BEST PRACTICES FOR POLICING IN K-12 SCHOOLS

Prepared for Alexandria City Public Schools – SLEP Advisory Group

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HANOVER RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

School security personnel are increasingly commonplace in Virginia's public schools. In addition to school security officers (SSOs) who are employed by the school district directly to maintain order and discipline in assigned schools, many school districts have also relied on school resource officers (SROs). SROs are certified law enforcement officers employed by local law enforcement agencies and assigned to provide coverage in a public school through partnerships with districts. A 2020 survey of school districts in Virginia, for instance, finds that 58.6 employ either a school resource officer or a school security officer.[1]

However, the presence of law enforcement officers in schools has proved controversial. Advocates of SRO programs such as the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), a leading professional association of SROs, argue that the presence of SROs enhances students' and teachers' sense of safety in school and that SROs are essential to support school safety planning.[2] In contrast, opponents of SRO programs, such as the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute, argue that the low levels of serious crime in schools result in SROs dedicating a substantial portion of their time to investigating minor incidents or supporting school disciplinary functions, resulting in excessive and inequitable sanctions for students.[3]

Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) is committed to the safety and security of students and staff and has maintained a partnership with local law enforcement over the past few years. In late Spring 2022, ACPS formed a SLEP Advisory Group to increase internal and external stakeholder involvement with the ACPS and Alexandria Police Department partnership. This group will meet with external facilitators on a regular basis to assist in the continued development and refinement of the partnership as well as establish recommendations to the School Board on innovative approaches, areas for policy changes, or enhancements to reimagine the partnership. In this report, Hanover reviews best practices for structuring SRO programs and research examining the effects of SROs and school policing more broadly on school climate, safety, and student outcomes. This report includes the following sections:

- **Section I** reviews best practices for structuring SRO programs, including program structures and the roles and responsibilities of SROs.

- **Section II** reviews the available empirical research on the student outcomes associated with SRO programs, including research examining the impacts of SROs on student involvement in the justice system and impacts on school climate and safety.

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[1] Lawson et al., Op. cit., p. 9.

[2] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools." National Association of School Resource Officers, 2012. p. 9. https://www.nasro.org/clientuploads/About-Mission/NASRO-To-Protect-and-Educate-nosecurity.pdf

[3] King, R. and M. Schindler. "A Better Path Forward for Criminal Justice: Reconsidering Police in Schools." Brookings - American Enterprise Institute Working Group on Criminal Justice Reform, April 30, 2021. pp. 39–40. https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-reconsidering-police-in-schools/

KEY FINDINGS

School districts and law enforcement agencies use memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to structure SRO programs. MOUs spell out expectations for all participants in an SRO program, including schools, law enforcement agencies, and individual SROs, and establish clear boundaries for the role of SROs to prevent SROs from assuming inappropriate responsibilities such as supporting student discipline. Districts and law enforcement agencies should carefully examine relevant laws and regulations when drafting MOUs to ensure compliance with legal requirements.

In effective SRO programs, SROs fulfill educational and counseling functions in addition to providing law enforcement services. The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) recommends adopting a Triad Model in which SROs serve as law enforcers, teachers, and informal counselors, while the U.S. Department of Justice's recommended roles for school counselors supplement the Triad Model with a role in emergency planning. A study drawing on a survey of 850 principals finds that law enforcement referrals increase by a significantly lower percent in schools where SROs adopt the Triad Model than in schools where SROs focus on law enforcement functions.

SROs should not support day-to-day discipline for non-criminal behavior. The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) recommends that policies governing SRO programs specify that SROs do not respond to any event which would not require a 911 call in the absence of an SRO. School policies and training for SROs should emphasize that SROs are not to support student discipline or refer students to the justice system for behavior that could be addressed more effectively through school disciplinary processes.

SROs appear to reduce some forms of violence in schools. A 2021 study drawing on national data from the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection finds that schools which receive federal grant funding to support SROs report higher rates of gun incidents than other schools, which the authors attribute to increased detection rates, but lower incidents of other forms of violence such as fighting and threats. A survey of students, parents, staff members, and community members at Wake County Public School System in North Carolina finds that large majorities of respondents agree that SROs increase their sense of safety at school, although other survey research does not find that students' sense of safety increases when they engage more frequently with SROs.

Empirical studies of SROs suggest that law enforcement referral rates increase in schools where SROs are present, but that SROs themselves do not account for the majority of law enforcement referrals for minor or status offenses. A study examining the implementation of SROs across middle schools in North Carolina finds that the presence of an SRO in a middle school increases the number of juvenile court referrals for misdemeanor complaints by 14 percent but decreases the number of referrals for felony complaints by 25 percent. However, a study examining juvenile referrals to law enforcement across sources finds that SROs make up only three percent of total referrals and are less likely than families or school administrators to refer students for minor or status offenses.

Several studies find that disproportionalities in law enforcement referrals and school disciplinary sanctions for students from racial or ethnic backgrounds increase in schools with SROs. For example, a 2021 study using data from a federal grant program that increased SRO staffing in California finds that disciplinary referrals for Black and Hispanic students increased in schools which increased SRO work hours with grant funding. Likewise, a study of SROs in Montana finds that the rate of law enforcement referrals increases in schools with SROs, with particularly strong effects on Native American students.

SECTION I: STRUCTURING SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAMS

In this section, Hanover reviews best practices for structuring SRO programs. This section begins with a review of research on program structures, including the role of SROs within local law enforcement agencies and the use of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to guide relationships between law enforcement and schools. This section goes on to review research on the roles of SROs in schools, including best practices for selecting and training SROs to appropriately support students and staff.

PROGRAM STRUCTURES

SROs are sworn law enforcement officers assigned to work in schools to ensure the safety of students, faculty, and staff. The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), a professional organization which provides training and support to school resource officers, defines a school resource officer as "a carefully selected, specifically trained, and properly equipped full-time law enforcement officer with sworn law enforcement authority, trained in school-based law enforcement and crisis response, assigned by the employing law enforcement agency to work in the school using community-oriented policing concepts."[4] In Virginia, the term *school resource officer* can refer to "any certified law enforcement officer hired by the local law enforcement agency to provide law enforcement and security services to Virginia public elementary and secondary schools." [5] SROs reflect an interagency collaboration model in which multiple agencies, including schools and law enforcement agencies, collaborate to support students' safety and wellbeing.[6]

In most Virginia districts, SROs are employed by local law enforcement agencies and detailed to work in schools, rather than employed directly by school districts. A 2020 study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs uses surveys and focus groups to examine the roles and structures of SRO programs in Virginia. This study finds that 99 percent of survey respondents indicate that their immediate supervisor is part of a law enforcement agency, suggesting that SRO functions in Virginia are largely performed by local law enforcement agencies operating through agreements with school districts rather than direct employees of school districts or specialized police departments. [7]

ESTABLISHING EXPECTATIONS THROUGH A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

School districts and law enforcement agencies establish expectations for SROs through a memorandum of understanding (MOU).[8] The NASRO identifies a clear MOU as essential for successful SRO programs.[9] Effective MOUs establish clear boundaries for the role of SROs to prevent SROs from assuming inappropriate responsibilities such as supporting student discipline.[10] The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) recommends that school districts and law enforcement agencies develop MOUs in collaboration with constituent groups affected by school policing,

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[4] "FAQ." National Association of School Resource Officers. https://www.nasro.org/faq/

[5] Lawson, G. et al. "An Investigation of School Resource and Safety Programs Policy and Practice in Virginia." U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, January 2021. p. 9. https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/investigation-school-resource-and-safety-programs-policy-and-practice-virginia

[6] "To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools," Op. cit., pp. 15–17.

[7] "NASRO Position Statement on Police Involvement in Student Discipline." National Association of School Resource Officers, August 14, 2015. https://www.nasro.org/aboutnasro/nasro-position-statement-on-police-involvement-in-student-discipline/

[8] Lawson et al., Op. cit., p. 89.

[9] "NASRO Position Statement on Police Involvement in Student Discipline," Op. cit.

[10] Javdani, S. "Policing Education: An Empirical Review of the Challenges and Impact of the Work of School Police Officers." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 63:3–4, June 2019. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6597313/

including students, families, and community members, and that MOUs include the minimum elements listed in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Minimum Functions of MOUs for SRO Programs

> Documents the SRO duties and program mission

> Identifies partner roles and responsibilities

> Prohibits SROs from engaging in school disciplinary inccidents, enforcing school codes of conduct, or addressing typical student behavior that can be safely and appropriately handled by school officials

> Defines reporting and data collection requirements

> Requires annual assessment of SROs

> Provides for effective training on various school-related topics

> Outlines supervision of the SRO(s) named in the MOU

Source: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing[11]

Schools and districts should carefully review MOUs to ensure that they comply with applicable laws and regulations, particularly related to the use of SROs to support school discipline. An analysis of MOUs for SROs at seven districts in South Carolina, for instance, finds that each district's MOU authorizes SROs to intervene in student disciplinary cases where state law forbids SRO involvement, suggesting that a careful review of legal requirements is necessary during the drafting process to ensure compliance.[12] The U.S. Department of Education has developed a **rubric** with checklists to guide school districts and law enforcement agencies in developing MOUs to create a new SRO program or improve an existing program.[13]

Schools and law enforcement agencies can ensure the appropriate implementation of the MOU through an annual evaluation process. The evaluation process determines whether the MOU is being implemented as specified and what effects the SRO program has on student outcomes. Evaluating the SRO program annually is essential to ensuring that SROs are not improperly involved in school discipline and for assessing their contribution to safety and security outcomes. In addition, the evaluation process can ensure that SROs comply with relevant laws and regulations such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, as well as any new legislation or regulation enacted during the year. An effective evaluation process collects the data listed in Figure 1.2. If this process identifies challenges or concerns related to the program, schools engage families, staff members, community representatives, and other constituent groups in developing an action plan to address the concerns.[14]
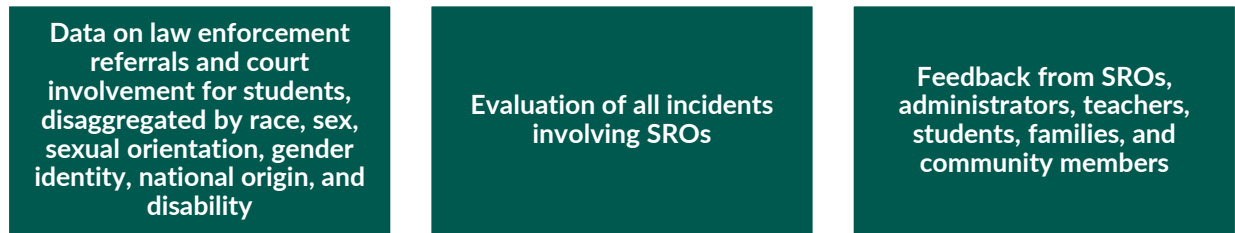
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[11] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs." U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. pp. 5–6.
https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2022ProgramDocs/chp/SRO_Guiding_Principles.pdf

[12] Lesley, J. "Discipline or Crime: An Analysis of the Use of Memoranda of Understanding to Regulate School Resource Officer Intervention in South Carolina Schools." *Journal of Law & Education*, 50:1, Spring 2021. p. 192. Accessed via EBSCOhost

[13] "Safe School-Based Enforcement through Collaboration, Understanding, and Respect (SECURe) Local Implementation Rubric." U.S. Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/files/sro-local-implementation-rubric.pdf

[14] "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs," Op. cit., p. 13.

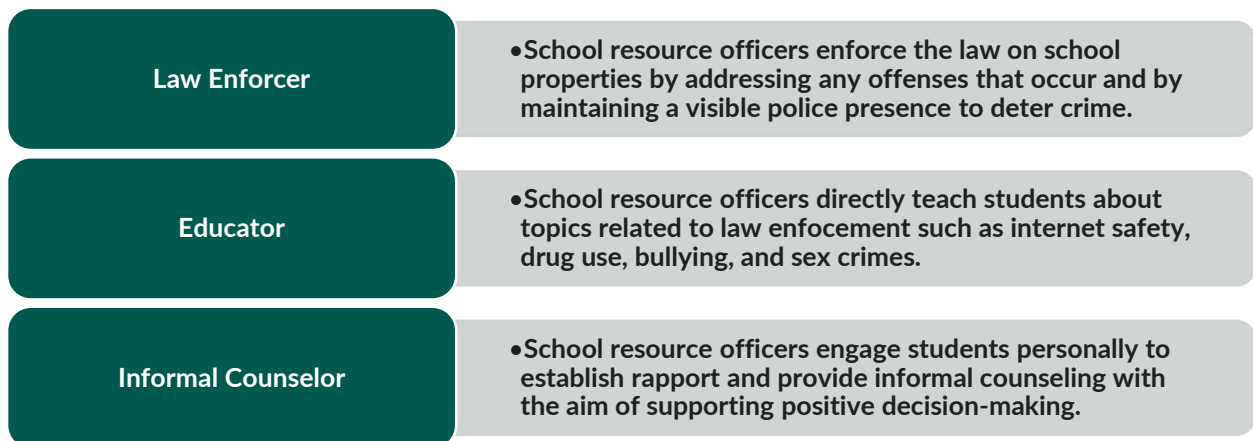**Figure 1.2: Data to Collect for Annual Evaluations of SRO Programs**

Data on law enforcement referrals and court involvement for students, disaggregated by race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, and disability	Evaluation of all incidents involving SROs	Feedback from SROs, administrators, teachers, students, families, and community members

Source: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services[15]

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

In effective SRO programs, SROs support educational and counseling roles in addition to enforcing laws and ensuring safety on campus. The NASRO recommends using the TRIAD model to structure the work of SROs. In this model, SROs support safety and student wellbeing in schools through three distinct roles, presented in Figure 1.3.[16] The COPS Office recommends a similar model which adds the role of Emergency Manager to the roles described in Figure 1.3 to reflect SROs' role in managing emergency situations that arise on school campuses.[17] Both models align with a broader community policing framework in which law enforcement officers collaborate with citizens to respond to crime and community issues.[18] SROs using these models prevent safety-related problems from occurring rather than solely reacting to problems using law enforcement strategies.[19] More specifically, the 2020 study of school resource officers in Virginia finds that job duties for resource officers outlined in MOUs largely align with the TRIAD model. MOUs also include job roles related to serving as a liaison representing the law enforcement agency to families, schools, and the public.[20]

Figure 1.3: Roles of School Resource Officers in a TRIAD Model

Law Enforcer	•School resource officers enforce the law on school properties by addressing any offenses that occur and by maintaining a visible police presence to deter crime.
Educator	•School resource officers directly teach students about topics related to law enfocement such as internet safety, drug use, bullying, and sex crimes.
Informal Counselor	•School resource officers engage students personally to establish rapport and provide informal counseling with the aim of supporting positive decision-making.

Source: National Association of School Resource Officers[21]

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[15] Chart contents adapted from: Ibid.

[16] "Police / Approach." Atlanta Public Schools.
http%3A%2F%2Fwww.atlantapublicschools.us%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D63659

[17] "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs," Op. cit., pp. 5–6.

[18] Fisher, B.W. et al. "The Alignment Between Community Policing and the Work of School Resource Officers." *Police Quarterly*, January 3, 2022. p. 3. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[19] Morgan, F.E. "School Resource Officers Deserve a Continuing Role." *School Administrator*, 79:4, April 2022. Accessed via EBSCOhost

[20] Lawson et al., Op. cit., pp. 78–42.

[21] Chart contents adapted from: "The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools." National Association of School Resource Officers. pp. 24–27. https://www.nasro.org/clientuploads/resources/NASRO-Protect-and-Educate.pdf

SROs should not support day-to-day discipline for non-criminal behavior. A position statement of the NASRO recommends that MOUs "prohibit SROs from becoming involved in formal school discipline situations that are the responsibility of school administrators."[22] Likewise, the COPS Office recommends that MOUs prohibit SROs from responding to any situation that would not require a 911 call if the SRO was not present, and that this prohibition should be made clear to all constituents before the implementation of an MOU and continuously throughout the school year.[23]

Even when MOUs constrain SROs from directly participating in school discipline, they may become involved in actions related to discipline. However, research suggests that SROs often support school discipline functions outside the appropriate scope of their responsibilities in practice. For instance, the 2020 study of school resource officers in Virginia finds that 64.1 percent of survey respondents whose role includes supervising school resource officers believe that resource officers receive request to support non-criminal disciplinary issues once a week or more.[24] Additionally, a 2019 study drawing on focus groups with SROs, school staff, and families at two anonymous school districts finds that SROs overwhelmingly report that they do not participate in student discipline, as required by the MOUs governing SRO programs at these districts. Participating SROs appeared to define involvement in discipline as participation in formal disciplinary consequences, such as writing student referrals. However, SROs did report substantial involvement in activities related to discipline, such as warning students of potential consequences for misbehavior, delivering verbal reprimands, reporting student misbehavior to school administrators, or being physically present when administrators delivered disciplinary sanctions.[25] The authors recommend that individual schools supplement official policies included in the district-level MOU with more specific policies establishing how SROs should respond to minor student misbehavior.[26]

SELECTING AND TRAINING SROs

A strong recruitment and training process is essential to staffing schools with SROs who can ensure safety and equity while building strong relationships with students. The COPS Office recommends that a committee consisting of representatives from both the school and the law enforcement agency recruit and select SROs, focusing on candidates who have at least three years of law enforcement experience and experience working with young people.[27] Effective SROs demonstrate a positive attitude toward young people and strong communications skills.[28] The COPS Office further recommends that schools work to recruit SROs who reflect the diversity of their student populations, and use the hiring criteria presented in Figure 1.4.

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[22] "NASRO Position Statement on Police Involvement in Student Discipline," Op. cit.

[23] "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs," Op. cit., p. 6.
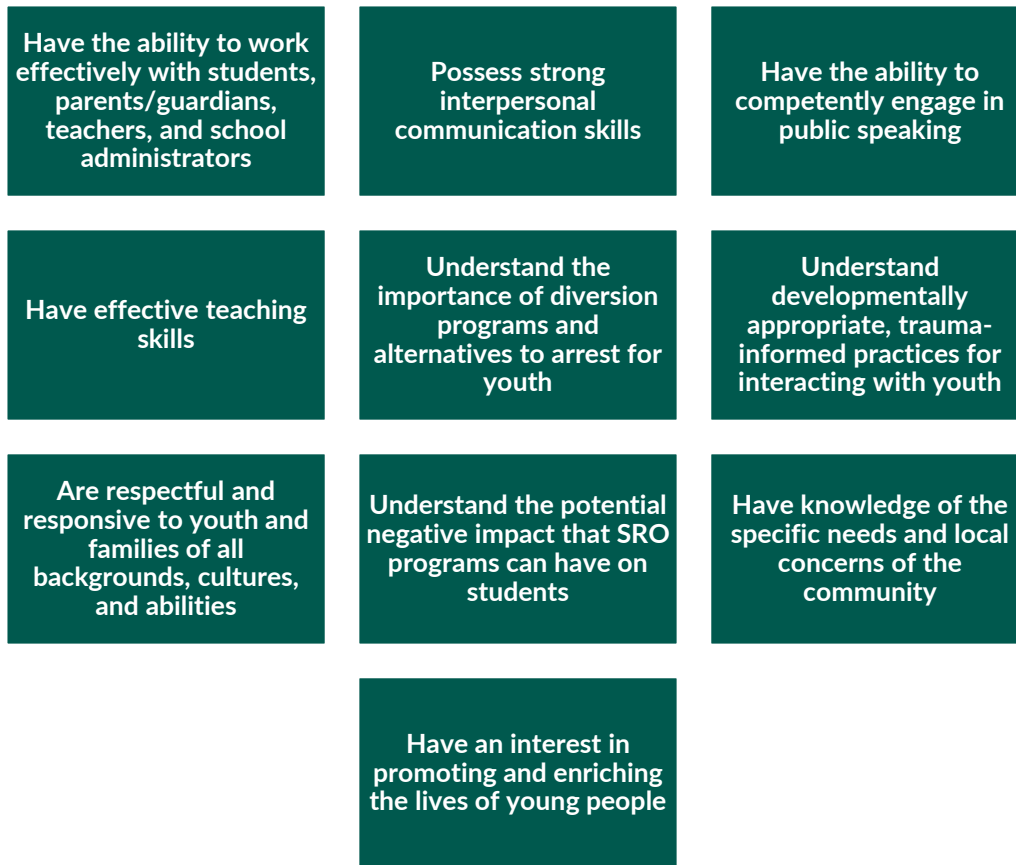
[24] Lawson et al., Op. cit., p. 124.

[25] Curran, F.C., B.W. Fisher, et al. "Why and When Do School Resource Officers Engage in School Discipline? The Role of Context in Shaping Disciplinary Involvement." *American Journal of Education*, 126:1, November 2019. pp. 45–46. Accessed via EBSCOhost

[26] Ibid., p. 58.

[27] "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs," Op. cit., p. 7.

[28] Morgan, Op. cit.

Figure 1.4: Recommended Hiring Criteria for SROs

Have the ability to work effectively with students, parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators	Possess strong interpersonal communication skills	Have the ability to competently engage in public speaking
Have effective teaching skills	Understand the importance of diversion programs and alternatives to arrest for youth	Understand developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed practices for interacting with youth
Are respectful and responsive to youth and families of all backgrounds, cultures, and abilities	Understand the potential negative impact that SRO programs can have on students	Have knowledge of the specific needs and local concerns of the community
	Have an interest in promoting and enriching the lives of young people	

Source: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services[29]

After recruiting SROs, districts and law enforcement agencies need to provide SROs with specialized training to provide them with unique skills needed to support the SRO's role. The COPS Office recommends that SROs receive specialized training focusing on appropriate roles for SROs and best practices for interacting with young people, including the topics listed in Figure 1.5.[30] The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services provides training for SRO in the state, but it is unclear whether participation in this training is mandatory for officers assigned to schools.[31] For most districts, MOUs between the school district and the local law enforcement agency include details on training requirements.[32]

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[29] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs," Op. cit., p. 8.

[30] Ibid., p. 5.

[31] "School Resource Officers." Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/school-resource-officers

[32] Ibid., p. 29.

Figure 1.5: Recommended Training Topics for SROs

- Parameters and limitations of the SRO's role, including training on identifying the difference between school disciplinary issues (which should be handled by teachers or school administrators) and threats to school safety or serious school-based criminal conduct that cannot be safely and appropriately handled by a school's internal disciplinary procedures
- Identifying situations in which mental health professionals should be called to handle or assist an SRO in handling a situation involving a mental health crisis and situations where an SRO's involvement is necessary to protect physical safety
- Constitutional and civil rights—including nondiscrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability under title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990—and the requirement that SROs make reasonable modifications when necessary to avoid disability discrimination when interacting with young people with disabilities
- Incident reporting and data collection
- Procedural justice
- Multitiered systems of support (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or other)
- Community policing and SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment) problem-solving model
- De-escalation and conflict resolution techniques
- Child and adolescent development, including brain development
- Teen dating violence and sexual assault
- Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Working with specific student groups, including youth with disabilities; English language learners; persons with various immigration statuses; and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and/or intersex
- Bias-free policing, including implicit bias and cultural competence
- Alternatives to arrest, including diversion programs
- Trauma-informed practices
- Bullying prevention
- Drug and alcohol use education
- Social media use
- Emergency management
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- School threat assessment
- Active shooter training
- Restorative justice/practices and conflict resolution
- Classroom presentation skills

Source: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services[33]

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[33] Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Guiding Principles for School Resource Officer Programs," Op. cit., pp. 10–11.

SECTION II: IMPACTS OF POLICING IN SCHOOLS

In this section, Hanover reviews empirical research on the outcomes associated with policing in K12 schools. This section begins by discussing impacts of SRO programs on school climate and safety, including students' perceptions of safety, incidents of violence in schools, and rates of exclusionary discipline. This section goes on to discuss research examining the impact of SROs on student involvement in the justice system.

IMPACTS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SAFETY

Studies examining student perceptions of school climate and safety find that students and other constituents believe that SROs increase their safety at school. A 2021 study drawing on surveys and focus groups with students in 25 schools across two anonymous districts finds that 76 percent of survey respondents indicate that the presence of an SRO increases their sense of safety in school. Students were more likely to agree that an SRO increased their sense of safety when they interacted frequently with the SRO and when they reported trusting the SRO.[34] Likewise, a survey conducted as part of an evaluation of the SRO program at Wake County Public School System in North Carolina finds that large majorities of respondents across constituent groups report that SROs increase their sense of safety, as shown in Figure 2.1, although some respondents expressed concerns about role clarity for SROs.[35]

Figure 2.1: Perceptions of SRO Outcomes in Wake County Public School System
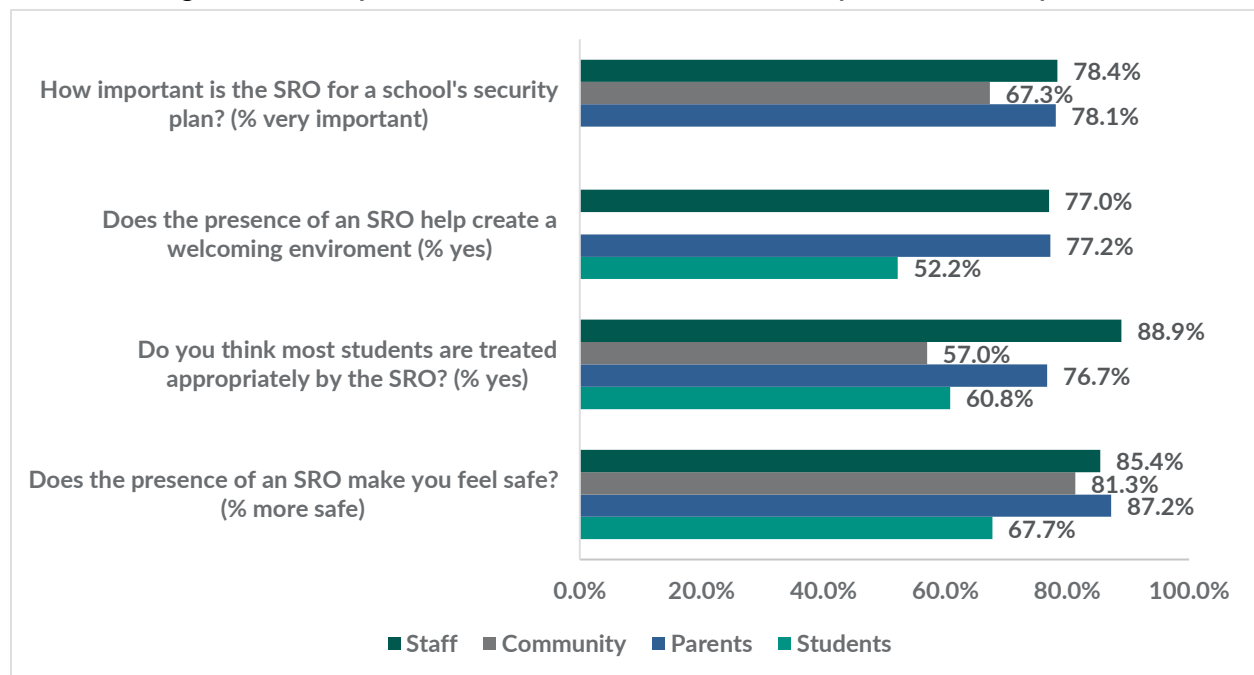
Source: Wake County Public School System[36]

Although students report that SROs increase their sense of safety, self-reported safety does not appear to increase as students engage more frequently with SROs. A 2016 study published in the journal *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* draws on a survey of 1,956 middle and high school students in an anonymous

[34] Curran, F.C., S. Viano, et al. "Do Interactions With School Resource Officers Predict Students' Likelihood of Being Disciplined and Feelings of Safety? Mixed-Methods Evidence From Two School Districts." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43:2, June 1, 2021. p. 216. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[35] Stephens, S. et al. "Review of the WCPSS School Resource Officer Program." Wake County Public School System, June 2021. p. 21. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=school+resource+officer&ft=on&ff1=dtySince_2018&id=ED619341

[36] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 15.

school district to examine the effect of interactions with SROs on students' self-reported sense of safety at school.[37] The study finds no significant relationship between students' sense of safety and the number of interactions they reported with SROs. However, the study does find that African American students were significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe at school than students from other racial backgrounds.[38]

IMPACTS ON INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

Empirical studies confirm that the presence of SROs reduces certain forms of violence in schools. A 2021 study published in the journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* uses data from the introduction of SROs to middle schools in North Carolina between 2005 and 2009 to examine the effects of SROs on a variety of student outcomes, including the number of violent incidents reported by schools to the state education agency.[39] The study finds that the presence of an SRO decreases the number of reportable violent incidents by 38 percent.[40] Moreover, a 2021 study published by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University examines national data on student outcomes collected through the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection to compare outcomes in schools whose local law enforcement agencies applied for federal grants to support SRO programs to schools whose local law enforcement agencies did not apply for SRO funding.[41] The study finds that SRO funding significantly increases the number of reported firearms incidents in schools, which the authors attributed to increased detection of firearms by SROs. The effect of SRO funding on shooting incidents in schools is marginally significant but not considered substantial by the authors. The study finds that SRO funding significantly reduces rates of school violence not related to firearms, such as fights and threats.[42]

Although the *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* study does not find that SROs reduce firearms-related violence at scale, SROs have prevented firearms-related violence in individual cases. The COPS Office cites specific incidents in which SROs averted planned school violence to demonstrate the benefits of SRO programs for school safety. A 2020 COPS Office report draws on a database of averted incidents of school violence and presents case studies of 12 incidents in which SROs played a major role in preventing violence or were the targets of planned violence, summarized in Figure 2.2.[43]

Figure 2.2: Summary of Incidents in Which SROs Were Targets of or Prevented School Gun Violence

- A non-student planned a school attack that would include planting an improvise explosive device near the SRO's office but was identified on surveillance video and reported by an individual with whom they had discussed their plans before the attack could be carried out.

- A student threatened to carry out a school attack that would include shooting the SRO. The students to whom the student made the threat reported it to the school's principal, and police officers including the SRO investigated the threat. The student was charged with disorderly conduct and placed under an involuntary mental health hold.

- A student overheard two other students planning to shoot a specific classmate and reported the conversation to the principal, who contacted the local police. The SRO led police and social services in investigating the threat,

[37] Theriot, M.T. and J.G. Orme. "School Resource Officers and Students' Feelings of Safety at School." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 14:2, April 1, 2016. p. 134. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[38] Ibid., p. 139.

[39] Sorensen, L.C., Y. Shen, and S.D. Bushway. "Making Schools Safer And/Or Escalating Disciplinary Response: A Study of Police Officers in North Carolina Schools." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43:3, September 1, 2021. p. 501. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[40] Ibid., pp. 508–509.

[41] Sorensen, L.C. et al. "The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing across the U.S." Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, October 2021. p. 5.
https://eric.ed.gov/?q=school+resource+officer&ft=on&ff1=dtySince_2018&id=ED616763

[42] Ibid., p. 23.

[43] Allison, J., M. Canady, and F.G. Straub. "School Resource Officers: Averted School Violence Special Report." Article. U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Policing Services, January 1, 2020. pp. 8–25.
https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=

including the removal of firearms from one of the students' homes and an order for the student to undergo a mental health evaluation.

- A non-student gained entry to a high school with firearms and the intent to kill two specific staff members and was confronted by the SRO. The SRO chased the perpetrator out of the school and ultimately arrested them in collaboration with other police officers.

- A non-student with a history of criminal behavior gained entry to a high school with firearms and confronted the school principal. The SRO stood between the perpetrator and the principal and was able to draw the perpetrator into an empty cafeteria before attempting to negotiate with them. Ultimately, the SRO and other police officers who arrived on the scene were forced to shoot and fatally wound the perpetrator when they pointed a firearm at the SRO.

- A student witnessed another student typing a note threatening to commit a school shooting and reported the incident to the SRO, who led an investigation. The student who had made the threat was ultimately arrested and referred to a juvenile assessment facility.

- A student uttered a threat to carry out a school shooting to a peer, who reported the threat to the SRO. The SRO led a law enforcement investigation resulting in the confiscation of firearms belonging to the student's family and the student's arrest on charges of terroristic threats.

- A student brought a firearm on campus and used it to threaten another student. A third student witnessed the incident and reported it to the SRO, who initiated a lockdown and search that retrieved the gun and led to the arrests of the students who had been involved in the incident.

- During an investigation of an unrelated threat, an SRO uncovered social media posts in which a student expressed admiration for the Columbine High School shooting. Further investigation discovered that the student was conspiring with a non-student to carry out a mass casualty attack using bombs and firearms, and the student was charged with conspiracy to commit murder.

- An SRO received an anonymous tip that two students were planning to carry out a school shooting. The SRO carried out an investigation, and the students were arrested and charged with making credible threats.

- A student brought a firearm to school and displayed it to other students, who reported the incident to the administrator. The school was placed on lockdown and the SRO located the suspect in collaboration with other law enforcement officers. The student was arrested and charged with carrying a concealed weapon.

- A student made threats to carry out a bombing and shooting, which peers reported to an SRO. The SRO opened an investigation in collaboration with local law enforcement, leading to the seizure of firearms belonging to the student's family and the student's charge with making a false report concerning the use of a firearm.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services[44]

IMPACTS ON EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE

Overall, research presents mixed findings on the relationship between exclusionary discipline and the presence of SROs. Although SROs appear to reduce rates of violence in schools, some studies suggest the presence of SROs increases rates of exclusionary discipline such as suspension and expulsion. The Annenberg Institute study, for instance, finds that the presence of SROs increases rates of exclusionary discipline, with large increases in rates of in-school and out-of-school suspensions and smaller but still significant increases in expulsion rates and referrals for arrest. The study also finds that the presence of SROs increases rates of chronic absenteeism.[45] Likewise, the 2021 *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* study finds that the presence of an SRO increases the number of long-term student suspensions and expulsions by 68 percent, with the authors attributing the increase in suspensions to school administrators feeling pressure to assign suspensions when SROs believe a suspension is necessary. [46]

On the other hand, a 2019 review of the empirical literature on policing in schools concludes that findings on the effects of police officers in schools on exclusionary discipline range from no significant effect to a significant increase in exclusionary discipline associated with police in schools, with no studies finding that

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[44] Chart contents adapted from: Ibid.
[45] Sorensen et al., Op. cit., pp. 23–24.
[46] Sorensen, Shen, and Bushway, Op. cit., pp. 508–509.

police presence reduces the rate of exclusionary discipline.[47] A 2018 study published in the journal *Middle Grades Review* uses data from a state grant program funding SROs in elementary and middle schools in North Carolina to examine the effect of SROs on student disciplinary referrals in middle schools, which the authors identify as an indicator of school safety. The study finds that disciplinary referrals did not decline for schools that hired SROs compared to a control group of schools that did not hire SROs.[48]

IMPACTS ON DISPROPORTIONALITY IN STUDENT DISCIPLINARY OUTCOMES

In addition to finding overall increases in exclusionary discipline from SROs, some studies find that the presence of SROs increases disproportionality in school disciplinary outcomes for students from racial or ethnic groups. A 2021 study published in the journal *Crime and Delinquency* uses data from a federal grant program that increased SRO staffing in California to assess the effect of SROs on disciplinary outcomes by race or ethnicity. The authors compared data for secondary schools that increased the number of hours worked by SROs through the grant program to a matched comparison group of similar schools that did not increase SRO hours.[49] To assess the effects of SRO staffing on student disciplinary outcomes, the authors used data on student disciplinary offenses and sanctions reported to the state education agency, which reports all disciplinary sanctions that resulted in removal from school for any period of time, such as out-of-school suspension or expulsion.[50] The study finds that the number of disciplinary offenses and sanctions reported to the state education agency increased for Black and Hispanic students and decreased for White students at schools receiving grant funding for SROs. The number of disciplinary incidents and sanctions reported to the state for Black, Hispanic, and White students at schools in the comparison group decreased over this period, suggesting that the presence of additional SROs was associated with an increase in disproportionality for disciplinary outcomes.[51]

The 2021 Annenberg Institute study confirms that the presence of SROs exacerbates disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes. This study finds that the effect size of SROs on in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion rates for Black students is roughly twice the effect size for White students. The study also finds a significant increase in grade retention rates for Black students in schools with SROs. In addition to exacerbating racial disproportionalities, the Annenberg Institute study finds that the presence of SROs increases disproportionalities in disciplinary outcomes for male students and students with disabilities.[52]

IMPACTS ON STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Opponents of SRO programs argue that the regular presence of law enforcement officers in schools leads to justice system referrals for student misbehavior that would otherwise be handled through the traditional school discipline process.[53] For example, the Justice Policy Institute, an advocacy organization focused on criminal justice reform, cites national data on student arrests in schools to argue that SROs frequently refer students to the justice system for minor misconduct that could be handled through school disciplinary processes.[54] These referrals contribute to a phenomenon in which school discipline contributes to students'

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[47] Javdani, Op. cit.

[48] Anderson, K.A. "Policing and Middle School: An Evaluation of a Statewide School Resource Officer Policy." *Middle Grades Review*, 4:2, September 2018. p. 16. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=school+resource+officer&ft=on&id=EJ1192862

[49] Crosse, S. et al. "Are Effects of School Resource Officers Moderated by Student Race and Ethnicity?" *Crime & Delinquency*, 68:3, March 1, 2022. p. 388. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[50] Ibid., p. 391.

[51] Ibid., p. 402.

[52] Sorensen et al., Op. cit., p. 25.

[53] Ryan, J.B. et al. "The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers." *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 53:3, January 1, 2018. pp. 189–190. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[54] "The Presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) in America's Schools." Justice Policy Institute, July 9, 2020. pp. 3–4. https://justicepolicy.org/research/policy-brief-2020-the-presence-of-school-resource-officers-sros-in-americas-schools/

involvement in the criminal justice system, referred to in the literature as the school-to-prison pipeline.[55] A 2016 review of research on the school-to-prison pipeline by the American Bar Association finds that African American and American Indian-Alaska Native students are disproportionately subject to arrest or law-enforcement referrals in schools, suggesting that inequitable law enforcement in schools contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline.[56]

Research comparing student referrals to law enforcement from different sources does not find that SROs are more likely than school administrators or other sources of referrals to refer students to the justice system for minor offenses. A 2015 study published in the journal *Criminal Justice Policy Review* examines data for juvenile referrals to law enforcement in an anonymous southeastern state to estimate the effects of SRO programs on the juvenile justice system. This study finds that SROs were more likely to refer students to the criminal justice system for moderate and serious offenses than other potential sources of referrals such as schools and family members. In contrast, schools and family members were more likely to refer students for minor or status offenses than SROs. Overall, SROs made up only three percent of total referrals to the juvenile justice system over three years, suggesting that SROs do not contribute substantially to the school to prison pipeline.[57] Similarly, a 2014 survey of SROs finds that SROs report performing fewer tasks related to law enforcement and maintaining order than other law enforcement officers.[58]

Although SROs themselves do not appear to account for the majority of student referrals to law enforcement, overall referrals increase in schools where police officers are present. A 2013 study of SROs uses data from the U.S. Department of Education's School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSCS) to examine the effects of SRO programs on student referrals to law enforcement. This survey includes items asking principals about the total number of crimes reported by the school as well as the percentage of crimes referred to law enforcement and for which students received a disciplinary sanction.[59] The study finds that the presence of an SRO or other sworn law enforcement officer significantly increases the percentage of crimes that are reported to police across categories of crime, with the strongest effect on referral rates for simple assault without a weapon.[60] Additionally, a 2020 study published in the *Journal of School Violence* uses data from the Civil Rights Data Collection and the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data to compare student arrest rates in schools that reported a police presence within the school to arrest rates in schools that did not report a police presence.[61] The study finds that, after controlling for other variables, the rate of students arrested increased by approximately 1.13 students per 1,000 students enrolled for schools that reported a police presence.[62]

Other research suggests, however, that the presence of SROs increases law enforcement referrals for relatively minor offenses, while reducing referrals for serious offenses. The 2021 *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* study finds that the presence of an SRO in a middle school increases the number of juvenile court referrals for misdemeanor complaints by 14 percent but decreases the number of referrals for felony complaints by 25 percent. The authors attribute the decline in felony complaints to a deterrent effect caused by the presence of SROs. The increase in misdemeanor complaints is stronger for White students than for

[55] "School-to-Prison Pipeline." American Civil Liberties Union. https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/juvenile-justice-school-prison-pipeline

[56] Redfield, S.E. and J.P. Nance. "School-to-Prison Pipeline: Preliminary Report." American Bar Association, February 2016. p. 30. http://jjie.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/School-to-Prison-Pipeline-Preliminary-Report-Complete-Final.pdf

[57] May, D.C. et al. "Do School Resource Officers Really Refer Juveniles to the Juvenile Justice System for Less Serious Offenses?" *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 29:1, February 1, 2018. pp. 97–98. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[58] Rhodes, T.N. "Officers and School Settings: Examining the Influence of the School Environment on Officer Roles and Job Satisfaction." *Police Quarterly*, 18:2, June 1, 2015. p. 153. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[59] Na, C. and D.C. Gottfredson. "Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors." *Justice Quarterly*, 30:4, August 1, 2013. p. 9. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754

[60] Ibid., p. 17.

[61] Homer, E.M. and B.W. Fisher. "Police in Schools and Student Arrest Rates across the United States: Examining Differences by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender." *Journal of School Violence*, 19:2, April 2, 2020. p. 3. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2019.1604377

[62] Ibid., p. 5.

students from other backgrounds, while the decrease in felony complaints is consistent across racial backgrounds. The study also examines long-term criminal justice involvement but does not find any significant effect of SRO programs on adult involvement in the criminal justice system.[63]

DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS BY POLICING MODEL

SRO programs that implement the Triad Model or similar frameworks in which SROs support counseling and education in addition to law enforcement functions exhibit smaller increases in student law enforcement referrals than programs in which SROs focus exclusively on law enforcement. For example, a 2020 study published in the journal *Crime and Delinquency* uses data from a longitudinal survey of 850 school principals to compare outcomes for schools in which SROs use the Triad Model to outcomes for schools in which SROs focus primarily on law enforcement functions, schools with no SROs and schools where SROs were present but did not engage substantially with students.[64] As shown in Figure 2.3, the number of reported property crimes and non-serious violent crimes increased significantly in schools where SROs adopted a law enforcement focus compared to schools with no SROs, and decreased significantly in schools with low-engagement SROs. The number of property crimes increased for schools where SROs used the Triad Model compared to schools with no SROs, but the number of non-serious violent crimes decreased.[65]

Figure 2.3: Impact of SRO Models on Law Enforcement Referrals Compared to Schools with No SROs
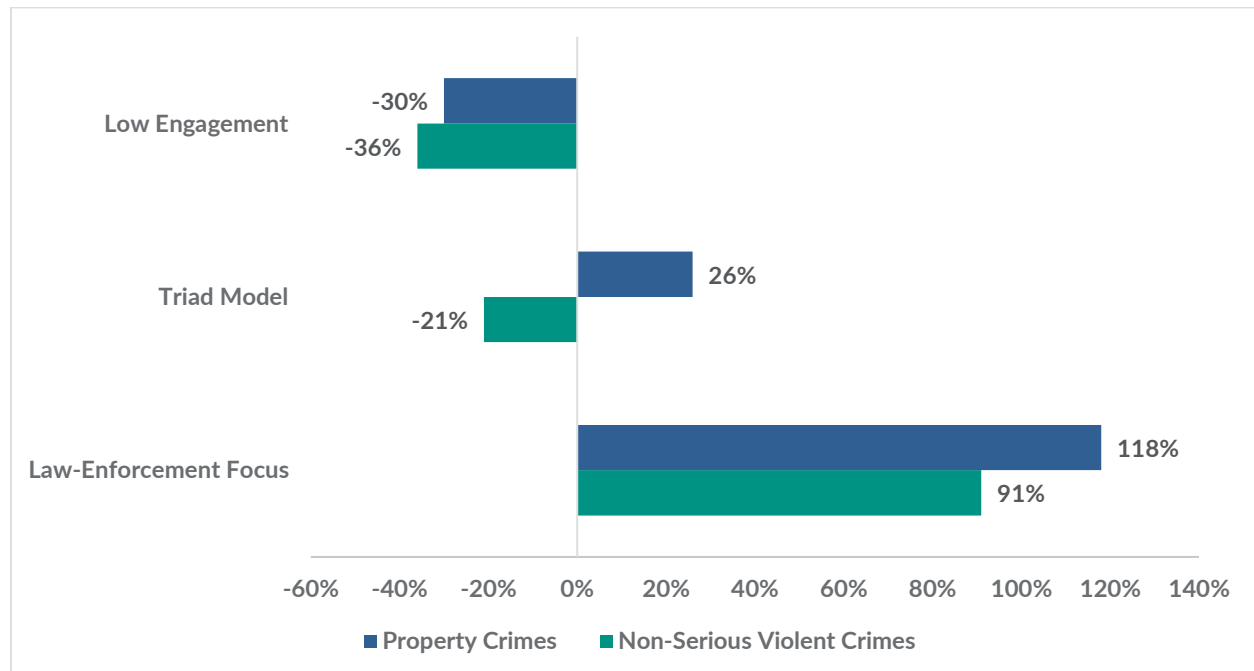
Source: *Crime and Delinquency*[66]

A 2018 study published in the journal *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* confirms that law enforcement referrals increase in schools with SROs, but that the increase is smaller in schools where SROs' duties align with the Triad Model. This study also compares data for schools in which SROs perform law enforcement functions exclusively to schools in which SROs support both law enforcement and mentoring or teaching,

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[63] Sorensen, Shen, and Bushway, Op. cit., p. 509.
[64] Fisher, B.W. and D.N. Devlin. "School Crime and the Patterns of Roles of School Resource Officers: Evidence From a National Longitudinal Study." *Crime & Delinquency*, 66:11, October 1, 2020. pp. 1614–1615. Accessed via SAGE Journals
[65] Ibid., pp. 1618–1620.
[66] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 1618, 1620.

such as schools using the Triad Model discussed in Section I of this report.[67] The study finds that schools with SROs reported higher rates of property and weapon or drug possession crimes than schools without SROs, after controlling for other factors which could have affected crime rates. The increase in crime reporting was statistically significant both for schools with SROs focused exclusively on law enforcement and schools with a broader approach to the SRO role. However, schools with SROs focused exclusively on law enforcement reported significantly higher rates of crime across categories than schools in which SROs supported a mentoring or teaching role.[68]

IMPACTS ON DISPROPORTIONALITY IN STUDENT JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

Research finds that the presence of SROs increases rates of disproportionality in student referrals to the justice system, with effects similar to those for exclusionary school discipline. The 2021 Annenberg Institute study finds that law enforcement referrals and arrests increase for all students in schools with SROs, but the effect size for Black students is approximately twice that for White students.[69] Likewise, the 2020 *Journal of School Violence* study finds that the arrest rate for Black students in schools that report a police presence increases substantially more than arrest rates for White or Hispanic students. Figure 2.4 illustrates the increase in the number of students arrested per 1,000 total students for each group, and for all students.[70]

Figure 2.4: Increase in Student Arrest Rates in Schools Reporting Police Presence by Race or Ethnicity
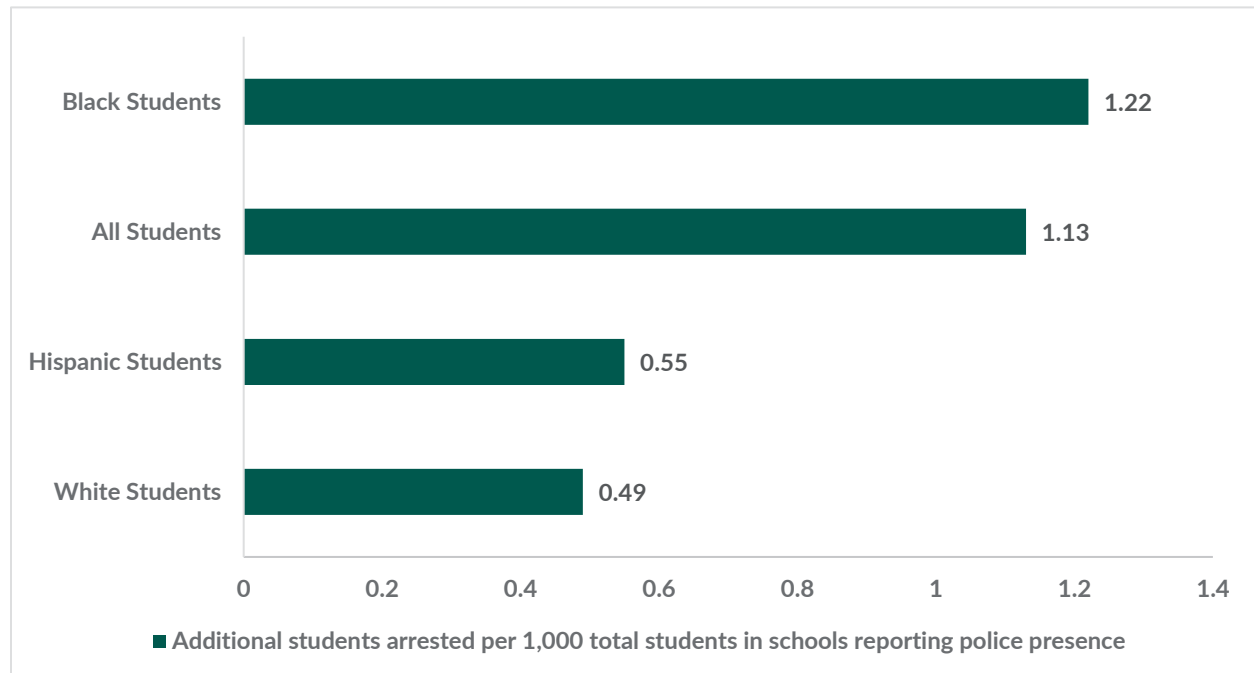
Source: *Journal of School Violence*[71]

Research examining state-level data also finds disproportionate effects of SROs on student law enforcement referrals by racial background. The 2021 *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* study finds that the increase in suspension rates is significantly larger for Black and Hispanic students than for White students, with Hispanic students experiencing the strongest increase of 51 percent.[72] A 2021 study published in the

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[67] Devlin, D.N. and D.C. Gottfredson. "The Roles of Police Officers in Schools: Effects on the Recording and Reporting of Crime."
    Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 16:2, April 1, 2018. p. 210. Accessed via SAGE Journals
[68] Ibid., p. 217.
[69] Sorensen et al., Op. cit., pp. 25–26.
[70] Homer and Fisher, Op. cit., p. 5.
[71] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.
[72] Sorensen, Shen, and Bushway, Op. cit., pp. 508–509.

journal *Affilia* uses statewide data from Montana to examine the impact of SROs on disproportionate school-related arrests and referrals to law enforcement for Native American students, disaggregated by gender.[73] The study finds that both male and female Native American students experience significantly higher rates of arrest or referral to law enforcement in schools with SROs or security guards than in schools without SROs or security guards. Across genders, the presence of SROs or security guards also increases the rate of referrals to law enforcement for all students, White students, and Asian students in Montana, as shown in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5: Mean Law Enforcement Referrals per 10,000 Students by Race and SRO Status in Montana
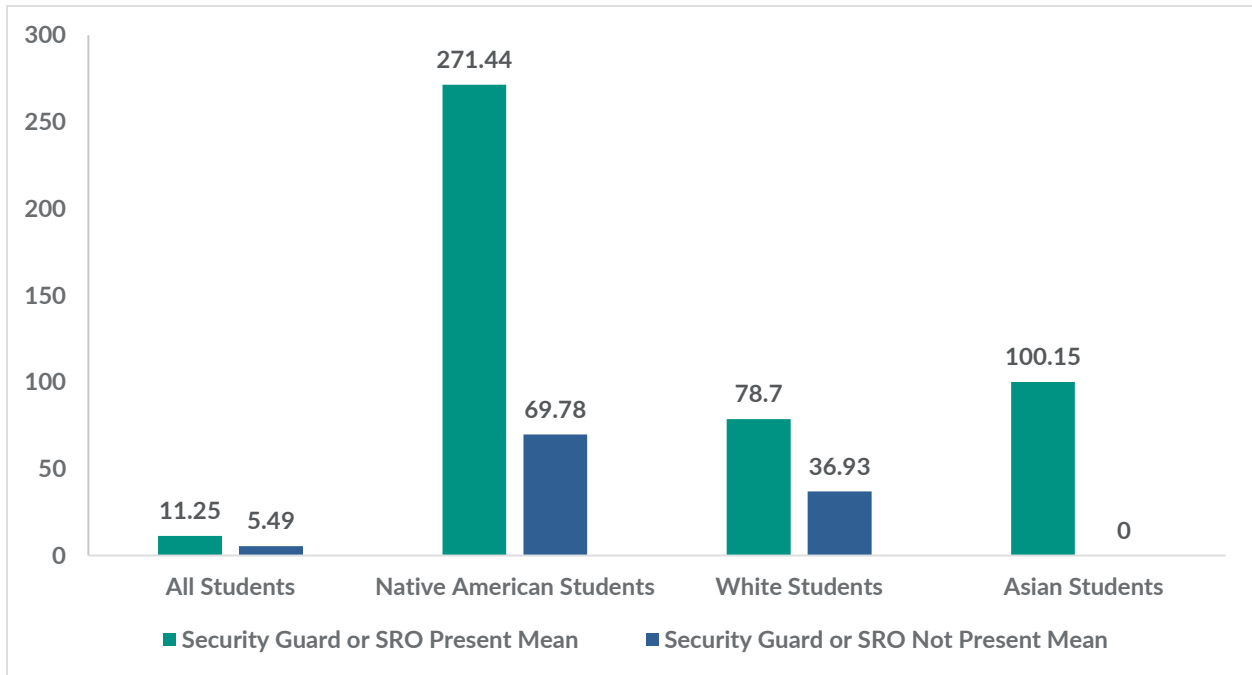
Source: *Affilia*[74]

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[73] Walker, L.A., K. Bokenkamp, and T.S. Devereaux. "Impact of School Resource Officer And/Or Security Guard Presence on Native American Referrals and Arrests in Montana's Schools." *Affilia*, 37:1, February 1, 2022. p. 69. Accessed via SAGE Journals

[74] Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 71.

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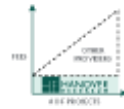200+ analysts with multiple methodology research expertise

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