model Standards*, n.d., <https://www.iadlest.org/our-services/model-standards>.

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0101	Priority 2	▶ Move to adult-learning & scenario/problem-based remediation. ▶ Replace unstructured “stress blocks” with objective-linked stress scenarios that are anchored to validated learning goals, monitored by safety officers, and include injury-mitigation guardrails. ▶ Stress exposure should follow a progressive model with cognitive/behavioral coping skills instruction and recovery periods, eliminating public humiliation rituals while tracking both performance outcomes and injury risk.^{43, 44}
R0102	Priority 2	▶ Standing Academic Support Program. ▶ Tutoring clinics, study skills/time-management workshops, and Problem Based Learning (PBL)-style scenario reviews for failed modules; staggered re-tests with guardrails to reduce fatigue-bias.⁴⁵
R0103	Priority 2	▶ Instructor standards & oversight. ▶ Require instructor/DI certification + periodic recertification; mentorship for new instructors; observation checklists; after-action reviews linking remedial outcomes to teaching adjustments.⁴⁶

⁴³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Perspective,” *Law Enforcement Bulletin*, n.d., <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/perspective>.

⁴⁴ D. W. Grupe et al., “The Impact of Mindfulness Training on Police Officer Stress, Mental Health, and Salivary Cortisol Levels,” National Institute of Justice, n.d., <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/impact-mindfulness-training-police-officer-stress-mental-health-and-salivary>.

⁴⁵ California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, *Police Training Program Guide*, n.d., https://post.ca.gov/portals/0/post_docs/publications/police-training-program/PTP-Vol1.pdf.

⁴⁶ Indiana Law Enforcement Academy, “TRA-014 Instructor Certification, Recertification, and Utilization”, n.d., <https://public.powerdms.com/Ind3899/documents/2007924/TRA014%20Instructor%20Certification-Recertification%20and%20Utilization>.

APPENDIX A: IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Implementation Phases

Phase I: Immediate Stabilization and Risk Mitigation

Timeframe: 0–12 months

Primary Focus: Safety, clarity, governance, and foundational controls

Priority Levels: Critical and Priority 1

Objectives

- ▶ Reduce immediate risk to trainees and staff
- ▶ Establish clear expectations, authority, and oversight
- ▶ Halt practices that undermine safety, learning, or professionalism

Key Actions

- ▶ Codify prohibitions on degrading or punitive physical “corrective” exercises and clearly define permissible stress exposure tied to learning objectives.
- ▶ Establish consistent oversight protocols for senior leadership presence during high-stress training events, emphasizing supervision and safety rather than symbolic endorsement.
- ▶ Standardize and formalize instructor conduct expectations, including drill instructor roles, authority, and accountability.
- ▶ Improve documentation and review of trainee injuries, resignations, and safety incidents.
- ▶ Enhance early integration and visibility of wellness supports (medical, EAU, chaplaincy) during initial training phases.
- ▶ Initiate a structured review of trainee attrition data, including exit questionnaire design and analytic limitations.

Key Outputs

- ▶ Updated SPA policies and directives
- ▶ Clear command guidance on stress exposure and instructor conduct
- ▶ Immediate risk-reduction measures documented and communicated

Phase II: Structural Alignment and Capacity Building

Timeframe: 1–3 years

Primary Focus: Staffing stability, instructional quality, analytics, and systems

Priority Levels: Priority 1 and Priority 2

Objectives

- ▶ Strengthening institutional continuity and professional capacity
- ▶ Shift from reactive to preventive approaches in training and staffing
- ▶ Build systems to support data-informed decision-making

Key Actions

- ▶ Transition critical SPA positions from temporary duty (TDY) assignments to permanent roles where operationally feasible.
- ▶ Develop and implement a formal Instructor Development Framework grounded in adult learning theory, coaching, and professional role modeling.
- ▶ Standardize trainee evaluation, remediation, and feedback processes across instructional settings.
- ▶ Modernize training records management and analytics to track injuries, attrition, performance trends, and outcomes.
- ▶ Improve coordination between recruitment, selection, and training functions to reduce reliance on the SPA as a primary screening mechanism.
- ▶ Strengthen external engagement with professional organizations and peer academies (e.g., SPPADS) to support continuous improvement.

Key Outputs

- ▶ Permanent staffing model for SPA leadership and key functions
- ▶ Instructor development curriculum and certification standards
- ▶ Enhanced data dashboards and reporting capabilities

Phase III: Modernization and Long-Term Sustainability

Timeframe: 3–5 years

Primary Focus: Facilities, culture change, and strategic integration

Priority Levels: Priority 2 and Priority 3

Objectives

- ▶ Align facilities and infrastructure with modern training requirements
- ▶ Institutionalize evidence-based training culture
- ▶ Ensure long-term resilience and adaptability

Key Actions

- ▶ Develop a comprehensive capital replacement and improvement plan for the SPA, aligned with training needs, safety requirements, and future capacity.
- ▶ Integrate wellness, resilience, and performance psychology principles into the training curriculum in a structured and measurable way.
- ▶ Embed continuous evaluation mechanisms, including periodic external reviews, to assess training effectiveness and reform progress.
- ▶ Align SPA operations with broader MSP strategic planning and workforce development goals.
- ▶ Formalize succession planning for SPA leadership and instructional roles.

Key Outputs

- ▶ Multi-year capital improvement plan
- ▶ Institutionalized culture of continuous improvement
- ▶ Sustained reduction in preventable attrition and injuries

Governance and Accountability

Successful implementation will require clear ownership, regular reporting, and sustained leadership engagement. MSP should designate a senior executive sponsor responsible for overseeing implementation, supported by a cross-functional implementation team. Progress should be reviewed at regular intervals and documented through written status updates tied to this roadmap.

To ensure transparency and durability, MSP is encouraged to consider periodic external assessment to validate progress, identify emerging risks, and support course correction.

Key Principle

The recommendations in this report are not intended to be implemented in isolation. Meaningful reform will require coordinated action across leadership, staffing, training philosophy, wellness integration, and infrastructure investment. This roadmap provides a structured pathway to achieve that goal while balancing urgency, feasibility, and long-term sustainability.

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This appendix consolidates recommendations and organizes them in priority order (Strategic, Critical, Priority 1, Priority 2, Priority 3) by section. Recommendation IDs (R###) reflect the order in which recommendations appear in the report.

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
Executive Summary / Cross-Cutting		
R0000	Strategic	Employ an independent, external audit team consisting of police training experts to review SPA operations for at least the next five years, inclusive of annual reporting, to ensure adherence to recommendations implemented from the IACP Study and to support continual improvement of the Department's training program.
Section 1: Organizational Environment		
R0001	Critical	Ensure consistency and continuity of SPA leadership to advance and maintain future training philosophy.
R0002	Critical	Hire a non-sworn professional position, with a background in education and training and at the equivalent to the sworn rank of lieutenant or sergeant, to support and enhance continuity at the leadership level. Consideration should be given to creating a non-sworn professional "Director of the Academy" to add stability.
R0003	Priority 1	Conduct a capital improvement assessment and create a modernization plan. (ex., including gymnasium, EVOC facility)
R0004	Priority 1	Adopt centralized, digital systems for curriculum, training records, and evaluation tools.
R0005	Priority 2	Conduct an assessment to identify the core positions required for effective training delivery and training support, and transition those roles to stable, permanent assignments. Eliminate the routine practice of filling essential SPA functions through lengthy TDY placements, particularly in positions that require continuity, specialized expertise, and sustained accountability.
R0006	Priority 2	The Department should communicate, at the executive level, that serving at the SPA is a mission-critical assignment and a professional development pathway, not a career-ending venture. This commitment should be reinforced through transparent selection criteria, stable tour lengths, recognition and promotion credit for SPA service, and leadership messaging that elevates training roles as central to the Department's operational readiness and public trust.
R0007	Priority 2	Expand delegated SPA budget authority for defined categories of recurring training needs (with thresholds and reporting) to enable timely, high-impact improvements while retaining centralized oversight for capital projects.
Section 2: The Training Environment and Culture		
R0008	Critical	- Establish a balanced stress / non-stress model to lower attrition and improve performance. - Insist that high stress exposure be limited to purposeful training exercises and linked to an identified learning objective.
R0009	Critical	Reduce reliance on high-stress training; integrate stress in realistic, job-related contexts and tied to specific learning objectives in the curriculum.
R0010	Critical	Educate the trainees about the purpose of and the learning objectives related to intentional stress exposure prior to implementing stress exposure and throughout the training.
R0011	Critical	Create opportunities for trainees to decompress between training exercises (e.g., mealtimes, evening personal time).

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0012	Critical	▶ Promote a supportive learning environment emphasizing mentorship, guidance, and professionalism.
R0013	Critical	▶ Maintain professional discipline in accordance with the Instructor's Code of Conduct while eliminating traditional methods of humiliation, dehumanizing, or arbitrary punishments.
R0014	Critical	▶ Have a written instructor remediation policy grounded in job tasks and minimum standards. ▶ Remediation should be defined as targeted, time-bound instruction to address specific skills or knowledge deficiencies. It should be implemented quickly when deficiencies are identified. ▶ Policies must align with job-task analyses and clearly state pass/fail criteria, re-testing rules, the appeals process, and conditions for repeating topics or releasing trainees from training.
R0015	Critical	▶ Instructor selection, preparation, and oversight. ▶ Attract capable instructors with clear criteria and incentives; train them in adult learning and evaluation. ▶ Implement a QA process and regular instructor refreshers aligned with curriculum changes.
R0016	Critical	▶ Clear thresholds for extension, re-test, or separation. ▶ Provide structured and consistent opportunities to re-test after remedial instruction; set limits on the number/timing of re-tests; when remediation fails, use documented processes to extend training or separate the trainee.
R0017	Critical	▶ Emotional Intelligence. ▶ Introduce evidence-based modules (emotional intelligence, mindfulness, sleep/fatigue, stress first aid) across SPA phases and into FTO.
R0018	Critical	▶ Quiet hours & lights-out policy. ▶ Posted and enforced in all barracks, aligned with fatigue science (e.g., 7–9 hrs. opportunity to sleep); designate “study hours” separate from sleep hours. ▶ Model on higher-ed & federal dorm policies and fatigue risk frameworks.
R0019	Critical	▶ Shift/supervision design. ▶ Rotate after-hours duty, cap consecutive late nights, and prohibit unscheduled “motivational” formations during established quiet hours.
R0020	Critical	▶ Inclusion, Privacy & Safety in Barracks. ▶ Gender-sensitive assignments: Provide two qualified female staff per deck during high-stress phases; privacy partitions; secure access; clear antiharassment rules and reporting).
R0021	Priority 1	▶ Early identification through structured evaluation and quality assurance. ▶ Standardize evaluation tools and performance tests, ensuring consistent training across instructors before evaluations. Implement internal quality assurance for assessors and document instructor standards.
R0022	Priority 1	▶ Align SPA remediation with field training (FTEP) to avoid mixed messages. ▶ Build SPA and field training “in tandem,” centralize FTO management, select experienced high-performing FTOs through rigorous processes, and ensure field training reinforces academy learning (not undermine it).
R0023	Priority 1	▶ Private Access to Care. ▶ Publish EAU access card/QR in every trainee packet; Stand up an on-call rotation and a confidential hotline; enable secure telehealth and a wellness app to remove logistical barriers (model: large-agency telehealth pilots).
R0024	Priority 1	▶ Integrate Wellness support into trainee remediation. ▶ EAU/Peer Support “warm handoffs” after any remedial assignment; confidential access (incl. off-hours); routine resilience micro-sessions; family-aware supports. (IACP Officer Safety & Wellness).

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0025	Priority 1	▶ Embed a Progressive, Career-Long Wellness Curriculum. ▶ Integrate recurring modules (sleep/fatigue, mindfulness, moral injury, family readiness, suicide prevention, stress first aid), starting in Week Zero and recurring through SPA phases and FTO. ▶ Evidence shows mindfulness/resilience training can lower stress biomarkers and improve mental health.
R0026	Priority 1	▶ Normalize Help-Seeking Through Leadership & Messaging. ▶ Use monthly wellness messaging; commander-led endorsements; supervisor coaching; integrate wellness goals into performance expectations.
R0027	Priority 2	▶ Establish Data & Evaluation Loops. ▶ Deploy a wellness dashboard (e.g., in Power BI) tracking exit reasons, injuries (with training-activity link), EAU contacts, and utilization; use IACP assessment tools.
R0028	Priority 3	▶ Implement telephone privileges during personal time. ▶ The MSP should implement a policy to allow trainees to contact family members after training hours.

Section 3: Recruitment, Hiring, and Attrition

R0029	Critical	▶ Hiring and Selection System Review (Recruitment-to-RTT Entry). ▶ Conduct a comprehensive review of MSP's recruitment, testing, selection, and appointment process—from application through RTT entry—to improve validity, fairness, readiness screening, and downstream training outcomes (to address the perception hiring is flawed). ▶ This review should strengthen upstream screening, reduce preventable attrition, and align hiring decisions with training capacity, safety, and performance expectations. ▶ Consider reintroducing a State Police-only entrance exam and selection process; Use the exam to identify committed candidates and signal agency priorities.
R0030	Critical	▶ Implement structured, job-related RTT interviews using trained panels, job-analysis-based questions, anchored rating scales, and multiple raters; add scenario/work-sample elements where feasible.
R0031	Critical	▶ Align class size and instructor ratios to training capacity and safety using national benchmarks and MSP injury/attrition data to reduce remedial overload and stabilize outcomes.
R0032	Priority 1	▶ Strengthen candidate care and communications from testing through SPA start (clear timelines, checklists, predictable touchpoints, and digital status tracking) to reduce late-stage drop-off.
R0033	Priority 1	▶ Formalize MSP's alignment mechanism with POST (designated liaison/representation) to strengthen feedback loops on standards, assessments, and training changes.
R0034	Priority 1	▶ Resignation Process: Create protected, quiet space for resignation reconsideration process and EAU contact, physically separated from DI activity.
R0035	Priority 1	▶ Establish a Hiring/Academy Analytics Working Group to define standardized data fields (deferrals, recycles, resignations, fail points) and implement a monthly review cadence supported by dashboards.
R0036	Priority 2	▶ Build a hiring-through-graduation analytics dashboard with standardized codes at each funnel stage and routine reporting to executive leadership and SPA leadership.

Section 4: Injury Prevention and Fitness Standards

R0037	Critical	▶ Establish a centralized injury and attrition data infrastructure: ▶ Develop and implement a centralized injury data system with longitudinal tracking capabilities ▶ Ensure system captures where, when, and how injuries occur ▶ Standardize data formatting and collection procedures ▶ Enable early warning detection and trend analysis to understand the financial impact
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Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0038	Critical	▶ Appoint a full-time Risk Manager responsible for injury analytics and reporting ▶ Designate an individual to synthesize injury trends and prevent avoidable injuries ▶ Ensure oversight capacity exists to guide data-driven decision-making ▶ Coordinate with all SPA departments for comprehensive data capture
R0039	Critical	▶ Require post-incident data reviews for all serious injuries or withdrawals ▶ Establish formal review process for significant incidents ▶ Identify prevention opportunities and systemic issues ▶ Document findings and corrective actions taken
R0040	Critical	▶ Establish a chain of command continuous review cycle for training-related injuries and attrition causes ▶ Implement regular, formal injury analysis process ▶ Review trends, patterns, and causation factors ▶ Inform changes to training methods, equipment, and environment ▶ Monitor effectiveness of implemented changes and create “culture of safety” through universal involvement in injury assessment
R0041	Critical	▶ Implement multi-domain entry screening protocols ▶ Require pre-enrollment assessments for aerobic/anaerobic capacity, mobility, strength, and injury risk indicators ▶ Develop and deploy standardized fitness and mobility entry assessments ▶ Use percentile-based benchmarks adjusted for age and gender ▶ Establish minimum entry standards aligned with occupational demands
R0042	Critical	▶ Adopt psychological readiness evaluations ▶ Include resilience profiling, trauma history, and behavioral health indicators to assess suitability for stress exposure ▶ Establish psychological screening tools to assess resilience and stress readiness ▶ Evaluate emotional regulation, trauma coping, and stress tolerance ▶ Implement structured protocol for mental wellness evaluation beyond basic psychological exams
R0043	Critical	▶ Create individualized risk profiles for each trainee ▶ Document baseline metrics and risk factors ▶ Include prior injury history, movement quality assessments, and chronic health conditions ▶ Use profiles to customize training intensity and recovery protocols ▶ Enable early identification of at-risk trainees for targeted support
R0044	Critical	▶ Establish musculoskeletal and injury history screening ▶ Conduct movement quality evaluations before training (e.g., Functional Movement Screen) ▶ Document prior injuries and chronic conditions ▶ Use screening results to guide conditioning plans and prevent injury recurrence ▶ Implement biomechanical assessments as part of initial evaluation
R0045	Critical	▶ Integrate ongoing injury prevention education ▶ Focus on mobility, flexibility, and cardiovascular health throughout training ▶ Embed education early and continuously ▶ Teach self-care and injury recognition skills ▶ Promote understanding of recovery importance
R0046	Critical	▶ Monitor mental wellness throughout academy with timely intervention ▶ Implement continuous psychological monitoring during training ▶ Provide early intervention when stress or mental health concerns emerge ▶ Reduce reactive approach by establishing proactive support systems ▶ Ensure confidential, professional treatment of wellness concerns

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0047	Critical	▶ Adopt functional fitness assessments that simulate policing tasks and align with real world job tasks. ▶ Implement assessments based on actual occupational demands (e.g., sprint tests, lifting tasks, dragging simulations) ▶ Replace generic fitness tests with job-specific scenarios ▶ Ensure assessments mirror real-world physical challenges officers face ▶ Develop capabilities that translate directly to field performance
R0048	Critical	▶ Use age- and gender-adjusted normative data to set entry and ongoing training standards. ▶ Establish percentile-based benchmarks that account for demographic differences ▶ Set realistic but challenging standards using evidence-based normative data ▶ Ensure standards align with expected field performance requirements ▶ Apply adjustments consistently across all fitness assessments
R0049	Critical	▶ Immediate suspension of physical tasks used for disciplinary purposes ▶ Prohibit use of PT as punitive, corrective, or disciplinary tool ▶ Align with Army PT guidelines and modern effective practices ▶ Shift from punishment to positive development approach ▶ Remove ethical and physiological concerns of exertional discipline
R0050	Critical	▶ Eliminate or strictly regulate unscheduled physical tasks and training drills imposed by drill instructors ▶ Prohibit supplemental physical activities during designated recovery periods ▶ Require all physical training to occur within structured program ▶ Prevent disruption of planned recovery windows ▶ Reduce cumulative fatigue and overtraining risk
R0051	Critical	▶ Mandate recovery protection through policy and scheduled structured periods with oversight to ensure compliance ▶ Enforce recovery periods as non-negotiable and protected parts of training schedule ▶ Establish clear policies designating recovery time as off-limits for physical activities ▶ Implement supervisory oversight to ensure compliance ▶ Create accountability for violations of recovery protection
R0052	Critical	▶ Implement individualized pacing for endurance runs based on fitness assessments ▶ Use individualized performance metrics to adjust training intensities ▶ Conduct running exercises according to ability-based groups ▶ Prevent forcing trainees beyond safe physiological thresholds ▶ Reduce lower-extremity injury risk from uniform pacing
R0053	Critical	▶ Review practice of allowing full power strikes to the head during training ▶ Consider prohibition or significant restriction given serious injury potential ▶ Evaluate against FLETC principles and peer agency practices ▶ Consider trainee skill variability and inability to exercise restraint ▶ Assess whether training objectives can be achieved through lower-risk methods
R0054	Critical	▶ Implement Concussion Awareness training ▶ Enhance recognition and prevention of head injuries ▶ Consider NCAA pre-participation assessment model ▶ Establish baseline testing and post-injury protocols ▶ Provide education on signs, symptoms, and reporting of concussions ▶ Create clear return-to-duty protocols after head injury

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0055	Critical	▶ Create a “Culture of Safety” at the SPA ▶ Integrate safety themes throughout lesson plan ▶ Ensure both trainees and instructors hear, repeat, and reinforce safety messages ▶ Conduct comprehensive review of all safety policies and protocols ▶ Ensure documented reports/checklists include supervisory review ▶ Emphasize injury prevention, risk assessment, PPE use, seat belt compliance, vehicle speed control ▶ Reduce likelihood that safety focus diminishes over time or with staff turnover ▶ Remove cultural barriers to reporting injuries or requesting rest ▶ Shift understanding from “toughness through exhaustion” to “capability through adaptation”
R0056	Priority 1	▶ Produce quarterly injury trend reports to guide policy and training reforms ▶ Synthesize injury data into actionable reports ▶ Distribute to leadership and relevant stakeholders ▶ Track progress on injury reduction initiatives ▶ Identify emerging trends for proactive intervention
R0057	Priority 1	▶ Review and revise high-risk training modules using injury data ▶ Systematically evaluate activities such as boxing, sustained running, and calisthenics ▶ Use injury trend data and effective practices to restructure high-risk activities ▶ Implement evidence-based modifications to reduce injury correlation
R0058	Priority 1	▶ Expand fitness and wellness staffing ▶ Hire certified strength coaches, exercise physiologists, athletic trainers, and nurses ▶ Reduce reliance on single-staff supervision models ▶ Create interdisciplinary training team for comprehensive trainee support ▶ Enable individualized baseline assessments and program modifications ▶ Increase staff with specialized fitness and wellness professionals
R0059	Priority 1	▶ Offer pre-academy physical and psychological conditioning for trainees not meeting benchmarks ▶ Develop preparatory programs for candidates below entry standards ▶ Provide resources and guidance for self-improvement before academy start ▶ Create structured conditioning pathways to bring trainees to readiness ▶ Reduce early injury and attrition through better preparation
R0060	Priority 1	▶ Conduct mandatory in-academy re-tests to monitor progress and intervene early ▶ Implement phased fitness assessments throughout training ▶ Use progressive testing to identify adaptation issues before injury ▶ Enable early intervention for struggling trainees ▶ Track fitness progression to inform training adjustments
R0061	Priority 1	▶ Embed early and continuous resilience training into onboarding process ▶ Introduce stress resilience and coping strategies before high-stress exposure ▶ Make resilience training proactive rather than reactive ▶ Integrate psychological preparation throughout pre-academy and early training phases ▶ Prepare trainees mentally for law enforcement demands
R0062	Priority 1	▶ Develop and implement phased physical conditioning program ▶ Create progression from foundational training to tactical simulation ▶ Ensure structured assessment at each phase ▶ Build fitness gradually with appropriate recovery ▶ Align conditioning with occupational task demands

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0063	Priority 1	▶ Develop early intervention strategies based on comprehensive risk assessments ▶ Use screening results to identify trainees needing additional support ▶ Implement targeted interventions before problems escalate ▶ Provide personalized training modifications and recovery protocols ▶ Reduce preventable attrition through proactive support
R0064	Priority 1	▶ Incorporate phased, scenario-based fitness evaluations throughout training ▶ Implement progressive testing that reflects operational environments ▶ Gradually increase assessment complexity and intensity ▶ Combine physical exertion with decision-making under pressure ▶ Use timed obstacle courses and cognitive-physical simulations ▶ Monitor adaptation and development throughout training cycle
R0065	Priority 1	▶ Implement longitudinal tracking of health and performance outcomes ▶ Establish longitudinal health and performance monitoring systems ▶ Track trainee fitness progression from entry through field deployment ▶ Use data to inform ongoing improvements to fitness programming ▶ Identify early indicators of injury risk or performance issues ▶ Create feedback mechanisms for continuous program refinement
R0066	Priority 1	▶ Embed wellness education as core component of trainee training ▶ Integrate education on injury prevention, recovery, and self-care ▶ Teach trainees to <u>understand</u> their bodies and recognize warning signs ▶ Promote long-term health and fitness as career-long priorities ▶ Shift from short-term testing focus to lifelong wellness development
R0067	Priority 1	▶ Incorporate structured conditioning programs alongside individualized recovery protocols ▶ Introduce individualized recovery and wellness education programs ▶ Ensure training load matches individual capacity and adaptation rate ▶ Provide personalized support for trainees at different fitness levels ▶ Balance challenge with adequate recovery for positive adaptation
R0068	Priority 1	▶ Provide training for drill instructors on injury prevention, load management and recovery periods ▶ Educate DIs on safe training loads and recovery management ▶ Teach principles of progressive overload and periodization ▶ Provide understanding of individual variation in adaptation ▶ Create shared language around evidence-based training practices
R0069	Priority 1	▶ Adopt Army PT Guidelines principles comprehensively ▶ Foster culture of injury risk reduction in all PT aspects ▶ Coordinate with medical subject matter experts for consultation ▶ Ensure PT appropriate to conditioning levels with gradual progression ▶ Monitor trainees for injury with prompt medical attention for complaints ▶ Implement all six Army commander requirements for PT oversight
R0070	Priority 1	▶ Implement evidence-based cross-training to replace some running volume ▶ Reduce overall running volume to prevent lower-extremity injuries ▶ Introduce variety through swimming, cycling, rowing, circuit training ▶ Maintain cardiovascular development while reducing repetitive impact ▶ Apply research showing cross-training effectiveness in injury reduction

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0071	Priority 1	▶ Embed comprehensive injury prevention and recovery education ▶ Teach trainees to recognize early warning signs of overtraining ▶ Provide education on self-care, nutrition, hydration, sleep ▶ Explain physiological processes of adaptation and recovery ▶ Empower trainees to manage their own physical health proactively
R0072	Priority 1	▶ Engage services of professional specialists ▶ Hire appropriately credentialed Strength Coach, Exercise Physiologist, Athletic Trainer, and Nurse ▶ Qualified strength coach to guide/assist sworn PT staff with evidence-based program ▶ Exercise physiologist to develop exercise plans, monitor progress, help recovery ▶ Athletic trainer and nurse to prevent, diagnose, treat muscle and bone injuries ▶ Positions should prove cost-effective given high injury/attrition costs ▶ Allows reassignment of sworn troopers to front-line positions, improving staffing
R0073	Priority 2	▶ Audit and revise fitness programming annually ▶ Ensure alignment with job duties, safety standards, and legal defensibility ▶ Review effectiveness using injury data and performance outcomes ▶ Update programming based on emerging research and effective practices ▶ Implement all "Actionable Items" outlined in supporting guidelines ▶ Create continuous improvement cycle for physical training program

Section 5: Curriculum and Training Methods

R0074	Critical	▶ Integrate procedural justice principles across training and daily academy life aligned with national effective practices.
R0075	Critical	▶ Promote procedural justice principles for both internal adherence and external community trust. Embed procedural justice concepts into multiple areas of study including Leadership, Ethics, Patrol Procedures, and Defensive Tactics. (highlight the Excellence Initiative)
R0076	Critical	▶ Model professionalism, empathy, and fairness consistently to reinforce procedural justice externally with communities.
R0077	Critical	▶ Strengthening academy curriculum with balanced adult learning. ▶ Align with current guidance emphasizing scenario/problem-based instruction, decision-making under stress, guided practice, and wellness integration rather than purely stress-based approaches.
R0078	Critical	▶ Explicitly prohibit degrading/punitive physical "corrective" exercises. ▶ Codify a clear prohibition on using physical exercises as punishment; ensure that all stress-inducing activities are directly tied to defined learning objectives and job-relevant competencies and are conducted in a manner consistent with professional training standards.
R0079	Critical	▶ Adopt a Phased, Hybrid Training Model ▶ Transition from a uniform high-stress environment to a phased model where stress is introduced strategically and a low-stress environment is maintained for cognitive learning. ▶ The rationale is to improve information retention and directly address the primary reasons for attrition. Implementation should be clearly documented.
R0080	Critical	▶ Formalize Injury and Wellness Analysis ▶ Establish a closed-loop system for injury management. This involves not only tracking every injury but also conducting a regular, formal analysis to identify patterns and causes. ▶ The analysis should be used to directly inform modifications to physical fitness, defensive tactics, and other training areas. This proactive approach, as seen in the Arkansas and Ohio academies, is critical for risk mitigation and cadet well-being.
R0081	Critical	▶ Implement Structured Stress Inoculation Training (SIT) with progressive exposure.

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0082	Critical	▶ Develop integrated mental health programs modeled on RCMP's ERST approach.
R0083	Critical	▶ Strengthen leadership accountability and institute safeguards against arbitrary disciplinary and harmful practices.
R0084	Priority 1	▶ Continue delivering smaller trainee class sizes. ▶ Maintain smaller class cohorts to improve feedback, student engagement, and instructional effectiveness.
R0085	Priority 1	▶ Create a non-sworn professional training leadership role to oversee curriculum modernization and engage curriculum experts or academic partners to develop an integrated, performance-based, scenario-driven program with measurable learning outcomes.
R0086	Priority 1	▶ Consider hiring non-sworn members with instructional design or administrative expertise to supplement existing capacity.
R0087	Priority 1	▶ Increase full-time staffing by one to two personnel to reduce workload and ensure the integrity of assigned responsibilities.
R0088	Priority 1	▶ Evaluate and implement a centralized digital platform for storing all trainee/trooper training materials and records to improve the efficiency of training discovery requests
R0089	Priority 1	▶ Adopt a formal Remedial Training Policy & SOP. ▶ Define remedial criteria (e.g., academic exam <80%; EVOC rubric failure; PT/DT skill deficit; comportment concerns), required root-cause analysis, individualized plan (methods, hours, instructor), re-test standards, documentation, and escalation.
R0090	Priority 1	▶ Integrate External Professional Expertise ▶ Hire or contract with non-sworn professionals, such as athletic trainers, physical therapists, doctors, and specialists in curriculum development. This professionalizes the academy's operations and provides a scientific, evidence-based foundation for training and wellness programs. ▶ Participate in IACP SPPADS to enhance knowledge of emerging approaches by peer organizations.
R0091	Priority 1	▶ Develop a Comprehensive Realistic Job Preview and Mentor Program ▶ To combat the consistent issue of unprepared trainees, agencies must implement mandatory pre-academy programs. These programs should provide a candid, realistic overview of the career, offer a foundational physical training regimen, and establish a formal mentor relationship. The goal is to set realistic expectations and provide a support network, which will reduce attrition at the source.
R0092	Priority 1	▶ Separate Disciplinary and Instructional Staff Roles ▶ The study team observed that, in practice, disciplinary interventions and tone-setting are sometimes carried into instructional periods, undermining consistency and limiting trainees' ability to absorb critical skills in a low-stress learning environment. ▶ MSP should formalize and enforce clear boundaries for when and how disciplinary staff may enter or intervene in instructional spaces, assign explicit "instructional control" to subject-matter instructors during classroom and skills blocks, and confine high-stress delivery to defined stress-inoculation scenarios tied to learning objectives and supervised for safety.
R0093	Priority 1	▶ Expand use of enhanced simulation-based training with structured feedback and debriefing.
R0094	Priority 1	▶ Conduct regular curriculum reviews to ensure alignment with democratic principles and community-focused policing strategies.
R0095	Priority 2	▶ Transition to logically sequenced, integrated, performance-based curriculum.
R0096	Priority 2	▶ Align lesson plans with real-world policing scenarios and modern competencies.
R0097	Priority 2	▶ Formalize lesson plan templates and evaluation tools tied to learning outcomes.

Rec ID	Priority Level	Recommendation
R0098	Priority 2	▶ Standardize lesson plan development ▶ Use a consistent lesson plan template (see Appendix F) with required components to ensure
R0099	Priority 2	▶ Integrate access to specialized training opportunities - either through attendance or structured review—to support the Curriculum Unit
R0100	Priority 2	▶ Develop and implement standardized protocols for real-time auditing of instructional delivery and curriculum adherence
R0101	Priority 2	▶ Move to adult-learning & scenario/problem-based remediation. ▶ Replace unstructured “stress blocks” with objective-linked stress scenarios that are anchored to validated learning goals, monitored by safety officers, and include injury-mitigation guardrails. ▶ Stress exposure should follow a progressive model with cognitive/behavioral coping skills instruction and recovery periods, eliminating public humiliation rituals while tracking both performance outcomes and injury risk.
R0102	Priority 2	▶ Standing Academic Support Program. ▶ Tutoring clinics, study skills/time-management workshops, and Problem Based Learning (PBL)-style scenario reviews for failed modules; staggered re-tests with guardrails to reduce fatigue-bias.
R0103	Priority 2	▶ Instructor standards & oversight. ▶ Require instructor/DI certification + periodic recertification; mentorship for new instructors; observation checklists; after-action reviews linking remedial outcomes to teaching adjustments.

APPENDIX C: MARKET ANALYSIS FOR RECOMMENDED POSITIONS

Market Analysis Methodology Overview

IACP proposes creating four (4) non-sworn professional staff positions as a means of reducing SPA costs. As a resource to guide MSP decision-making related to this recommendation, IACP conducted a base pay market analysis for each of the four (4) positions listed in the table below.

Market Analysis Process

- ▶ Researched and collected comparable job documentation to use as a source in identifying applicable salary survey title matches.
- ▶ Gathered organizational scope factors including demographics and labor market details necessary to identify market-based competitors
- ▶ Used Salary.com CompAnalyst and Payfactors salary survey consultant subscriptions to collect relevant market data as of January 2026.
- ▶ An Excel workbook was created to detail multiple salary survey title matches for each proposed job title for MSP's consideration from each of the survey sources at the 25th percentile (P25), 50th percentile (P50) and 75th percentile (P75) to provide MSP with the data necessary to determine next steps based on IACP recommendations.
- ▶ Applicable salary survey titles were identified by matching minimally 70% of the duties found in the job documentation sources listed in the table below according to HR effective practices and were found to be representative of each job's difficulty and level of responsibility.

IACP PROPOSED JOB TITLE	DOCUMENTATION SOURCE
Fitness/Wellness Instructor	Texas Training Operations Division: Education Specialist V Fitness-Wellness Instructor.docx
Fitness/Wellness Training Supervisor	Texas Training Operations Division: Manager V Fitness-Wellness Supervisor.docx
Physician Assistant	No job documentation provided
Director Training-Curriculum Unit	Michigan State Police: MSP PDB Major Job Description.docx State of Michigan Civil Service Commission: PDReport (21).docx SENMGEXCB59N Major.docx

Market Analysis

Job Title: Fitness/Wellness Instructor

FLSA Status: Exempt

Salary Survey Market Data						Annual		
Survey Source	Industry	Size: Headcount	Size: Revenue	Geographic Region	Job Title Match	P25	P50	P75
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Fitness & Wellness Coordinator II	\$48,460.00	\$56,330.00	\$66,810.00
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Exercise Physiologist	\$59,430.00	\$67,420.00	\$77,940.00
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Education Specialist	\$56,600.00	\$69,100.00	\$93,300.00
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Training Coordinator	\$75,200.00	\$84,600.00	\$95,300.00
Market Average:						\$58,015	\$68,260	\$85,620

Job Title: Fitness/Wellness Training Supervisor

FLSA Status: Non-Exempt

Salary Survey Market Data						Annual		
Survey Source	Industry	Size: Headcount	Size: Revenue	Geographic Region	Job Title Match	P25	P50	P75
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Fitness Center Manager	\$80,060	\$91,800	\$106,040
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Wellness Program Administrator III	\$87,560	\$99,670	\$112,600
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Police Sergeant	\$73,700	\$93,000	\$126,400
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Health Fitness Center Manager	\$76,600	\$86,700	\$101,900
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Training Center Manager	\$112,600	\$126,900	\$150,500
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 – 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Training Coordinator	\$75,200	\$84,600	\$95,300
Market Average:						\$79,855	\$90,693	\$103,960

- Market data excluded; dropped market match
- Market data included; comparable market match to benchmark title.

Job Title: Physician Assistant

FLSA Status: Exempt

Salary Survey Market Data						Annual		
Survey Source	Industry	Size: Headcount	Size: Revenue	Geographic Region	Job Title Match	P25	P50	P75
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Physician Assistant—Clinic	\$137,360	\$149,290	\$165,230
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Physician Assistant—Emergency & Trauma	\$145,920	\$160,790	\$181,130
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Physician Assistant—Medical	\$130,540	\$142,510	\$157,650
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Physician Assistant—Primary Care	\$128,170	\$138,780	\$150,270
Payfactors*	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Physician Assistant	\$134,000	\$148,700	\$167,500
Payfactors*	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Physician Assistant—Clinic	\$132,600	\$149,100	\$168,500
Payfactors*	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Physician Assistant—Specialty Area	\$133,200	\$146,700	\$166,000
Market Average:						\$132,645	\$145,847	\$162,525

* No job documentation provided

Job Title: Director, Training Curriculum Unit

FLSA Status: Exempt

Salary Survey Market Data						Annual		
Survey Source	Industry	Size: Headcount	Size: Revenue	Geographic Region	Job Title Match	P25	P50	P75
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Training Director	\$173,045.45	\$193,709.09	\$214,790.91
CompAnalyst	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	CT, MA, NH, RI, VT	Police Sergeant	\$112,600.00	\$126,900.00	\$150,500.00
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Training Center Manager	\$75,200.00	\$84,600.00	\$95,300.00
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Training Coordinator	\$73,700.00	\$93,000.00	\$126,400.00
Payfactors	ALL	3,000 - 7,500	ALL	Northeast	Police Sergeant	\$142,822.73	\$160,304.55	\$182,645.45
Market Average:						\$124,123	\$139,155	\$155,045

Market data excluded; dropped market match

Market data included; comparable market match to benchmark title.

Next Step Recommendations

- ▶ Identify MSP's base pay compensation philosophy (lag, match, or lead the market)
- ▶ Develop job descriptions to accurately reflect the essential functions, knowledge, skills and abilities for each new position including applicable required compensable factors including, but not limited to: Education, Certifications & Licenses, Years of Job-Related Experience, Work-Related Knowledge, Direct Supervisory Responsibilities, Decision-Making Authority/ Problem Solving, Monetary Accountability, Physical and Mental Abilities, Contacts, and Work Environment.
In accordance with HR effective practices any new positions added should follow these standards, criteria, and processes prior to market pricing to ensure a consistent and equitable compensation structure and program can be developed, fully understood, and transparently communicated to all employees.
- ▶ Repeat the base pay market analysis process as detailed above using MSP's newly developed and approved job documentation.

APPENDIX D: CASE STUDIES

Evidence-Based Physical Fitness Testing and Assessment Model

A comprehensive Physical Fitness Testing and Assessment Model designed specifically for law enforcement officers (LEOs). This model is rooted in evidence-based practice, ensuring it accurately measures the physical capabilities essential for effective job performance in high-stress situations.

Description of the Model

The Physical Fitness Testing and Assessment Model consists of four distinct tests that evaluate an officer's ability to engage both hemispheres of the body—upper and lower—in generating the kinetic motor movement required for critical law enforcement tasks. This bilateral body engagement reflects the physical demands placed on officers during real-world scenarios, such as controlling or neutralizing threats.

In addition to motor coordination, the model assesses three key biological and physiological responses critical to LEO performance under stress:

- ▶ **Elevated Heart Rate Performance:** Measures the officer's capacity to function effectively when cardiovascular demand is heightened.
- ▶ **Valsalva Maneuver Execution:** Evaluates the ability to safely perform muscle contractions that stabilize the core during intense exertion while temporarily holding one's breath.
- ▶ **Anaerobic Capacity:** Assesses short-term, high-intensity energy production without reliance on oxygen, replicating real-life physical confrontations.

These physiological markers correspond to the acute stress window—within 5% to 2% of peak fear response—that officers encounter when attempting to subdue threats with physical force.

Importantly, this testing model removes impact testing, thereby lowering the risk of injury to officers during physical assessment.⁴⁷ The assessment is also objective rather than subjective, providing consistent, quantifiable metrics that reduce evaluator bias and enhance reliability.⁴⁸

Testing Components

The model includes the following assessments that replicate the physiological stress and energy systems used in the field:

- ▶ **2K VO2 Row Test:** Measures aerobic capacity and endurance.
- ▶ **4-Minute Row Test:** Assesses sustained high-intensity cardiovascular output.
- ▶ **500m Row Test:** Evaluates anaerobic power and speed.
- ▶ **Combat Fitness Evaluation:** Simulates functional physical tasks to mimic job-specific demands.

Each test elicits the same physiological taxation, response, and burden consistent with the Gerdom Clause, a legal precedent ensuring job-relatedness and business necessity in employment testing.

47 W. J. Kraemer and S. J. Fleck, *Optimizing Strength Training: Designing Nonlinear Periodization Workouts*, 4th ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2019).
48 J. J. Dawes and R. Orr, "Objective Assessment Methods for Law Enforcement Fitness Testing: Improving Reliability and Validity," *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety* 66, no. 2 (2020): 87–94.

Legal and Scientific Validity

The testing model meets rigorous standards, demonstrating:

- ▶ **Job-Relatedness:** Direct correlation to essential job tasks and physical demands.
- ▶ **Business Necessity:** Ensures officer's readiness to safely and effectively perform duties.
- ▶ **Scientific Validity:** Consistency with generally accepted scientific standards in exercise physiology and occupational health.
- ▶ **Compliance:** Aligns with applicable state and federal labor and employment laws, safeguarding against discriminatory practices.⁴⁹

Conclusion

This Physical Fitness Testing and Assessment Model is recognized as best practice, representing a validated, evidence-based approach to evaluating law enforcement officers' physical readiness. By replicating the physiological conditions of real-world policing challenges, the model supports operational effectiveness, officer safety, and legal defensibility.

Another Perspective—Stress Exposure Resiliency Training—United States Military Academy at West Point

The IACP study team looked for independent research to validate some of the findings that the SPA currently relies on to support the SPA's emphasis on stress exposure resiliency training. Much of what the academy relies on for reported "evidence-based" support for their program is traced back to the 2006 *Report of the Massachusetts State Police Academy Commission (the 2006 Report)*⁵⁰. However, a closer examination of the recommendations from that report fail to identify any validity to support the training and,

often, it contradicts previous research "findings" related to stress exposure espoused by a former commission member's own research, as well as contemporary evidence-based best practices.

As examples, the following conclusions about "high-stress inoculation" were reported in a previous study published by the United States Military Academy at West Point:

"The logic of such an approach is that if people are subjected to stressful situations in training, they will experience less stress in actual job-related situations. In essence, their toleration level will be increased—a form of "stress inoculation." Although many organizations, particularly in the military, rely heavily on stress training, there are several arguments against such training.

First, research into cognitive processes has shown that under conditions of high stress, learning ability is hampered. If new skills are introduced under high stress conditions, the cognitive interference of stress reduces the chances of learning. The more complex the behavior, the less likely the individual will learn the behavior.

Second, if an environment is set where failure due to stress is obviously inevitable, the fear of failure itself may create an additional decrement in individual performance.

Third, indiscriminate stress during training may not resemble the stress of the actual event. For instance, it is difficult to equate the practice of "name-calling" in Army Basic Training with the heat of battle. The more closely the situation which requires a particular response resembles the training environment, the greater the probability of the successful transfer of skills."⁵¹

49 U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Guidance on Employee Selection Procedures under Title VII* (Washington, DC: EEOC, 2021).

50 Kathleen M. Burke et al., *Report of the Massachusetts State Police Academy Commission* (Boston, MA, March 2006).

51 Paul M. Bons et al., *Leadership in Organizations* (New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1988), 334.

"These factors suggest that the ideal training situation for an organization which needs its members to function in high stress situations may include the systematic teaching of necessary skills at relatively low levels of stress where the chance for successful learning is greater. Once the individual achieves the desired skill level, stress inoculation may be performed by increments, having the individual perform the skill in increasingly stressful, but work-related situations. Based on these considerations and what we know about the consequences of stress, the following questions might be asked by a leader who contemplates improving capability by using stressful training:

- 1. Do the subordinates have the necessary skills prior to the introduction of stress?*
- 2. How realistic is the relationship between the training situation and what the person will face on the actual task?*
- 3. Is the cost (physiological and psychological) worth the benefit for the group and the individual?*
- 4. Are there other ways to accomplish the task and achieve similar results?*

The results of an experiment involving a large police academy, provide insight into the inappropriate use of stress-inoculation techniques." Recall that two distinct training philosophies were used in the academy. One set of classes was subject to the academy's existing, highly rigid, nonspecific stressful program, where stress was applied through heavy physical training, forced endurance of "mickey mouse" inspections, creation of an "any decision is a wrong decision" environment, and mass punishment.

In the experimental classes, although candidates received the same curricula, instructors, evaluations, etc., they were instructed in a professional, nondemanding atmosphere. This

environment did not utilize yelling, threats to self-esteem or mass punishment. The test group was placed in a situation based on mutual respect, free verbal exchange and minimal ambiguity".⁵²

"Results showed that the test group received significantly more positive evaluations on accepting criticism by peers, accepting policies and working without drawing unnecessary attention, but no difference was found in a global overall job performance. However, in later field performance, experimentally trained police officers performed at a significantly higher level than their "stress-trained" cohorts. In addition, they reported higher job satisfaction and performance acceptability by the persons they served."⁵³ As classes were randomly assigned to the conditions and a concerted effort was made for equal assignments upon graduation, the systematic difference in performance evaluation was attributed to the difference in initial training environment.

These results notwithstanding, the question of the effectiveness of training under generally stressful conditions as a means of inoculating the person from future stress is still an open issue. Nevertheless, the previously discussed systematic manner of teaching new skills appears to be logical and psychologically sound and has at least one field study whose results support such an approach."⁵⁴

Another area that the United States Military Academy stressed in their leadership training focused on the importance of providing social support to new service members. According to the leadership manual, "membership in groups consisting of individuals undergoing the same environmental stress can provide an outlet for tension with a group of people who can empathize. The exchange of information permits individuals to realize that others are experiencing a stressful situation in similar ways. People will often form such groups on their own if the opportunity exists. The stress manager's function may be to provide such an opportunity. This technique is especially viable for people in the initial organizational socialization period.

52 Ibid. Page 335.

53 Ibid. Page 335.

54 Ibid. Page 355.

Deliberately fostering support groups is a means of helping people deal with the stress of the situation. This can be done by allowing time for group interaction, requiring group output on tasks and setting up the physical environment to promote interaction, such as creating a common living area.”⁵⁵

Summary

The SPA relies heavily on *the 2006 Report* to justify its stress exposure resiliency training, yet deeper analysis reveals a lack of scientifically valid support, contradictions with an original report author’s own research, and misalignment with contemporary best practices in stress exposure training philosophy.

High-stress training may not deliver the benefits it promises or which the MSP hopes to achieve. Evidence supports a systematic, skill-based, purposeful, and socially supportive approach—one that fosters competence, resilience, and long-term performance without compromising mental health or morale.

Critiques of High-Stress Training (Based on West Point Research)

- ▶ Stress hampers learning: Cognitive interference from intense stress reduces ability to absorb and retain complex skills
- ▶ Fear of failure undermines performance: A training climate where failure is expected can cause anxiety and degrade results
- ▶ Mismatch with real-world stress: Arbitrary stressors (e.g., shouting, humiliation) don’t reflect the types of pressure encountered in field work
- ▶ Transfer of learning is compromised: Skills learned in unrealistic stress settings often don’t translate well to actual law enforcement duties

⁵⁵ Ibid. Page 358.

APPENDIX E: NATIONAL EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN FITNESS AND INJURY PREVENTION

These are categorized for structured assessment and policy enhancement for the SPA:

I. Fitness Standards in Selection

1. Conduct a Fitness Standards Audit

- ▶ Review current entry-level physical assessments (e.g., push-ups, sit-ups, 1.5mile run (*Cooper Standards are no longer applicable*)) and validate alignment with job-specific, evidence-based fitness benchmarks (e.g., TXDPS Physical Fitness Testing Assessment).⁵⁶

2. Adjust Standards Based on Normative Data

- ▶ Consider implementing up-to-date age- and gender-normed standards that meet Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidance and align with nationally recognized FLETC, FBI, IACP, and TXDPS models.⁵⁷

3. Incorporate Injury-Prevention Components

- ▶ Add flexibility, mobility, or functional movement screens (e.g., Functional Movement Screen, FMS) to pre-test protocols to identify biomechanical risks.⁵⁸

4. Introduce Pre-Test Medical Risk Screening

- ▶ Require candidates to complete a standardized PARF+ or undergo musculoskeletal and cardiovascular screening to identify pre-existing conditions.⁵⁹

II. Fitness Expectations During Training

1. Develop a Progressive Fitness Training Plan

- ▶ Create a structured, phased conditioning model (e.g., foundational → development → maintenance) with intensity scaling appropriate to trainee adaptation.⁶⁰

2. Establish a Fitness Standards Review Committee

- ▶ Set up a multidisciplinary team to review and update physical training protocols every 1–2 years based on injury trends and peer-reviewed research.⁶¹

3. Implement Real-Time Injury Monitoring

- ▶ Use tools like daily wellness check-ins, Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) scales, and wearable tech (e.g., heart rate monitors) to track overtraining risks and intervene early.⁶²

III. Alignment with National Effective Practices

1. Benchmark Against National Models

- ▶ Compare Academy standards to those of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC), FBI Academy, IACP guidelines, and the Texas Department of Public Safety Law Enforcement Fitness Norms.⁶³

2. Commission External Fitness Program Review

- ▶ Engage an independent thirdparty audit (e.g., from a university exercise science department or national law enforcement fitness expert) to evaluate injury-prevention integration.⁶⁴

3. Review Peer Academy Best Practices

- ▶ Conduct structured interviews or site visits with top-performing academies (e.g., California POST, Texas DPS) to identify replicable best practices.⁶⁵

56 P. Aguilera et al., "Validity of Law Enforcement Fitness Assessments," *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* 32, no. 7 (2018): 2008–2014.

57 FBI National Academy Associates, *Law Enforcement Fitness Standards Report* (Quantico, VA, 2019).

58 Cook et al., "Functional Movement Screen: A Review," *International Journal of Sports Physical Therapy* 9, no. 5 (2006): 399–414.

59 Michael L. Pollock, Glenn Gaesser, and James Butcher, "Cardiovascular Risk Screening Protocols," *Medicine & Science in Sports* 11, no. 1 (1979): 50–54.

60 Tudor O. Bompá and G. Gregory Haff, *Periodization: Theory and Methodology of Training*, 5th ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2009).

61 American College of Sports Medicine, *ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription*, 11th ed. (Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer, 2020).

62 Carl Foster et al., "Monitoring Training Stress," *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* 15, no. 4 (2001): 513–521.

63 FBI National Academy Associates, *Law Enforcement Fitness Standards Report*.

64 K. Wilson et al., "Independent Evaluation of Law Enforcement Fitness Programs," *Journal of Occupational Health* 63, no. 2 (2021): e12136.

65 FBI National Academy Associates, *Law Enforcement Fitness Standards Report*.

IV. Injury Prevention Strategies

1. Standardize Injury Prevention Protocols

- ▶ Mandate formal dynamic warm-ups, cool-downs, and corrective exercise routines as part of daily PT. Integrate injury-prevention education modules.⁶⁶

2. Integrate Technique Instruction

- ▶ Include dedicated instruction blocks on biomechanics and correct form for major strength/endurance movements (e.g., squats, planks, sprints).⁶⁷

3. Build Recovery into Training Schedules

- ▶ Include more daily mobility sessions (foam rolling, stretching), active recovery days, and educate cadets on sleep, hydration, and nutrition as part of injury prevention.⁶⁸

V. Staff Qualifications and Oversight

1. Require Instructor Certification

- ▶ Ensure all physical training staff are certified by organizations such as NSCA (CSCS), FLETC, NASM, or ACSM, with specific training in injury prevention.⁶⁹

2. Provide Ongoing Risk Mitigation Training

- ▶ Deliver quarterly training for fitness staff, DT staff, DI staff on injury risk factors, safe progression planning, and early signs of overtraining.⁷⁰

3. Create an Instructor Accountability Policy

- ▶ Track injury incidents per instructor; implement peer reviews and corrective action processes if injury rates spike under a specific trainer.⁷¹

VI. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

1. Establish an Injury Surveillance System

- ▶ Create a centralized database for tracking all physical training-related injuries, including type, severity, time of occurrence, and training activity involved.⁷²

2. Correlated Injury Data to Program Changes

- ▶ Conduct quarterly reviews correlating injury rates to recent changes in training intensity, format, or curriculum using statistical analysis.⁷³

3. Collect Structured Trainee Feedback

- ▶ Use anonymous post-academy surveys to evaluate trainee perceptions of training intensity, injury risk, and preparedness—then integrate into training review.⁷⁴

66 D. G. Behm and A. Chaouachi, "Effects of Static and Dynamic Stretching on Performance," *European Journal of Applied Physiology* 111, no. 11 (2011): 2633–2651.
67 S. McGill, "Low Back Stability: From Formal Description to Issues for Performance and Rehabilitation," *Journal of Spine & Rehabilitation* 1, no. 2 (2010): 90–101.
68 R. Meeusen et al., "Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of the Overtraining Syndrome," *European Journal of Sport Science* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–24.
69 National Strength and Conditioning Association, *CSCS Certification Standards* (2022).
70 T. Soligard et al., "'How Much Is Too Much?' IOC Consensus on Load and Injury Risk," *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 50, no. 17 (2016): 1030–1041.
71 D. Daway and L. Ekblad, "Accountability in Fitness Instruction," *International Journal of Sports Management* 16, no. 1 (2015): 12–25.
72 R. Bahr et al., "Injury Surveillance in Sports," *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 37, no. 3 (2003): 226–230.
73 W. H. Meeuwisse et al., "Prevention of Sports Injuries Through Surveillance," *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine* 17, no. 4 (2007): 221–227.
74 M. Laerdal et al., "Post-Training Feedback Loops in Law Enforcement," *Police Practice and Research* 15, no. 3 (2014): 227–242.

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

XXXXXXX STATE POLICE DIVISION HUMAN RESOURCES SECTION TRAINING BUREAU, XXXXX, XXXXX

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Course Title: Instructor Training Course

Lesson Title: Lesson Plan Construction

Purpose: To teach “how to construct a professional lesson plan”

Performance Goals: Successfully construct a professional State Police lesson plan

Pre-requisites: None

Target Audience: Enlisted and Civilian Personnel attending ITC

Method(s) of Instruction: Lecture, discussion, facilitation, practical exercise

Instructor Requirements: ITC/PTC Certification

Training Aids: PowerPoint presentation, handouts

Total Time: 6 Hours

Learning Objectives: The participant will be able to:

1. Define a lesson plan
2. Identify the values of a lesson plan
3. List the steps in conducting lesson plan research
4. List the considerations when preparing to write a lesson plan
5. List the considerations when organizing lesson plan content
6. State the parts of a lesson plan
7. Construct a lesson plan objective
8. Format and write a lesson plan

References:

Bannon, B. Planning for Instruction. Educational Technology Collaborative. 19 Feb 2008. The University of Tennessee. 14 May 2008 <http://edtech.tennessee.edu/~bobannon/index.html>

What makes a lesson plan a lesson plan? LEARN North Carolina. Oct. 2007. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education. 14 May 2008 http://www.learnnc.org/support/lp_parts

Writing Lesson Plans. Lesson Planning. Feb. 2008. Huntington College Education Department. 14 May 2008 <http://www.huntington.edu/education/lessonplanning/Plans.html>

El-Tigi, Manal. Write a Lesson Plan Guide. The Educator's Reference Desk. 20 Dec. 2003. Information Institute of Syracuse University. 8 May 2008 <http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/Guide.shtml>

Introduction:

A lesson plan is a written description of academic instruction. It helps the instructor organize their lesson objectives and methods of instruction. It determines the purpose of class time activities and provides focus for the instructor's presentation.

During this instruction, the student will be introduced to the formal lesson plan. The student will define a lesson plan. Presentation and discussion will include:

1. values of a lesson plan;
2. importance of lesson plan research;
3. steps taken in lesson plan preparation;
4. steps taken in the organization and format of lesson plan content;
5. parts of a lesson plan;
6. writing objectives that are measurable, observable, tangible and specific.

Today's goal is to successfully construct a professional lesson plan.

I. Definition of a Lesson Plan

- A. A lesson plan is an instructor's outline of the major and minor points to be taught in a period or block of instruction.
- B. A lesson plan helps the instructor to organize his or her thoughts, learning objectives and methods of instruction.
- C. It provides focus for the instructor.

II. Values of a Lesson Plan

- A. Ensures presentation of subject in logical order.
- B. Helps instructor to allot appropriate amount of time to subject matter.
- C. Ensures achievement of performance objectives and proper coverage of subject.
- D. Serves as a reference for examination preparation.
- E. Serves as a guide for other instructors.
- F. Gives instructor confidence.
- G. Ensures common interpretation by all instructors.

III. Lesson Plan Research

- A. Instructor must determine the subject. Be specific.
- B. Instructor must collect relevant source and reference material.
- C. Instructor must gather subject material from credible sources.
- D. Instructor must properly document and cite subject sources.

IV. Lesson Plan Preparation

- A. Determine the appropriate amount of time needed for the instruction
 - 1. Generally, allot 10 minutes per learning objective, but understand that this is a flexible rule.
- B. Determine the training aids needed for the instruction
 - 1. PowerPoint presentation
 - 2. Projection system
 - 3. Flip chart
 - 4. Information handouts
 - 5. Photographs, drawings, props, maps, diagrams, charts
- C. Make an audience analysis

NTI: At this time, discuss how an audience may influence the manner in which an instructor conducts the lesson. Briefly discuss each of the following considerations.

- 1. Interest
 - 2. Knowledge
 - 3. Age
 - 4. Gender
 - 5. Expectations
- D. Determine the method(s) of instruction
 - 1. Lecture
 - 2. Conference
 - 3. Demonstration
 - 4. Facilitation
 - 5. Practical exercise
- E. Determine classroom location, layout and seating arrangement (logistics)

NTI: At this time, briefly discuss how logistics (classroom location, layout and seating arrangement) may influence lesson delivery.

V. Organizing Lesson Plan Content

- A. Write content in logical sequences
 - 1. Easy to difficult (from simple concepts to more complex concepts)
 - 2. Familiar to unfamiliar (from what is already known to new knowledge)
 - 3. Theory to practice (learn principle, then apply it in a practical exercise)
 - 4. Step by step (proceed in chronologic sequence)
- B. Write content in outline format
 - 1. Type in uppercase and lowercase, not in CAPITAL LETTERS
 - 2. Use spacing according to Lesson Plan Template
 - 3. Always use Tab key to indent
 - 4. No misspellings
 - 5. Content in sequential or chronological order
 - 6. Professional appearance
 - 7. Use the following outline format:

NTI: While discussing the below outline format, direct the students to view the Lesson Plan Template (in Student Course Book and attached to this lesson plan), which is written in the appropriate outline format. Explain the proper outline format, and have the students study it in the body of the Lesson Plan Template.

1. First major point (objective)
 - A. First minor point
 - B. Second minor point
 1. Supporting information
 - Examples or illustrations
2. Second major point (objective)
 - A. First minor point
 1. Supporting information

VI. Parts of a Lesson Plan

NTI: While discussing the four parts of a lesson plan, have the students continue to view the Lesson Plan Template, targeting and discussing each part.

- A. Heading Page
 1. Letterhead (entity responsible for training)
 2. Course Title (name of course)
 3. Lesson Title (title of lesson)
 4. Purpose (reason for instruction)
 5. Performance Goals (participant skills to be gained, improved or enhanced)
 6. Prerequisites (participant prerequisites)
 7. Target Audience (who will be taught)
 8. Methods of Instruction (methods used to teach lesson)
 9. Instructor Requirements (ITC/PTC/specialty training)
 10. Training Aids (training aids used for the instruction)
 11. Total Time (total instruction time)
 12. Learning Objectives (the participant will be able to:)
 13. References (list references used to write the lesson plan)
 14. Date and Badge # (or name, if lesson plan is written by civilian) B in lower right corner of page
- B. Introduction
 1. Written to provide a general overview of the subject (similar to the preface of a book)
 2. Intended to spark interest (why is this subject important?)
 3. Should introduce the learning objectives/major points
 4. May state, (During today's lesson, we will discuss...)

NTI: Note to the students that the Introduction is written on a separate page from the Heading Page. Nothing more than the Introduction is written on this page.

- C. Body or Explanation
 1. Provides the content of the lesson
 2. Is written in proper outline format
 3. The main points and supporting information correspond with the performance or learning objectives
 4. Contains relevant key words, key phrases and sufficient detail
 5. Includes the following:
 - a. NTI (Notes to Instructor)
 - b. QTC (Questions to Class)
 - c. STC (Statements to Class)

D. Summary

1. Emphasizes the importance of a lesson plan
2. Restates or reviews the lesson's learning objectives
3. May briefly summarize the subject matter
4. May state, (During today's lesson, we have discussed...)

NTI: Note to the students that the Summary is written on a separate page from the Body or Explanation. Nothing more than the Summary is written on this page.

VII. Lesson Plan Objectives

A. Definition of a lesson plan objective:

That which students are expected to learn; that which students are expected to accomplish or gain B knowledge, skills and abilities

B. Rules for writing correct lesson plan objectives:

1. Objectives are student-oriented, not teacher-oriented.
2. Number of learning objectives must match the number of roman numerals in the body of the lesson plan for accuracy and consistency.

NTI: At this time, give examples of both teacher-oriented objectives and student-oriented objectives.

Teacher-oriented: Lecture on the leadership responsibilities of an instructor.

Student-oriented: List the leadership responsibilities of an instructor.

Teacher-oriented: Discuss the reasons for writing a lesson plan.

Student-oriented: Construct a well written lesson plan.

3. Objectives are relevant to all in-class activities. Student performance is measured by in-class activities, and lesson objectives define student performance.
4. Objectives are written with specific goals in mind. They are qualifiable. They are not general in nature.

NTI: At this time, give examples of general and specific objectives.

General: Repair an article of clothing.

Specific: Replace a broken zipper on a jacket.

5. Objectives are written so that their meaning is clear, not ambiguous.

NTI: At this time, give examples of objectives that are ambiguous, and objectives that are clearly written.

Ambiguous: Know the presidents of the United States.

Clearly written: List in writing the presidents of the United States.

6. Objectives are directly observable, not abstract in nature.

NTI: At this time, give examples of objectives that are abstract, and objectives that are directly observable.

Abstract: Appreciate good Italian food.

Directly observable: Prepare a tray of lasagna.

7. Objectives are measurable and able to evaluate student performance.

NTI: At this time, give examples of objectives that are difficult to measure, and objectives that are clearly measurable.

Difficult to measure: Visualize building a model of a powerboat.

Measurable: Build a model of a powerboat.

8. How many objectives should a lesson plan have? General rule:
 - a. 1 learning objective = 10 minutes of training time
 - b. 4 learning objectives = 40 minutes of training time

NTI: Stress to the group that this general rule is extremely flexible. Not all 40-minute presentations have 4 objectives. The number of objectives in a lesson plan depends on lesson plan topic, content, allotted time, chosen activities and methods of instruction.

NTI: At this time, distribute handout List of Action Verbs for Lesson Objectives. (in Student Course Book and attached to this lesson plan). As you refer to the PowerPoint slides that coordinate with action verbs, and discuss action verbs with the group, note that this handout will offer a wide variety of useful action verbs to use when writing lesson plan objectives.

9. Write objectives with action verbs. Action verbs are measurable, observable, tangible, specific, clear, and enable the instructor to evaluate.
 - a. Examples of good action verbs: arrange, construct, define, demonstrate, draw, install, label, list, locate, name, recite, record, repair, state, tabulate, write.
 - b. Examples of verbs that are NOT action, NOT measurable, NOT observable: appreciate, empathize, familiarize, recognize, regard, understand, value.

NTI: At this time, conduct Choosing the Right Objectives exercise, using the exercise sheet, What is a well-written learning objective? (attached to this lesson plan) This is an oral activity. There are four exercises. The first exercise is called Student-oriented or teacher-oriented Objectives. In this set, read each statement, and ask the group if each statement is either student-oriented or teacher-oriented. Repeat this activity for each of the three remaining exercises.

VIII. The following is a summary/recap of the main objectives in this lesson plan. It serves to reinforce all that has been discussed, with yet another opportunity for participants to clarify what is involved in writing a formal lesson plan.

- A. Lesson plan defined
- B. Values of a lesson plan
- C. Lesson plan requires research
- D. Lesson plan requires preparation
- E. Lesson plan requires content organization
- F. Four parts of a lesson plan
- G. Write lesson plan in proper outline format
- H. Write lesson plan in logical sequences
- I. General rule: 1 learning objective = 10 minutes of instruction

NTI: The participants will spend the remainder of this block of instruction creating lesson plans for their Ten-Minute Presentations. The ITC coordinator and I will remain in the classroom and assist/guide participants in the process.

Summary

Professional, skillful instruction begins with a well-constructed lesson plan. It defines the instructor's learning objectives. It serves as a guide through lecture and class activities.

This lesson has introduced the student to the formal lesson plan. Creating a lesson plan requires research, preparation, organization, formatting, and writing with appropriate learning objectives as goals. This lesson has taken the student through this entire process, so that the student can successfully construct a professional lesson plan.

APPENDIX G: ACADEMY COMMANDANTS (1992-PRESENT)

Commandant	Years	Recruit Training Troops
LT Phillip Trapasso	1992 – 1996	70th RTT, 71st RTT and 72nd RTT
CPT Bradley Hibbard	1996	
CPT Daniel Jamroz	1996 – 1998	73rd RTT
CPT Thomas McGilvray	1998 – 1999	74th RTT
CPT Thomas Robbins	1999 – 2000	75th RTT
CPT John Flaherty	2001 – 2003	76th RTT
LT Ronald Waskiewicz	2004	
LT Richard Lane	2004 – 2005	77th RTT
Det. LT William Powers	2005 – 2006	78th RTT and 79th RTT
CPT Sean Baxter	2008 – 2010	
Major David Otte	2010 – 2012	80th RTT
CPT Steven McCarthy	2012 – 2013	
CPT Robert McGrath	2013 – 2015	81st RTT
CPT Matthew Roy	2015 – 2017	82nd RTT
CPT Michael Lyver	2017 – 2018	83rd RTT
Det. LT Michael Baxter	2018 – 2019	84th RTT
CPT Daniel McGinn	2019 – 2020	85th RTT
Det. LT Scott McDonald	2020 – 2022	86th RTT
CPT Jon Provost	2022 – 2023	87th RTT and 88th RTT
Det. LT Jeffrey Johnson	2023 – 2025	89th RTT and 90th RTT
CPT David Pinkham	2025 – Present	91st RTT

APPENDIX H: IACP STUDY TEAM SITE VISIT OBSERVATIONS

Following is a summary of study team observations during the various site visits:

1st Onsite visit • May 12–13

1st day of Stress Exposure Resiliency Training • Monday, May 12

The date of the study team's first site visit coincided with the beginning of training for the 91st Recruit Training Troop (RTT). The 91st RTT began its session on approximately May 5, 2025, with 124 trainees. According to Academy staff, four trainees failed to show up for training on the first day. By the end of the second day of the study team's site visit, 10 trainees had resigned from the program.

Study team members were invited to attend a meeting of the SPA's drill instructors (DIs), where team members introduced themselves to the DI staff and explained the purpose and parameters of the IACP study. Staff was informed this would be a comprehensive assessment of the training operations to identify existing effective practices and recommendations for changes or enhancements based on evidence-based research and proven professional practices. The study team further explained that during the course of the study it would be collecting data, making observations, and conducting interviews and/or focus groups and confidential surveys. Finally, the team assured the instructors that there would be no attribution from any statements made to a specific individual and asked that they be as candid as possible when being interviewed in order to help inform the study.

During the roll call, the DIs were instructed to impose significant stressors on the trainees and that this was to be done very intentionally and specifically. The DIs had been given a written script to be followed for that first day of training. The study team learned that there has been a longstanding exercise at the SPA that occurs on the

first "stress day" in the Chow Hall and the team members were invited into the Chow Hall to observe. The team members also noted that a majority of the MSP's most senior command staff were also present in the Chow Hall to observe this exercise.

The study team members observed what they characterized as very "over the top" yelling, screaming, pounding on tables, and blowing of whistles that went on for approximately one hour. A senior DI stood on a raised platform, blew his whistle, and screamed commands to alternately sit down, immediately followed by a command to stand, then to sit again, and repeated this throughout the "exercise." During this exercise, the trainees were reminded to consider resignation from the program as the DI shouted loudly on several occasions that "resignation from the Massachusetts State Police Academy is simple. Your training manual states that you can approach any staff member, and your training will stop. We will escort you to the front lobby and this will all end. It is that easy. Resignation is always an option!!! Do you understand?"⁷⁵

Study team members observed an extended period—approximately one hour—during which drill instructors employed continuous elevated verbal commands, forceful table strikes, and whistle use as part of a stress induction exercise. While inducing stress was cited as the intended training purpose, the intensity and duration observed exceeded what could reasonably be associated with a defined learning objective or structured stress exposure model. Team members, including experienced law enforcement training professionals, assessed that the approach surpassed established parameters for controlled stress application and was not supported by recognized instructional methodology. The methods used did not demonstrate a clear linkage to documented performance outcomes and presented a risk of undermining, rather than reinforcing, the intended training goals.

75 Quoted from the 91st RTT Day One script provided by the MSP Academy (and observed by the study team).

Week 2 – 2nd day of Stress Exposure • Tuesday, May 13 • Trainee Lunch Period

The study team observed the trainees in the Chow Hall during lunch. It was a chaotic-looking scene where some trainees were seated and eating, some were standing with their trays in front of them trying to eat, and others were running laps around the perimeter of the Chow Hall yelling things like “I like to look around.” DIs were screaming at the trainees throughout the meal time. The study team observed one trainee, who had vomited in the hallway, being examined by a member of the Health & Fitness staff. It clearly was not an appropriate environment for trainee health, wellness, or proper nutrition.

After lunch, the Commandant spoke to the trainees in a classroom to explain the purpose of the stress exposure resiliency training. He explained to the trainees that stress will be a part of the training regimen and emphasized that the ability to handle stress should occur at the SPA, not on the road after graduation. However, prior to the presentation, the DIs escorted the trainees into the room. The trainees were given orders by the screaming DIs to take seats, immediately followed by getting up, then take seats, and repeated for several minutes prior to the Commandant entering the classroom. The study team noted that the “extra” exertion that occurs throughout the day by DIs repeatedly having trainees run laps indoors, run from location to location, and the constant “up/down” in their seats is likely a source of unaccounted physical exertion and a potential cause of preventable injuries, especially muscular, skeletal injuries.

2nd On Site Visit • June 23–25

Week 8 • Chow Hall Observations • June 23

While the study team was in the MSP Chow Hall for lunch, the various trainee cohorts (they were in smaller “Round Robin” groups) began arriving at different times for their lunch. The first group to arrive went through the kitchen area, received their trays with their food, and were required to stand behind the lunch tables holding their trays straight out in front of them, head and eyes looking straight ahead. As each subsequent group arrived, each group did the same. The first group into the Chow Hall probably held their trays out for 10 minutes or more until all groups arrived.

Once all groups were present, a female trainee was required to stand on the raised platform, tray extended forward, and was asked to publicly explain why she had arrived late (1 hour and 20 minutes) to the academy that morning. It was while the DI was questioning her with a loud voice for an answer and she was answering with a loud voice, that all of the trainees in the Chow Hall turned their heads to face her.

The female trainee explained that although she had set multiple alarms, she had slept through them. The DI then asked the entire group what they must do to ensure that this does not happen again and explained that the RTT was a group effort, not a bunch of individuals. While holding trainees accountable for timely attendance is important and using one failure as an example to the group is valid, to those on the study team witnessing this, it appeared to be more focused on punishing the entire group (standing and holding trays for so long) and creating the potential to alienate the female trainee from her classmates for being late to the academy.

Another observation made by the study team is that the MSP-issued baseball caps of the 20 trainees who resigned from the program as of that date were tacked up on the wall in the Chow Hall, symbolizing the number of trainee resignations. These actions appeared to be more of an expression of a sense of accomplishment with the staff being proud of the resignations.

“Round Robin” Training

During the study team’s visit on Week 8, MSP trainees were broken into smaller training groups and assigned to different skills training venues for the week. One group was at driver’s training (EVOC), one at firearms training, one at Patrol Procedures, and one at Defensive Tactics or Physical Training. There were also several academic classroom presentations during that week that study team members observed.

Outside of the trainee’s interactions with the drill instructors (between classes), the Academy staff trainers in each of the “Round Robin” training venues created a highly positive and professional learning environment for the trainees. Training staff used positive encouragement, allowed trainees to make mistakes without being punitively corrected, and provided meaningful feedback in a calm and professional manner. It was only when the trainees were turned back over to the charge of the DIs, that the high stress environment was restored.

3rd Onsite Visit • Week 11 • July 14–15

During the study team’s visit on Week 11, team members conducted additional interviews with SPA staff, toured the facility, observed training, and facilitated a focus group with current trainees. A primary goal of spacing the site visits several weeks apart and sending different team members on each site visit was to gain insight into how the academy transitions into the various phases of training while also providing for a diverse perspective from team members.

On this visit, the team also concluded that the SPA faces significant challenges in leadership stability, infrastructure, and trainee development. Despite a dedicated staff and strong scenario-based training, outdated systems and inconsistent feedback mechanisms hinder efficiency and trainee development. Trainees value the paramilitary structure but express concerns about fairness, feedback, and constant physical demands. Infrastructure upgrades (e.g., lecture hall, WiFi), standardized scheduling, and improved record-keeping systems were also identified as critical needs. A consistent leadership model and a permanent civilian manager could provide much-needed continuity and operational support.

APPENDIX I: PRIOR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE—THE 2006 COMMISSION REPORT

A review by the IACP study team of the current MSP training environment revealed a strong reliance on numerous references to the *2006 Report of the Massachusetts State Police Academy Commission (the 2006 Report)*,⁷⁶ especially as it related to the stress exposure resiliency training component of the Recruit Training Troop (RTT) program. In order to better understand the current training environment, it is important to understand the MSP's cultural reliance on the continuation of past training practices.

This Commission was formed after MSP became aware of allegations involving violations of training protocols by some staff during the 78th Recruit Training Troop session. While the Commission was not charged with investigating any aspects of improper performance by SPA staff, it was created to review SPA training policies and practices and to make recommendations for future changes or improvements.

The IACP study team conducted a thorough review of prior recommendations from *the 2006 Report* for improvements at the SPA, including the stress exposure resiliency training approach currently utilized at the SPA. The study team's findings cast doubt on the effectiveness of high-stress training methods recommended in *the 2006 Report* and will emphasize a recommended shift toward evidence-based practices that better support trainee learning and long-term performance.

While this Commission issued its findings in a report more than 19 years ago, a review of current practices at the SPA indicates that in many key areas, little has changed or improved as a result of the recommendations provided by the Commission. A summary of key findings identified in the *2006 Report* includes the following:

Key Findings from the 2006 Report

Academy Attrition and Training Issues

- ▶ Roughly 33% of trainees resign early in the training program—mostly within the first few days
- ▶ Most resign due to being overwhelmed and unprepared for SPA life
- ▶ High attrition is expected and accepted by staff

Program Design and Progression

- ▶ Training often remains in command-and-control mode without phase transitions
- ▶ Lacking in a properly-phased approach to foster trainee autonomy and leadership
- ▶ Large class sizes from budget constraints reduce training quality

Training Staff and Structure Challenges

- ▶ Roles in chain of command are unclear, leading to poor oversight and communication
- ▶ Staff lack proper training and education to manage a modern training program
- ▶ Academy assumes selection process is flawed, using training as a secondary filter
- ▶ Encourage cross-role teaching: academic instructors help with drill, and vice versa

Drill Instructor Dynamics

- ▶ Professional and rule-abiding, but culturally and physically isolated from other SPA staff
- ▶ Despite claims of promoting leadership, the drill program mostly instills unquestioned obedience instead

⁷⁶ Kathleen M. Burke et al., *Report of the Massachusetts State Police Academy Commission* (Boston, MA, March 2006).

Stress Exposure Resiliency Training

- ▶ Core element of the Academy's socialization plan, intended to mirror real job stress of troopers
- ▶ Effective when stress is between trainee and task, not trainee and staff
- ▶ A belief that removing this training would undermine the credibility of future officers

Background

Stress Exposure Resiliency Training—SERT (Assertions from *the 2006 Report*)

While failing to validate any evidence-based research to support its finding, the Commission's report offered the following:

"The Commission determined that the stress portion of the training program is a viable and valuable component of the recruit's training and an appropriate method to ensure officers are properly prepared for Department operations. The Commission examined agencies that use both stress and non-stress training in their Academy programs. It appears that agencies are split fairly evenly between these two training methods. Relevant research also indicates that there is little relevant difference in the results of each type of training program in terms of job satisfaction and performance. However, the stress approach leads to significantly more commitment to the organization and internalization of its values. Additionally, the Commission concluded that tradition and other subjective elements are what make each model successful for individual departments."⁷⁷

- ▶ Stress Exposure Resiliency Training is essential for developing leadership, confidence, and self-reliance—mirroring real job demands
- ▶ It reinforces Department values and does not negatively affect job satisfaction
- ▶ Stress should result from challenging tasks—not from degrading treatment by staff
- ▶ Drill staff must be trained in the theoretical basis and correct implementation of SERT

Academy Training and Instruction Reform

- ▶ Roles in the SPA chain of command are ill-defined and result in confusion, inadequate communications, and poor oversight of SPA training operations
- ▶ Training staff members are not provided the proper training and education to design and run a cutting-edge program
 - ▶ They need and deserve expanded training and professional development support
- ▶ Large class sizes undermine training quality; optimal class size needs to be determined
- ▶ The drill staff experiences pressure to exceed past training performance—partly due to unrealistic perceptions of its role in filtering out unfit trainees
- ▶ Training must avoid humiliating or hostile conduct and emphasize positive reinforcement over punishment
- ▶ The current use of gigs and demerits as a disciplinary tool is excessive
 - ▶ It frustrates their intended use as a means of effectively communicating deficiencies to trainees and identifying candidates who should be discharged from the SPA

Drill Instructors and Role Clarity

- ▶ Drill instructors often become powerful role models due to their high-stress interactions with trainees
- ▶ They feel solely responsible for trainee success, sometimes leading to harmful "Just One More" dropout pressures
 - ▶ Some drill instructors begin to believe that the class would be substantially improved if one more trainee, the weakest, would leave the class
 - ▶ This practice can lead to the potential abuse of the training process since there is always a weakest individual in any group
- ▶ The drill staff often fails to smoothly transition between training phases as outlined in its plan
- ▶ Cultural and functional isolation from academic staff increases friction and hinders program unity
- ▶ A perception exists that one person could not effectively embody the role of trainer and evaluator/disciplinarian due to the inherent conflict between teacher/trainer and disciplinarian

⁷⁷ Ibid. Page 40.

Training Philosophy and Cultural Impact

- ▶ Academy training instills habits of obedience more than critical leadership, contrary to its stated goals
- ▶ Leadership, problem-solving, and positive behavioral feedback should be central to the training model
- ▶ The SPA fosters a sense of identity and pride that should be preserved for future troopers
- ▶ There is a great deal of organizational, cultural, and self-induced pressure placed on the SPA staff to produce classes that exceed the standards achieved by previous training troops

Teaching Methods and Organizational Culture Recommendations

- ▶ Return to a multi-disciplinary team-teaching approach, combining academic and drill responsibilities to foster unity and flexibility
- ▶ Break down functional silos to eliminate the fragmented staff structure
- ▶ Each instructor should both teach in their expertise area and support trainee development holistically across a platoon
- ▶ Language should be included in SPA training manuals that prohibit “conduct that promotes no legitimate public safety objective, but serves to merely denigrate an individual by creating a humiliating, hostile, or offensive work place”

A notable conclusion issued by the Commission, **and one in which the study team finds to have been a significant obstacle to the MSP implementing changes, improvements, or innovation to the Recruit Training Program over the years**, is the following statement in the report that is both protective of, and supportive of, the Department’s culture, its rituals, and its traditions involving the manner in which it conducts stress exposure resiliency training in the recruit training program:

“In the case of the Massachusetts State Police, this training protocol has long served to initiate recruits into the culture of the Department and has provided them with a sense of accomplishment, confidence, pride, competence and identification with the organization. The removal of this type of training would be a great disservice to future officers and

the Department since it is most likely that they would suffer the professional stigma of not having succeeded in the same manner as all other officers of the Department. While each officer believes that the training they received was much more challenging than that received by newer officers, the reality is that the Department has remained remarkably consistent in its approach and training has been appropriate for its time.”⁷⁸

Summary

Relying on assertions like those bolded in the preceding paragraph create a major impediment for current and future Academy leaders who may be interested in changing or improving the disciplinary environment and the degree of stress exposure in the recruit training program to more closely align with 21st century effective practices. The ability to implement modern, evidence-based practices is even further exacerbated when senior leadership (lieutenant colonels and majors) is present to observe and to signal their tacit approval of the RTT Day 1 Chow Hall stress exposure exercise that the study team members found to be excessive, lacking purpose, and demeaning to the trainees.

While stress exposure in purposeful training exercises is an important component of training, effective training should prioritize skill development, psychological readiness, and mutual respect over indiscriminate stress exposure. A modern police training academy must incorporate proven learning models and promote supportive environments that build resilient, capable, and community-minded troopers.

The vast majority of SPA staff interviewed by the study team demonstrated a strong desire to perform their duties at a high level. An often-repeated goal of some members of the SPA staff is to be a pre-eminent law enforcement training agency that delivers cutting-edge training. However, continued reliance on tradition, outdated rituals, and a desire to exceed the stress exposure experienced by prior RTT classes will stifle this goal. Instead, this will likely result in the suppression of meaningful innovation or improvement that aligns with societal changes and evolving public expectations of today’s law enforcement officers.

78 Ibid. Page 40.



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