

LAW
ENFORCEMENT
IN
MINNESOTA
SCHOOLS:



A STATEWIDE
SURVEY
OF
SCHOOL
RESOURCE
OFFICERS



SEPTEMBER
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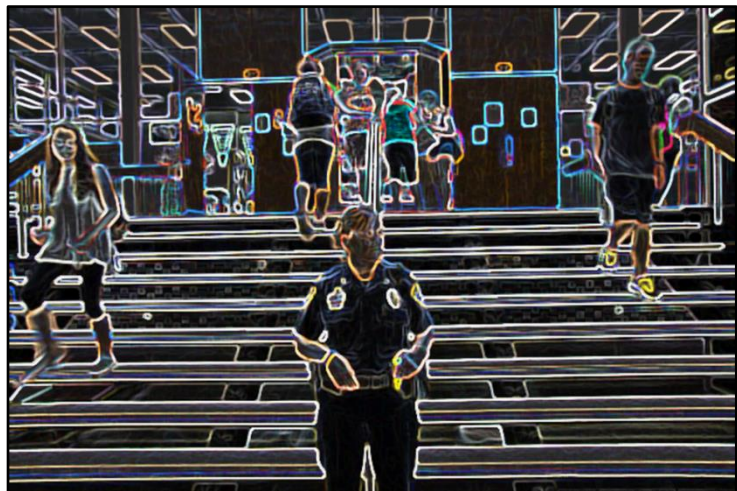
Introduction

Police agencies have long had a role in service to schools. Traditional activities have included periodic patrols, responding to calls for service and criminal investigations of offenses involving youth. Only in the last 20 years has assigning law enforcement officers to schools on a full-time basis become a widespread practice.¹

Some factors thought to have contributed to the expanded use of police in schools include the rising involvement of juveniles in crime in the 1980s and 1990s; the shift to accountability-based policies to behavior in schools, including “zero tolerance;” and new, federal funding for community oriented policing, which includes funding for law enforcement in schools. In addition, high profile school shootings in the late-1990s, coupled with the terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001, significantly elevated concern for schools as targets of violence.^{2,3}

The presence of law enforcement in schools has been controversial. Proponents assert that School Resource Officers (SROs) keep students and educators safe, which in turn creates an environment conducive to learning. SROs help schools prepare for potential external threats and help reduce the internal presence of drugs, alcohol, weapons, gangs and violence. In addition, SROs can serve as mentors for youth, and educators for students and staff. Supporters believe SRO programs encourage positive relationships between students and police, increasing the likelihood that youth will come to police with information about illegal activity.^{4,5,6}

Those opposed to law enforcement presence in schools contend there is little evidence to demonstrate that SRO programs reduce illegal or disruptive behavior. By the time SROs became common in the late 1990s, juvenile involvement in crime was already declining both inside and outside of schools.⁷ Opponents express concern that SROs can negatively affect school climate and compromise the civil rights of youth. Of particular concern is the criminalization of certain behaviors by a justice system response— behaviors which, in the absence of an SRO, would have been addressed with school-based discipline. Furthermore, justice system responses are more likely to be applied to youth of color, special education students and low income students.^{8, 9, 10}



The practice of school-based policing expanded rapidly in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, leaving little time for evaluation or establishment of best practices. Goals and outcome measures for SRO programs have been elusive given the tremendous variability across states and jurisdictions. Throughout the 2000s, researchers studied the effects of law enforcement in schools in an attempt to provide policy-and-practice guidelines for these unique partnerships.

Report Purpose

Partnerships between schools and law enforcement agencies are driven by local needs. For that reason, the motivations behind the SRO program may differ from community to community. Similarly, two communities may have the same goal for their SRO programs, but employ different strategies or emphasize different roles for their officers. With more than 400 law enforcement agencies in Minnesota and more than 2,000 total school settings, the potential variability among SRO programs is substantial.

It is also the case that Minnesota has no agency or organization responsible for the certification, monitoring, or evaluation of SROs or school-law enforcement partnerships. Because of this, little information exists about the number, location or characteristics of SROs in the state.

The goal of this study is to gather the most comprehensive information on Minnesota SROs to date. This study utilized a statewide survey of law enforcement agencies followed by a comprehensive survey of individual SROs to collect information on the prevalence and characteristics of Minnesota SROs, including:

- The number, location, and demographic characteristics of the officers
- The types of schools in which SROs serve
- The qualifications necessary to be selected for SRO positions
- Prior law enforcement experience and specific SRO training
- Typical duties performed by SROs

The survey also solicited the opinions and perspectives of SROs on many topics. Participants were asked to identify additional training needs; the perceived effectiveness of their presence in schools; whether they feel they are used appropriately in the school setting; and attitudes about school administrators, special education students and zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. SROs were also invited to share the most satisfying and challenging aspects of their job. The voice of Minnesota SROs will be featured prominently in this publication.

This report aims not only to fill gaps in knowledge regarding SRO programs in the state but also to explore whether Minnesota SRO programs are consistent with recommended practices. The results of the Minnesota SRO survey will be explored in relationship to research and recommendations put forth by leading agencies regarding law enforcement in school. The SRO survey coupled with the research will serve to:

- Provide an overview of the research and recommended practices related to law enforcement in schools
- Acknowledge the concerns of opposition to law enforcement in schools
- Assist law enforcement, educators and community stakeholders to better understand and meet the needs of the SRO position and profession
- Enhance the quality and consistency of Minnesota's SRO programs

A History of SROs

Early History

School-police began in the 1930s in the U.S., but the first major U.S. Police School Liaison Program (PSLP) started in 1958 in Flint, Michigan.¹¹ The original program had three objectives: The early detection and prevention of delinquent behavior; providing a liaison between police, school personnel and the community for handling offenses in-and-around schools; and to localize the services of several agencies so as to communicate more closely with each other on juvenile problems in a given section of the city.¹² Two early projects modeled after the Flint program included a PSLP in Tucson, Ariz. in 1966, and a PSLP program in Minneapolis, Minn. in 1967.¹³ In addition, the state of Florida assigned local police to schools in the 1960s—in fact, the term “school resource officer” is credited to a Miami police chief.¹³

In 1968, the federal *Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act* authorized the federal government to give grants to states to improve and strengthen law enforcement. This included recruiting and training law enforcement personnel and “public education relating to crime prevention and encouraging respect for law and order, including education programs in schools....”¹⁴ By 1975, an analysis of the Flint PSL program found that while in the early 1960s most of the officer’s time was spent on public relations and counseling, by the 1970s most of their time was spent on traditional police functions and security because of growing drug traffic, robberies and race conflicts in the schools.¹⁵

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the development of SRO programs lapsed, but police did increase their contact with schools by delivering educational programming. The *Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program (D.A.R.E.)* originated in 1983 and, in the 1990s, the *Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.)* was developed. These and other local programs “brought police into schools in a crime prevention role” but did not put police in the formal role of addressing safety issues facing the school.¹⁶

The Rise of Formal SRO Programs

In the mid-1990s, juvenile involvement in delinquency began rising sharply.¹⁷ In 1994, the federal *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act* was implemented, which created the Community Oriented Policing Services Program (COPS).^{18,19} The purpose of COPS was to award federal grants to states to hire and train police in community-oriented policing techniques and purchase and deploy new crime fighting technology. Since 1994, the federal COPS Office has invested nearly \$14 billion in grants to states and facilitated the hiring of more than 100,000 law enforcement officers.^{20,21}

In 1998, the federal authority to provide grants to states for law enforcement purposes under the *Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968* was expanded specifically to “establish school-based partnerships between local law enforcement agencies and local school systems by using school resource officers in and around elementary and secondary schools.”²² In this revision, SROs were formally defined in federal law as:

A career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with schools and community based organizations to

- (A) address crime and disorder problems, gangs, and drug activities affecting or occurring in or around an elementary or secondary school*
- (B) develop or expand crime prevention efforts for students*
- (C) educate likely school-age victims in crime prevention and safety*
- (D) develop or expand community justice initiatives for students*
- (E) train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice and crime awareness;*

Not long after the expansion of federal funding to support SROs, the nation's largest incident of student initiated school violence occurred in Littleton, Colo. in 1999. Two students planned and executed an attack on Columbine High School using firearms and explosive devices which resulted in the deaths of twelve students, one teacher and both gunmen; 21 others were wounded.²³

Following the Columbine mass shooting, the federal COPS Office launched the *Cops in Schools (CIS)* grant program.²⁴ This funding stream helped states cover salaries and benefits for new SRO hires for a period of three years. States were encouraged to develop funding streams to sustain the SRO position after the grant period ended.²⁵ Between 1999 and 2005, the CIS program resulted in the hiring of approximately 7,300 SROs nationally.^{26,a}

In addition to supporting SROs, the federal COPS Office established *Secure Our Schools (SOS)* grants in 2002.^b SOS grants were for state, local, and tribal governments to purchase and develop school safety resources customized to the needs of schools. Funds could be used for metal detectors, locks, lighting, security assessments, security training for personnel and students, coordination with local law enforcement, and other security or deterrent measures.²⁷

History of Minnesota SROs

Minnesota, like many other states, has experienced serious incidents of school violence. One of the earliest incidents of student initiated violence occurred in 1966 in the northern Minnesota town of Grand Rapids. A 15-year-old middle-school student shot another student and killed a school administrator in the parking lot at the start of the school day.²⁸

In 2003, a school-shooting in the town of Cold Spring, Minn. resulted in the death of two students. In 2005, a shooting on the Red Lake Indian Reservation resulted in the death of seven at the high school and two adults in the community. Seven additional people were injured. Conversely, in 2010, a school resource officer disarmed a student with a loaded handgun at Hastings Middle School, 25 miles southeast of St. Paul, without any shots fired.²⁹ Most recently, in 2014, a youth was apprehended in the city of Waseca after firearms and explosives were found in a storage facility along with alleged details of a plan to carry out an attack on the local secondary school. His alleged plot involved a plan to shoot the

^a The CIS funding stream was eliminated in 2006.

^b Federal SOS funding was discontinued in 2011.

school resource officer.³⁰ Each time a critical incident occurs in our nation's schools, the debate about how to best ensure the safety of our youth resurfaces.

In addition to the aforementioned partnership between Minneapolis police and schools in the 1960s, Minnesota in 1991 developed a way for local jurisdictions to fund law enforcement in schools. Before widespread federal support for law enforcement and SROs, the Minnesota Legislature passed a taxation statute permitting schools to tax property in the school district as a "levy for crime related costs." These levy funds could go to "pay the costs incurred for the salaries, benefits and transportation costs of peace officers and sheriffs for liaison services in the district's middle and secondary schools."³¹ It is unknown how many school-based law enforcement officers the tax levies supported. However, data collected for this study suggest an increase in the number of SRO programs following the creation of that law.^c

Minnesota law enforcement agencies have also received federal grants to expand SRO programs. Between 1999 and 2005, 77 Minnesota law enforcement agencies received \$10.7 million in *Cops in Schools* grants that funded the creation of 88.5 SRO positions.³² Data collected for this study also indicate an increase in SRO programs while this grant funding was available.^d In addition, 25 law enforcement agencies received \$1.5 million in federal *Secure Our Schools* grants. These funds are just a fraction of the total \$160.4 million that has come to Minnesota through federal COPS Office grants.³³

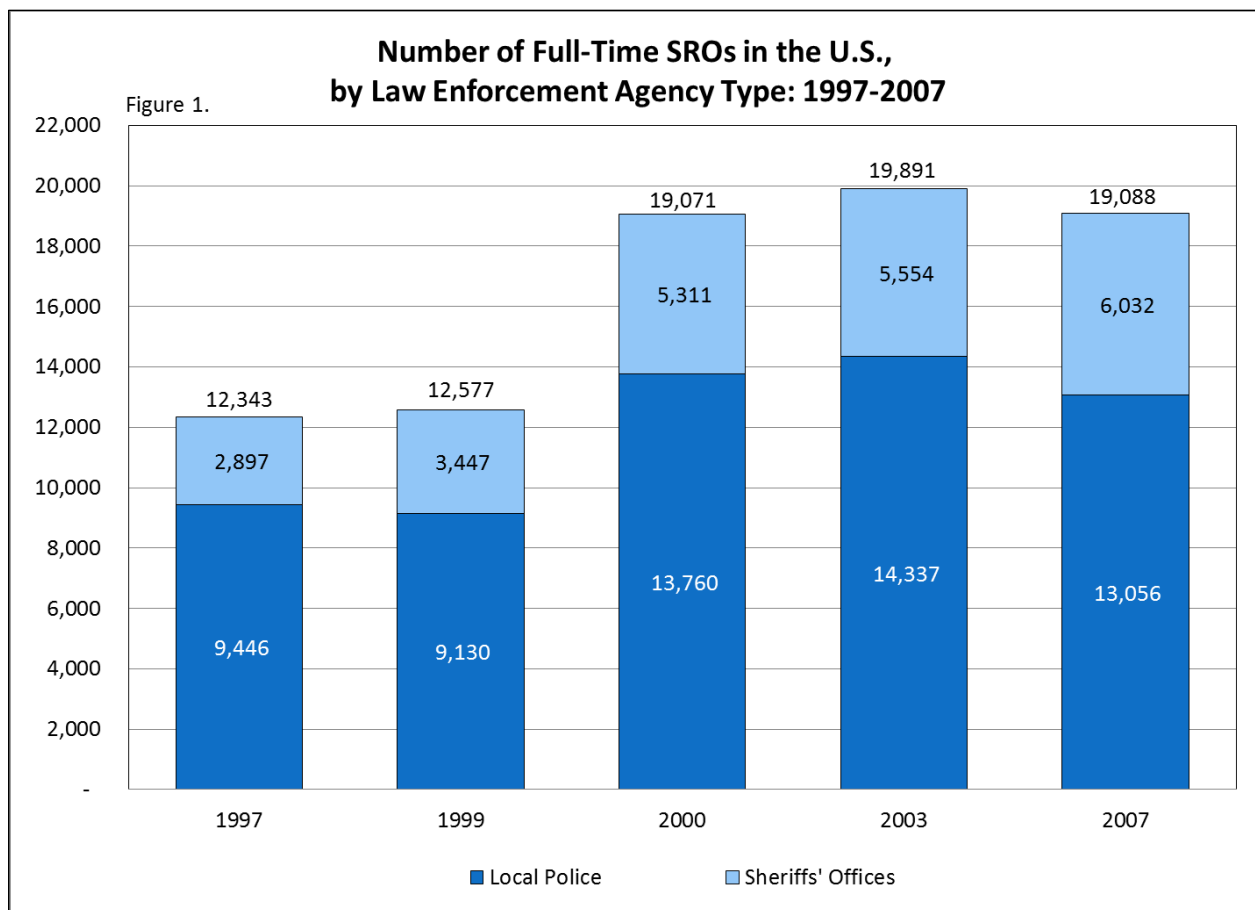
^c See section *The Prevalence and Location of SROs in Minnesota Schools: Year SRO Program Established*

^d *Ibid.*

Prevalence of SROs in the United States

In the late 1970s, there were fewer than 100 identified school police officers in U.S. public schools; by the mid-1990s that number had increased to more than 2,000.³⁴ In 1987, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics began collecting key information about law enforcement agencies through a national survey of law enforcement agencies. In 1997, the survey began inquiring whether departments had full-time school resource officers.

According to these surveys, as of 1997 there were just over 12,000 full-time SROs employed by police and sheriffs' offices in the U.S. By 2000, (after the creation of the *Cops in Schools* funding stream) there were over 19,000 full-time SROs. The number of SROs peaked in 2003 at close to 20,000 and declined to approximately 19,000 as of 2007.^{35,36} These figures include full-time SROs employed in local police departments and sheriffs' offices. Total SROs by agency are depicted in Figure 1. Data are not yet available for the next survey of law enforcement agencies which was to occur in 2012.³⁷ In addition, many school districts around the country have established police departments, especially in California and Texas. It is unknown if these law enforcement agencies within the school districts are included in the national data.



Study Methodology and SRO Distribution

Goals of this study include identifying how many law enforcement agencies in the state of Minnesota employ SROs, and the number of active SROs. In addition, it is the intent of this project to survey as many individual SROs in the state as possible to gather global information on the characteristics of SROs in Minnesota. The following section describes the methods used to achieve these aims.

First Survey: Identification of Law Enforcement Agencies with SROs

In Minnesota, the *Board of Police Officer Standards and Training (POST)* maintains a list of active law enforcement agencies in the state.³⁸ In 2013, when this project was underway, the POST Board documented 447 active law enforcement agencies. In addition, the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe, a sovereign American Indian Nation, operates a law enforcement agency not counted by the *POST Board*. In total, there were 448 law enforcement agencies in the state with the agency classifications denoted in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Total Minnesota
Law Enforcement Agencies, 2013
N=448

Agency Type	Agency Count
County Sheriffs	87
Municipal Police	338
Tribal Police	9
Specialty Agencies	14
Total	448

Among the 448 active law enforcement agencies are 14 “specialty agencies” which include the Minnesota State Patrol, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Enforcement Unit, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Fugitive Apprehension Unit, Metro Transit Police, and various state university and municipal park police forces. The 14 specialty agencies were excluded from this study because they have a special law enforcement purview, no specific geography for which they are responsible, or a population that does not typically include juveniles. This reduced the total agencies targeted for the study to 434.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs (OJP) sent an on-line survey to all county sheriffs, tribal police chiefs and chiefs of municipal police departments in the state. The short survey inquired whether their department employed one or more SROs. An SRO was defined broadly as “a sworn officer of the law dedicated (full- or part-time) to serving in a school setting.”

All but three agencies in the state (99%) completed the first survey or responded to follow-up emails or phone calls by OJP staff. Responses suggest that 166 police and sheriffs’ offices in Minnesota (38% of all agencies) employ one or more SROs.

Respondents who indicated their department employs SROs were asked “How many?” Based on their responses, it was estimated that Minnesota has approximately 315 full- or part-time SROs.

Second Survey: Targeting Individual SROs

Based on the results of the first survey, 166 agencies were targeted to receive a second survey which was to be completed by their SROs. Leadership in these law enforcement agencies received a link to an on-line survey, and were then asked to forward the survey link to all SROs in their department. The survey remained open for responses for approximately two weeks with numerous participation reminders.

The Minnesota SRO Survey was designed by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs based on questions and issues prominent in the literature. Several professionals in the Minnesota law enforcement field provided comments on the survey content and piloted the SRO survey prior to administration. The survey consisted of 53 questions with a mixture of open- and closed-ended responses.^e

One of the first questions on the survey was designed to filter out officers who have some contact with schools but are not routinely stationed in a school environment. Respondents were asked to select the answer which BEST describes their relationship with their school(s):

- A) "I spend a consistent or scheduled part of my total weekly hours stationed or embedded in one or more elementary, middle or high school settings."

Or

- B) "I am only at schools to respond to calls for service; to perform periodic walk-throughs or check-ins; to be a physical presence at certain times of the day (ie. start or end of the day); or to deliver a course curriculum such as D.A.R.E."

158 law enforcement agencies in Minnesota (36%) employ approximately 307 full- or part-time SROs.

Respondents who selected answer "B" did not progress further in the survey. Of the 166 agencies contacted, eight officers in eight departments self-selected out of the survey. This reduced the total agency count with SROs in Minnesota to **158** and the total SRO count to approximately **307** (36% of law enforcement agencies).^f

^e The Minnesota School Resource Officer Survey is available upon request. Please use contact information on page i to request a copy.

^f For a list of Minnesota law enforcement agencies reporting one or more SROs, see report Appendices A and B.

RESPONSE RATE

Ultimately, 222 unique officers completed an SRO survey. These 222 surveys represent 72 percent of known SROs in the state. In addition, these 222 surveys came from 126 unique law enforcement agencies. Hence, 80 percent of law enforcement agencies with one or more SROs in Minnesota are represented in the survey sample.

In 107 of the 126 participating agencies, all SROs in the department participated in the SRO survey.

Figure 3.
Number of SROs in Minnesota by Agency Type and Distribution of SROs Participating in the SRO Survey

Agency Type	Total Estimated SRO Count	# SRO Surveys Completed	Percent of SROs Surveyed
Sheriffs' Offices	51	33	65%
Municipal PD	251	186	74%
Tribal PD	5	3	60%
Total	307	222	72%

Figure 3 depicts the distribution of SROs in Minnesota by law enforcement agency type, as well as their survey participation rate. Survey respondents represent 74 percent of SROs in municipal police departments; 65 percent of SROs in county sheriff's offices; and 60 percent of SROs in tribal police departments in the state.

DATA ANALYSIS

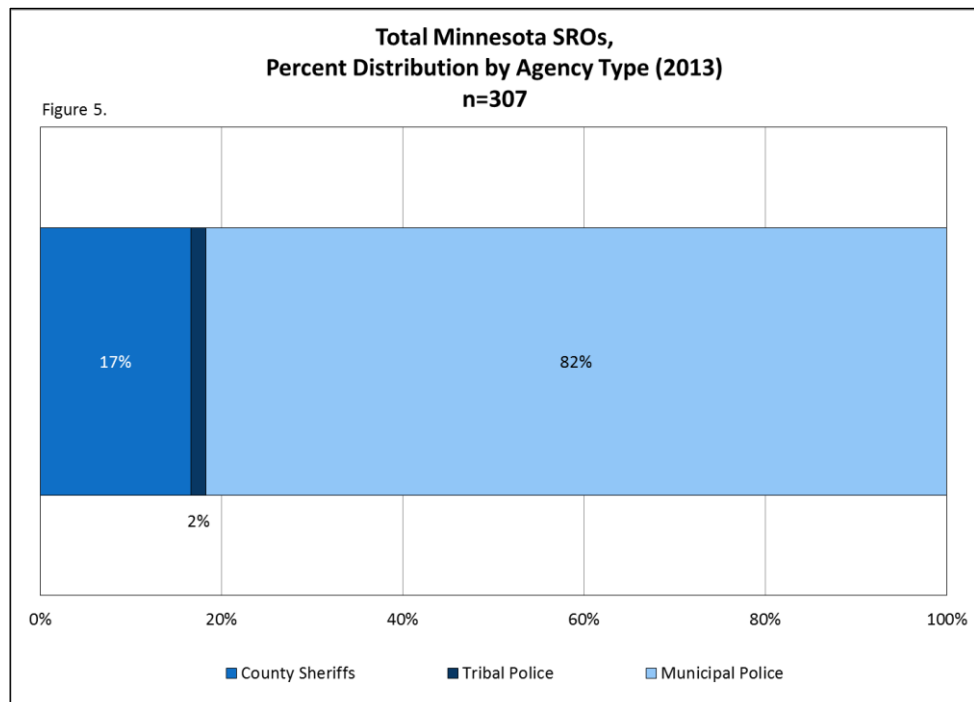
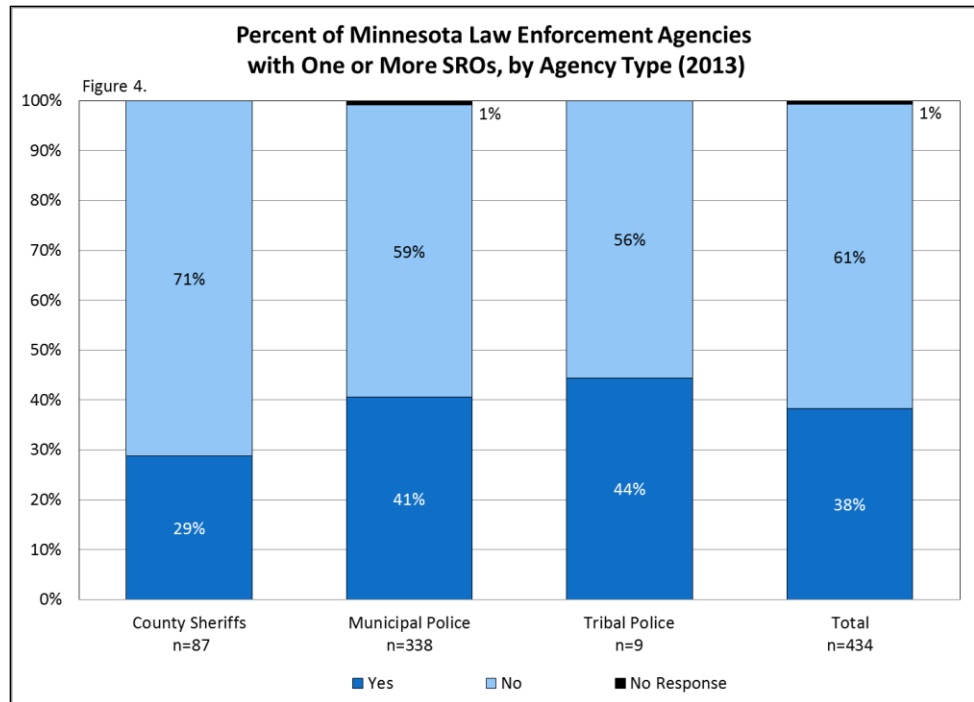
Survey data were downloaded electronically into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Analysis of qualitative data and closed-ended responses was conducted using frequency counts and other descriptive statistics. Open-ended questions were coded for themes using content analysis. In addition, the report identifies differences in survey responses based on SRO attributes using the Pearson Chi-Squared test of statistical significance.

Distribution of SROs within Minnesota Law Enforcement Agencies

According to the 2007 survey of law enforcement agencies by the U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 38 percent of local police departments and 50 percent of sheriffs' offices had full-time SROs^{39,40} Minnesota's 2013 survey of all law enforcement agencies suggests that 41 percent of municipal police departments and 29 percent of sheriffs' offices in the state have SROs.

However, the national survey was limited to full-time SROs, whereas the Minnesota survey includes part-time SROs. Figure 4 illustrates the percentage of departments in Minnesota with SROs by agency type.

Collectively, the greatest percentages of SROs in Minnesota are found in municipal police departments. Survey data suggests that 82 percent of all SROs in the state are located in municipal police departments, followed by county sheriffs' offices (17%). A small percentage of Minnesota SROs (2%) are located in tribal police departments (Figure 5).



Study Methodology and SRO Distribution: Summary and Recommendations

- An initial survey of the chiefs and sheriffs of 434 Minnesota law enforcement agencies revealed that 38 percent of all municipal PDs, tribal PDs and county sheriff's offices (166 departments) employ approximately 315 full- or part-time SROs. In a second survey of active SROs, these numbers were revised to 158 departments employing 307 SROs (36% of law enforcement agencies).
- 222 SROs—72 percent of known SROs in the state—participated in the survey for this study.
- Of the estimated 307 SROs in Minnesota, 82 percent are located in municipal police departments followed by 17 percent in sheriff's offices and 2 percent in tribal police departments.

REPORT FINDINGS

SRO Demographics and Characteristics

Preliminary questions on the Minnesota SRO survey were designed to collect basic demographic information about SROs in Minnesota. Included are responses related to gender, race/ethnicity and age. Best practices in cultural- and gender-responsiveness when working with youth support that professionals reflect the race, ethnicity and gender of populations served.^{41,42} In the case of SROs, the primary service population is the student enrollment in Minnesota schools.

SRO Gender

As of 2014, The Minnesota Board of *Peace Officer Standards and Training* (POST) reports 10,458 active peace officers in the state—1,202 of whom are female (12%).⁴³

Participants in the SRO survey were asked to identify their gender. Of the 222, surveys collected, 176 respondents are male (80%) and 45 are female (20%). Females make up a larger proportion of SROs in the state than of active peace officers overall. However, because Minnesota’s student body is 49 percent female, female officers are underrepresented when compared to the population of youth served (Figure 6).⁴⁴

Figure 6. Gender of Minnesota Peace Officers and SROs(%) n=221*		
Gender	MN Active Officers (%)	SRO Survey Participants (%)
Male	88%	80%
Female	12%	20%
* 1 refusal		

SRO Age

Minnesota SROs who participated in the survey are most likely to be between the ages of 30 and 50 years-old (79%). Officers under the age of 30 accounted for just 11 percent of all SROs, whereas SROs over the age of 50 are 10 percent of survey respondents (Figure 7).

The largest age-group of SROS in Minnesota is officers ages 30-to-39 (41%) followed closely by officers ages 40 to 49 (38%).

Figure 7. Age of Minnesota SROs (%) n=218*	
Age	Percent
Under 30	11%
30 to 39	41%
40 to 49	38%
50 and Over	10%
*4 refusals	

SRO Race and Ethnicity

The Minnesota *POST Board* does not collect data on the race or ethnicity of active peace officers in the state. Consequently, it is not possible to determine if the race and ethnicity of SROs in Minnesota is different from the racial and ethnic distribution of licensed officers in the state overall.

Survey participants were asked to identify their race and ethnicity by selecting from one or more provided race categories. Participants were permitted to type in additional races or comments, if needed. In total, over nine-in-10 SROs (92%) surveyed selected white alone as their race.

The remaining 8 percent of SROs selected the racial and ethnic distributions depicted in Figure 8. Three percent of SROs selected Black or African American; 2 percent selected Hispanic or Asian, respectively; and 1 percent of respondents selected Asian or Pacific Islander. Just two officers selected more than one race.

Figure 8.
Race and Ethnicity of Minnesota SROs (%)*
n=222

Officer Race and Ethnicity	SRO Survey Participants
White	92%
Black or African American	3%
Hispanic	2%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1%
More than One Race	1%

*Total exceeds 100% due to rounding

Student Race and Ethnicity

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) maintains data on the race and ethnicity of students enrolled in Minnesota schools. Enrollment data illustrate the racial distribution of students in grades 1 through 12 during the 2012-13 school year (Figure 9).⁴⁵

The racial composition of Minnesota's student body is considerably more diverse than the population of SROs. School enrollment consists of 27 percent youth of color, whereas just 8 percent of SROs represent communities of color. African American students are the largest population of color in Minnesota schools at 11 percent, while just 3 percent of SROs identify as African American.

Naturally, communities and schools around the state have unique youth compositions. Whereas African American youth may be the largest population of color in one area, American Indian, Hispanic or Asian youth may be the most prevalent population in another. Schools and police departments should collaborate to ensure that youth of color feel represented by both school staff and law enforcement.

Figure 9.
Minnesota School Enrollment by Race (%),
2012-13 Academic Year
n=845,177

Race/Ethnicity	Percent
White	73%
Black	11%
Hispanic	7%
Asian/P.I.	7%
American Indian	2%

Level of Education

In Minnesota, all prospective law enforcement officers must complete a two- or four-year law enforcement or criminal justice degree through a Professional Peace Officer Education Program (PPOE). Conversely, an officer may possess a two- or four-year degree in any discipline and then complete “law enforcement certificate courses” through a PPOE. Both the degree track and the certificate track require passing the *POST Board* licensing exam.⁴⁶ Minnesota is exceptional in that, as of 2007, only 10 percent of all local police departments nationally had a similar minimum education requirement for new officers.^{47,g}

It is possible, under some circumstances for Minnesota officers to be employed with only a high school degree or equivalency. Minnesota can give licensing reciprocity to persons who have worked in law enforcement in other states, or have federal or military law enforcement service. In order to be licensed in Minnesota, officers from other states must have at least five years of professional experience after basic training if they do not possess a post-secondary degree.⁴⁸

Because of the state education requirement for licensed officers, Minnesota has an above-average level of education among law enforcement officers. A review of the literature revealed no specific recommendations regarding the level of education SROs should possess. Police chiefs interviewed in another study observed that officers with post-secondary education may be preferable because they may possess better written and verbal skills and may be more connected to education.⁴⁹

Participants in the Minnesota SRO survey were asked to report their highest level of education completed. As is depicted in Figure 10, the 2-year associate’s degree is the most common level of education completed among Minnesota SROs (49%) followed closely by a 4-year bachelor’s degree (45%). Approximately 3 percent of SROs have a high school degree or equivalency and an additional 3 percent have obtained a master’s degree. Less than 1 percent of SROs have acquired a doctorate degree (0.5%).



Figure 10.
SROs’ Highest Level of
Education Completed (%)
n=215*

Education Completed	Percent
High School Diploma/GED	3%
2-Year Associate’s Degree	49%
4-Year Bachelor’s Degree	45%
Master’s Degree	3%
Doctorate Degree	<1%
*7 refusals	

^g The two-year minimum education requirement has been in effect in Minnesota since 1978.

Law Enforcement and SRO Experience

Recommended practices generally reflect that officers should have prior law enforcement experience before being assigned the role of SRO, although a specific length of time in the field is not denoted. Officers participating in the SRO study were asked to report the total years they have been sworn law enforcement officers.

Figure 11 illustrates that nearly one-third of SROs indicate they have been sworn officers for six-to-10 years (33%). The second largest population of officers has been sworn for 11-to-15 years (21%), followed by 16-to-20 years (17%). The least experienced officers, those sworn for five years or less, account for just 12 percent of respondents.

Respondents in Minnesota’s SRO survey were asked to report the number of years they have held the position of an SRO. Not surprisingly, these responses were considerably lower than total years of sworn law enforcement service.

In Minnesota, it is most common for SROs to have held the position for two years or less (44%), so that the majority of SROs in the state could be considered new to the position (Figure 12). The second largest group of SROs has held the position for 3-to-5 years (29%). Just under one-in-10 respondents (9%) have been in the role of an SRO for 10 years or more.

Recommended practices regarding SROs include minimizing turnover. The relationship building necessary to do the job of an SRO effectively can take numerous years, and disruptions can compromise the efficacy of the program. Said one respondent: *“SROs are like cheese—they only get better with time.”* Effort should be made to keep SROs in schools for longer periods to create consistency in the program.

Figure 11.
Years as a Sworn Law Enforcement Officer (%)
n=221*

Years Sworn	Percent
0 to 5 years	12%
6 to 10 years	33%
11 to 15 years	21%
16 to 20 years	17%
21 to 30 years	15%
31 to 40 years	2%
*1 refusal	



Figure 12.
Years as an SRO (%)
n=221*

Years	Percent
2 Years or Less	44%
3-to-5 Years	29%
6-to-9 Years	18%
10 or More Years	9%
*1 refusal	

Total Hours per Week as an SRO

SROs surveyed were asked to report how many hours in a typical week during the school year are spent in the schools they serve.

Figure 13 illustrates that six-in-10 respondents reported spending 40 hours a week or more in school settings (60%), followed by an additional 28 percent who spend 30-to-39 hours per week in schools. In total, 88 percent of Minnesota SROs spend 30 hours a week or more in school settings. Less than 6 percent of SROs spend under 20 hours per week in schools during the academic year.

Figure 13. Hours Spent as an SRO in a Typical Week (%) n=222	
Hours	Percent
Less than 20	6%
20 to 29	7%
30 to 39	28%
40 or More	60%

SRO Demographics and Characteristics: Summary and Recommendations

- **The majority of SROs in Minnesota are white males. Communities and schools ought to make an effort to recruit SROs who are women and persons of color to reflect the entire student population, consistent with best practices in gender- and culturally-responsive services.**
- **No data are maintained on the race and ethnicity of licensed law enforcement officers in the state. The Minnesota POST Board should collect these data on newly licensed officers to ensure law enforcement officers reflect the citizenry of the state.**
- Minnesota SROs are well educated. Over 48 percent possess a 4-year college degree or higher while an additional 49 percent possess a 2-year college degree.
- The majority of SROs (88%) have been sworn law enforcement officers for more than five years. This is consistent with recommendations that officers be familiar with the policies and procedures of their departments prior to becoming SROs. However, over four-in-10 officers (44%) have been SROs for two years or less, suggesting a relatively large number of inexperienced SROs in the state.
- Minnesota SROs dedicate the majority of their time to school-related activities. Nearly 90 percent of SROs spend at least 30 hours per week in SRO activities.

The Prevalence and Location of SROs in Minnesota Schools

An additional question this study sought to answer is: “How prevalent are SROs in Minnesota schools?” According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Education for the 2009-10 school year, 31 percent of all public schools in the United States had an SRO present at least once a week. Variability exists by school type. SROs were present at least once per week in 18 percent of primary schools; 51 percent of middle schools; and 60 percent of high schools.⁵⁰

In order to determine a total number of Minnesota schools served by SROs, participants were asked to provide the name of each school where they serve, full- or part-time, in an SRO capacity. Space was given to enter up to five schools. To ascertain a non-duplicated count of schools, each school was counted only once, even if it was named by more than one SRO. Some officers entered non-conventional responses such as serving “all schools in the district.” In these cases, OJP researchers looked up all the schools in the district where the participant’s law enforcement agency was located and counted each school name once.

Total Schools Served

In the 2012-2013 school year, the MDE reported 1,908 public schools and 489 private schools in the state.⁵¹ The 222 SRO survey respondents reported contact with 541 schools. Included are primary, middle, and secondary schools, as well as Area Learning Centers (ALCs) and charter schools. A small number of private schools (14) were among the 541 schools named. Excluding private schools, SROs participating in the survey have contact with approximately 28 percent of public schools in Minnesota, slightly under the national estimate of 31 percent.^h On average, each SRO had contact with 2.4 schools.

Minnesota SROs are known to have contact with 541 schools, or approximately 28 percent of all public schools.

Type of Schools Served

Participants in the Minnesota SRO survey were asked to report the lowest and highest grade level present for each school named. This information was used to classify schools as elementary, middle or secondary schools. If the information was not known or left blank, staff researched and entered the grade levels served.

The distribution of Minnesota SROs by school type is illustrated in Figure 14 on page 19. This section represents a good-faith estimate of the number of schools with SROs in Minnesota by school type.

^h The total school count with SROs does not include responses from the estimated 85 SROs in Minnesota who did not participate in the survey. Actual number of schools with SRO contact in Minnesota is higher than captured in this study.

Differences in the way schools are defined or classified by different data sources means percentages should be interpreted with caution.

Elementary Schools

For this study, elementary schools are defined as those where the highest grade in the school is 6th grade. In total, 189 unique public elementary schools are named in the SRO survey. According to MDE there were 924 public elementary schools in the state (PK-6) in the 2012-13 school year. Based on known schools served, approximately 21 percent of Minnesota's public elementary schools have SROs. Nationally, it is estimated that 18 percent of primary schools have an SRO present at least once per week, though the national definition of a primary school is K-8th grade.

Middle Schools

This study classifies middle schools as those where the highest grade level is 8th grade. According to this definition, Minnesota SROs surveyed report serving in 113 unique middle schools.

According to MDE there were 193 middle schools in 2012-2013 school year. MDE uses a narrower definition of a middle school as those settings serving any combination of grades 5th through 8th. Based on the 113 middle schools named by SROs, approximately 59 percent of Minnesota public middle schools are served by SROs.

National data suggests that 51 percent of middle schools have an SRO present at least once per week, though the national definition includes schools serving up to grade 9.

Secondary Schools

According to MDE, secondary schools are those settings serving grades 7 through 12, of which there are 463 in the state. In addition, there are 278 Area Learning Centers (ALCs) which typically serve youth through grade 12, and 20 schools in Minnesota serving grades K through 12. For the purpose of this study, these three school classifications are grouped together for a total of 761 secondary schools.

SROs surveyed named 225 unique secondary schools, ALCs or K-12 schools suggesting the known presence of an SRO in 30 percent of secondary schools in Minnesota.

National data suggest the presence of SROs in 60 percent of high schools, though the national definition only includes schools serving grades 9 through 12. In Minnesota there were 218 senior high schools serving grades 9 and higher in 2012-2013. SROs indicated serving in 132 of these settings for an overall SRO presence in 61 percent of Minnesota senior high schools. This estimate is more consistent with the national average.

Figure 14. Percent of Minnesota Public Schools with SROs, by School Type*			
School Type	MDE School Count	SRO Count	Percent of schools with SROs ⁺
Elementary Schools	924 PK-6	189 PK-6	21%
Middle Schools	193 5-8	113 PK-8	59%
All Secondary Schools	761 7-12; K-12; ALCs	225 7-12; K-12; ALCs	30%
Total	1,878**	527	28%
Senior High Schools Only	218 9-12 only	132 9-12 only	61%
<small>*Schools classified by the highest grade served. ** Total public school count excludes 30 schools classified as state-approved Distance Learning Programs ⁺ Percentages should be interpreted with caution due to different definitions in classifying schools</small>			

The literature does not promote the presence of SROs in one type of school setting over another, but does suggest that the role of an SRO will likely be different in a high school or middle school than in an elementary school. SROs in primary school settings may be called to find a missing child; may serve as a mentor for children who are afraid of law enforcement; may teach youth about the basics of safety, or may be a physical deterrent to persons planning to abduct or harm children.⁵²

Average Hours per Week by School Type

While SROs have contact with many school settings, the amount of time they spend at each setting is inconsistent. For each school named, SROs were asked to indicate how many hours they spend at that school in a typical week.

- On average, SROs spent 4.3 hours per week at elementary schools. The most frequent response was one hour per week, as might occur in responding to calls for service or a weekly check-in.
- SROs spent more time at middle schools averaging 18.6 hours per week. The most frequent response was 10 hours.
- Minnesota SROs spent the most amount of time in secondary school settings. On average, SROs spend 24.4 hours per week in settings serving through grade 12. The most frequent response was 40 hours per week which suggests secondary learning settings are most likely to have a full-time SRO on campus.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, in the 2012-2013 school year there were 44,854 disciplinary actions resulting in a minimum of a one day out-of-school suspension.ⁱ Of those, 19,892 (44%) were students in grades 9-12; 16,363 (37%) were students in grades 6-8; and 8,599 (19%) were students in grades K-5.⁵³ As might be expected, the safety and security needs of a high school setting are potentially higher than those of a middle school; and those of a middle school are higher than an elementary school. The hours per week distribution of Minnesota SROs reflect this demand.

Data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics supports that a greater percentage of high schools report serious violent incidents^j than middle schools, and middle schools more so than elementary schools. In the 2009-10 school year, 13 percent of primary schools recorded at least one serious, violent incident followed by 19 percent of middle schools. Nationally, 28 percent of high schools recorded at least one serious, violent incident at school.⁵⁴

School size also has an effect on the presence of SROs. Nationally, schools with enrollment over 1,000 students are most likely to have an SRO (74%) compared to schools with student bodies of 500-999 (35%).⁵⁵ The Minnesota study did not include an analysis by size of the student body.

Year SRO Program was Established

For each individual school named, respondents were asked to indicate when the SRO position was established. A significant percentage of SROs were uncertain as to when the SRO position was created. Of the 451 schools named, 36 percent of officers indicated they did “not know” when the position was established, or they left the answer blank (Figure 15).

Of those who answered the question, 9 percent of SROs indicate the position was established prior to 1991. The largest four-year range for the establishment of SRO programs was between 1991 and 1995 (16%). An additional 25 percent of programs were established in the eight years between 1996 and 2004.

The years SRO positions were established in Minnesota schools overlap the years when the most state and federal funding was available to local law enforcement to hire additional police officers and support police in schools.^k

Year	Percent
2010-2013	7%
2005-2009	7%
2001-2004	13%
1996-2000	12%
1991-1995	16%
1980-1990	6%
Before 1980	3%
I Don't Know**	36%

*Only schools named singly could be included in the analysis. **Includes No Answer

ⁱ Disciplinary events include any suspension of one day or more as well as events resulting in expulsion and exclusion. MDE records 29 disciplinary incident types including: attendance, bullying, disruptive/disorderly conduct, fighting, alcohol, drugs and tobacco, theft, threats, verbal abuse, and vandalism.

^j Serious violent incidents include rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attack or fight with a weapon, threat of physical attack with a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.

^k See section *A History of SROs*.

Geography: Metro Area versus Greater Minnesota

Data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics for the 2009-10 school year suggest that violent victimization rates for students are higher in schools located in cities and towns, and are slightly lower in schools located in suburbs and rural areas.⁵⁶ National data on the location of SROs supports that schools in cities and towns are most likely to have an SRO at least once per week (33% and 35%, respectively). Thirty-one percent of schools in suburbs report having an SRO at least weekly compared to 27 percent of schools in rural areas.⁵⁷

Each school named in the Minnesota SRO survey was assigned a geographic location as a part of the seven-county twin cities metropolitan area (Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington Anoka, Carver, Scott and Dakota counties) or greater Minnesota. Of the 541 school settings, 48 percent are in the seven-county metro area, and 52 percent are located outstate.¹ In this manner, it appears that SROs are equally distributed between the twin cities metro area and greater Minnesota. The Minnesota study did not delineated whether a school was in a city, town, suburb or rural area.

Generally, SROs in greater Minnesota have a larger number of school settings for which they are responsible than do SROs in the seven-county metro area. In the seven-county metro area, each SRO served an average of 2.0 schools; in greater Minnesota, each SRO served an average of 3.0 schools.

Schools in the seven-county metro area, however, typically have larger student bodies. Of total enrolled students in 2012-2013 (845,177), 55 percent were enrolled in the seven-county metro area and 45 percent were enrolled outstate. On average, there are 1,781 students per SRO respondent in the seven-county metro area and 1,359 students per SRO respondent in greater Minnesota.⁵⁸

Minnesota SROs are comparably represented in the seven-county metro area (48%) and greater Minnesota (52%).

The Prevalence and Location of SROs in Minnesota Schools: Summary and Recommendations

- Survey data suggests that SROs in Minnesota have contact with approximately 28 percent of public schools which is fairly comparable to the national average of 31 percent.
- Generally, Minnesota SROs are most likely to be located in senior high school settings as well as middle schools. SROs are least likely to be in elementary schools and spend the least amount of hours per week in elementary school settings. SROs spend the most amount of time per week in secondary school settings which is consistent with where the greatest numbers of disciplinary incidents occur.

¹ Of the 32 law enforcement agencies that did not participate in the SRO survey, 10 are located in the seven-county metro and 22 are located in greater Minnesota communities.

- About half of Minnesota SROs are located in the seven county twin cities metropolitan area (48%) and about half are in greater Minnesota (52%). This corresponds closely to the distribution of Minnesota's student body (55% metro, 45% greater Minnesota). Outstate SROs are typically spread across a greater number of schools while metro SROs serve fewer schools with larger student bodies.
- The literature does not suggest that SRO programs should be implemented in one school type over another. **Any school with specific crime or safety problems to be addressed is a potential candidate for an SRO program.** The role of SROs in the schools will vary depending on the age of the students.

The SRO Selection Process

How Officers Are Assigned as SROs

According to the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office, “Officers in schools are highly visible and regularly interact with students, faculty and parents. They can serve as role models for students and can affect faculty and parental perceptions of police. Selecting officers who are likely to do well in the school environment and properly training those officers are two important components of SRO programs.”⁵⁹

The federal COPS Office examined 19 effective SRO programs in the country and found that, when it came to recruiting SROs, some specific methods were desirable. First and foremost, the report recommends that SROs not be assigned involuntarily. Instead, a department ought to solicit volunteers for the position. In this manner, those with both the desire and skill set to be effective in the schools are likely to apply—and they will have a higher level of commitment to the position. Recruitment of officers who are believed to be a good fit for the position and the use of personal invitation to the position are also promoted.⁶⁰

75% of current SROs requested, applied for, or created the SRO position.

Minnesota SRO survey respondents were asked if they requested the position of SRO, or if it had been assigned to them. While respondents offered many qualifiers such as “I applied and was selected” or “my supervisor recommended that I take the position,” it was determined that 71 percent of SROs requested the position in some way, and an additional 4 percent created the SRO position in their department. Conversely, 24 percent of respondents indicated that they had been assigned to the position (Figure 16).

Figure 16.
How Were You Designated as an SRO in Your Department? (%)
n=222

Method	Percent
Requested or Applied	71%
Assigned	24%
Created the Position	4%
Other/Missing	1%

- *“I think an SRO is a specialized position and cannot be forced on an officer just to fill the spot. Most of the great SROs love it above all other opportunities at the department.”*

Permanency of Position

According to the federal COPS Office, SRO programs should try to minimize turnover as “police turnover and reassignment” is an operational obstacle that can potentially threaten the success of SRO programs.⁶¹ Turnover of SROs can result in a program that is less effective for a period of months or even years while a new SRO is hired and learns how to do the job.⁶²

Some reasons SROs may leave the job relate to goodness of fit, conflict with school administration, isolation from the department or burnout. In addition, retirements and promotions within the

department can cause SROs to shift positions. Other times, departments or collective bargaining agreements require mandatory rotation of officers after a fixed period of years.⁶³

No specific best practice emerged in the literature related to rotating officers in the SRO position or the ideal length of time in service to schools. The federal COPS Office study found that some departments advocate for bringing new energy to the position every three to five years, while others felt SROs should remain indefinitely, provided they want the position and are performing well.⁶⁴

Minnesota SROs were asked whether their position was a permanent assignment or a rotating position. Approximately 47 percent of SRO respondents indicated the assignment is permanent unless they requested otherwise, whereas 52 percent indicated it is a time-limited or rotating position (Figure 17).

Of those who indicated their time as an SRO is a rotating position (n=114), the most common length of assignment is either three years (34%) or five years or more (33%). It is least common for the assignment to be just one or two years (Figure 18).

Survey participants were also asked if they could continue in the SRO position at the end of their time or rotation. Just under half (47%) state they could continue as an SRO if they chose to whereas one-quarter cannot (26%). Numerous respondents (27%) were unsure if they had the option to continue.

- *“I would do it for the rest of my career if my department would let me.”*
- *“I wish I would have considered it sooner in my career.”*
- *“...In a perfect world, all officers would serve as an SRO at some point in their careers. I would encourage any officer to take advantage of the opportunity to serve as an SRO if they have the chance.”*
- *“Best kept secret in the department!”*

Figure 17.
Which Best Describes Your Position as an SRO in Your Law Enforcement Agency? (%)
n=222

Position	Percent
Permanent	47%
Time-Limited or Rotating	52%
Missing/No Answer	1%

Figure 18.
Length of Temporary or Rotating SRO Position (%)
n=114

Assignment Length	Percent
1 or 2 Years	5%
3 Years	34%
4 Years	18%
5 or More Years	33%
Unsure	10%

Over half of Minnesota SRO positions are time-limited or rotating (52%).

Minimum SRO Qualifications

In addition to voluntary application for the SRO position, the federal COPS Office highlights eight essential criteria that should be applied to every candidate regardless of the school’s grade level, size, student body, culture or other considerations. The criteria are as follows (original emphasis):⁶⁵

- (1) **Likes kids**, cares about and wants to work with kids, and is able to work with kids
- (2) has the **right demeanor and "people skills,"** including good communication skills
- (3) **has experience** as a patrol officer or road deputy
- (4) is able to work **independently** with little supervision
- (5) is exceptionally **dependable**
- (6) is willing to **work very hard**
- (7) is—or can become—**an effective teacher**
- (8) has above average **integrity**

Additional resources emphasize that, when considering an SRO position, candidates should have specific skills and abilities including working well with the student age range and others including school administrators and parents. Resources advise that SROs possess knowledge of school-based legal issues as well as issues of child development and psychology. Ideally, SROs have public speaking and teaching skills; knowledge of school safety and implementation; and they have “the right training, personality and enough law enforcement experience to be effective.”^{66,67} The federal COPS Office recommends a thorough application, screening and interviewing process before assigning an SRO to schools.⁶⁸

As is listed in number three of the “essential criteria” of an SRO, prior experience as a patrol officer or road deputy is recommended. However, the literature does not expressly state how much prior experience is optimal. Several years as a law enforcement officer are helpful to an SRO knowing the inner workings of the department, how to interact with the public and how to write good reports.⁶⁹

As it relates to training, it is suggested that it is more important that an SRO have the interpersonal qualities and character to be an SRO, since skills can generally be taught. That said, it is very important for SROs to receive the training they will need to work with youth, school administrators and staff in a timely manner.⁷⁰ This will be explored further in the section on *Training*.

Minnesota SROs were asked whether there are minimum qualifications in their department to be eligible for the SRO position. Approximately one-third of respondents (34%) indicate there are no minimum department qualifications to be an SRO (Figure 19).

Figure 19.
Does Your Agency Have Minimum Training or Experience Requirements to be Eligible for the Position of SRO? (%)
n=222

Response	Percent
Yes	66%
No	34%

Figure 20.
Minimum Qualifications: Years of Law Enforcement Experience (%)
n=141

Years of Service	Percent
1 Year or Off Probation	14%
2 Years	27%
3 Years	38%
4 or 5 Years	6%
No Minimum Requirement	14%

The 66 percent of officers who stated there are minimum qualifications to be an SRO (n=147) were asked to share the details; 141 officers provided explanation. The majority (92%) indicated that there is a minimum law enforcement experience requirement which ranged from 1-year as a licensed officer or being off probation (14%) to as high as five years of experience (6%). Two and three years of law enforcement experience are most common (65%) (Figure 20).

In addition, some officers expressed minimum training, performance or education requirements in advance of consideration for the SRO position including:

- National Association of School Resource Officers training (11%)
- Officer in good standing (5%)
- Drug Abuse Awareness Education (4%)
- Supervisor’s recommendation required (2%)
- Four-year college degree (1%)

Minimum law enforcement experience and training requirements to be an SRO vary widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in Minnesota; this is also true nationally.

Adequacy of Preparation

Survey participants were asked whether they felt adequately prepared for their position as SRO. Just over seven-in-10 SROs (71%) agree that they were adequately trained or prepared for the position (Figure 21).

Conversely, 14 percent of SROs neither agree nor disagree with feeling adequately prepared. An additional 15 percent of SROs disagree or strongly disagree that they were prepared for their position as an SRO.

Figure 21. Were You Adequately Prepared/ Trained to be an SRO? (%) n=211	
Adequate Preparation	Percent
Strongly Agree or Agree	71%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	15%

- *“I think training for new SROs is crucial. I taught elementary D.A.R.E for nine years prior to being in the SRO position so I had previous experience in the school environment. There are a lot of special circumstances in the school that you don’t learn about on the street.”*

Benefits of the SRO Position

When enticing officers to apply for the SRO position, the COPS Office recommends enhancing the incentives. Some factors to promote about the SRO position included day shifts with weekends and holidays off; working with kids; working independently; and making a difference in the lives of youth. In addition the SRO position can be a promotion in itself or a track to other promotion in the department. Departments can also consider allowing SROs to take home patrol vehicles or provide premium pay as an incentive to apply for the position.⁷¹

Figure 22.
Factors Affecting Decision to be an SRO (%)
n=170

Benefits	Percent
Enjoy working with youth	89%
Enjoy the opportunity to teach others	73%
Like the shift/schedule SROs work	73%
Like the school environment	61%
Earn a premium wage for being an SRO	21%
Other Reasons	10%

The Minnesota SROs who indicated they had applied for, created or volunteered to fill an SRO position (n=170) were asked to select from a list of factors that influenced their decision to become an SRO.

The most common response selected by 89 percent of SROs was that they “enjoy working with youth.” Over seven-in-10 officers also expressed that they enjoy the opportunity to teach others or they like the shift or schedule that SROs work. Two-in-10 officers expressed earning a premium wage for the position (Figure 22).

Among the “other” reasons provided for wanting to be an SRO include: wanting to have a positive effect on kids; to promote school security; to have a change from patrol work; a desire to expand their knowledge or pursue education; and the personal connection of being an alumnus of the school.

- *“It is a job like no other. I work 8 hours and get weekends off. I find that the actual law enforcement in schools is only approximately 20 percent of the job. It’s building relationships, trust and understanding with the students and staff.”*
- *“Been a great assignment. The only reason I applied for the position many years ago was because I wanted the hours for family reasons. I had no interest in working with kids. Once I got in the unit, I found out how much fun the teachers and administrators were and even started to enjoy working with the kids.”*
- *“I was born and raised in the community and attended some of the same schools.”*



- *“I am an alumnus of the school and live in the same neighborhood.”*
- *“I needed to feel like I am making a difference, something I wasn’t feeling on the street.”*

The SRO Selection Process: Summary and Recommendations

- While most SROs have elected to be an SRO (75%), one quarter were assigned to the position. **Recommended practices do not support assigning SROs to the position who are not interested in school-based law enforcement.**
- **Recommended practices discourage frequent transitions in SROs.** Over half of Minnesota SROs (52%) indicate that their position is time-limited or rotating.
- **Recommended practices support that SROs have experience as a law enforcement officer prior to being selected as an SRO.** While two-thirds of officers indicate their department has minimum experience or training qualifications to be an SRO, one-third do not.
- Seven-in-10 officers (71%) indicate they felt adequately prepared to be an SRO.
- Nearly nine-in-10 officers (89%) state they “enjoy working with youth” as a contributing factor affecting their decision to become an SRO. “Likes kids” is the number one criteria SROs should have according to the federal COPS Office.

The School-Law Enforcement Partnership

Including Schools in SRO Selection

Generally, recommended practices support the involvement of school administrators in the SRO selection process. It has been suggested that a committee consisting of both law enforcement department personnel and school administrators be created to evaluate the candidate's law enforcement ability and to give administrators the option to voice opposition on the candidate's ability to operate in the school environment.⁷² The federal COPS office recommends convening an oral interview board or a panel which includes school administrators. Involving school officials help to match SROs appropriately with schools and increase acceptance of the SRO program among school personnel.⁷³

Participants in the Minnesota SRO survey were asked if a school administrator (superintendent, principal or dean, etc.) was involved in their hiring or appointment. Over half of respondents (55%) indicated that a school administrator was involved in the hiring process; forty percent said there was no school administrator involved. An additional 5 percent were unsure.

- *“SROs should want to be there—they should not be assigned. They should interview with the school administration [in the school] they apply to work in.”*

Memorandum of Understanding

According to the federal COPS Office, it is critical to establish written operating protocols in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the school and the law enforcement agency. An MOU is “essential to state clearly what the roles of the various agencies are” and will help to establish clear expectations for all parties.⁷⁴ The National Association of School Resource Officers also calls interagency agreements essential to specifying the role of the SRO and asserts that every jurisdiction with a school-law enforcement partnership should have such an agreement.⁷⁵ These agreements are important to further the goals of a school safety team; to prevent role conflict between parties; and to address legal issues that can emerge during interagency collaboration.

Minnesota SROs participating in the survey were asked whether there is a written contract or memorandum of understanding between the law enforcement agency and the school. In total, 141 officers indicate there is an MOU or written contract (64%). Twenty officers (9%) indicated there is no MOU. An additional 27 percent of officers were unsure (Figure 23).

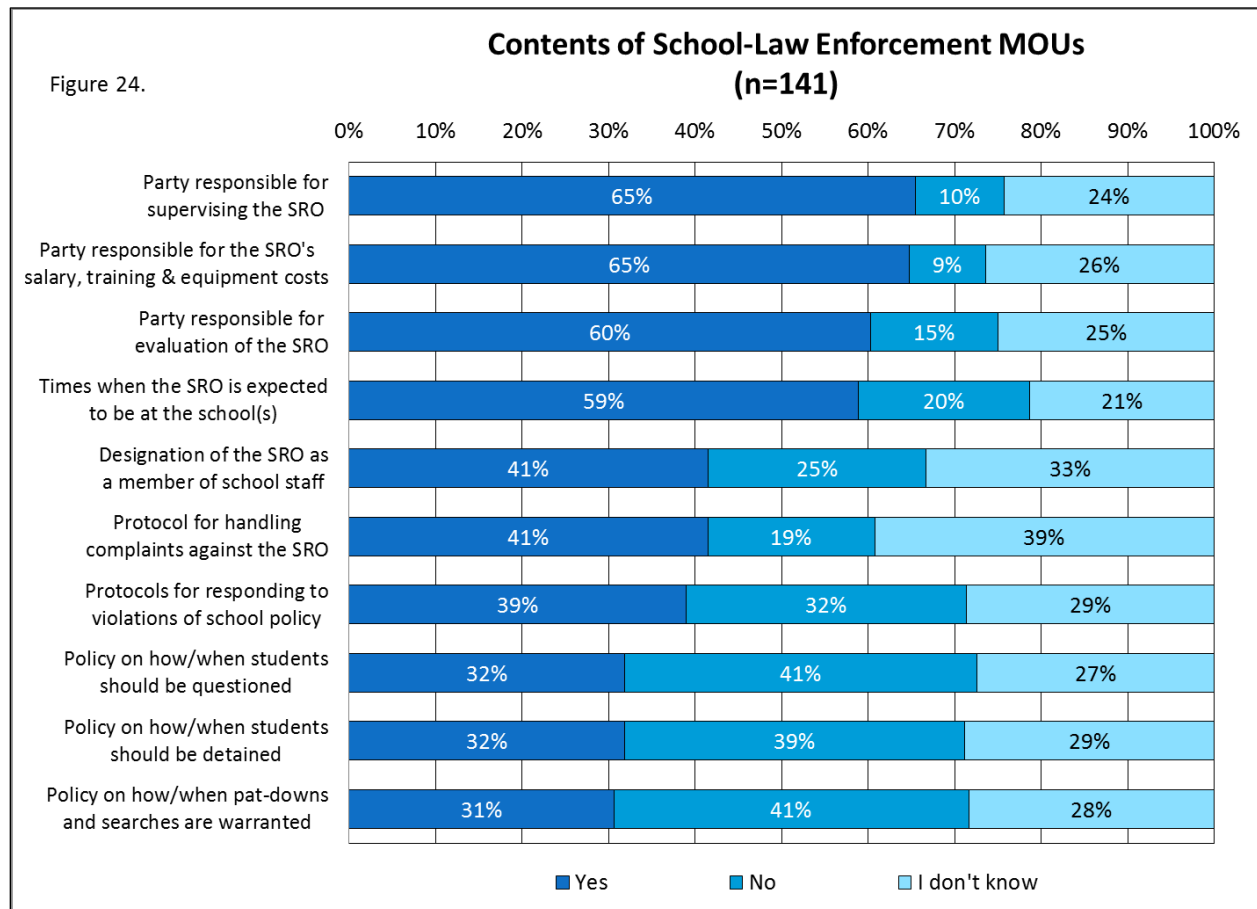
Figure 23.
Is There a Memorandum of Understanding or Other Written Contract Regarding Your Position as an SRO Between Your Law Enforcement Agency and the School(s) You Serve? (%)
n=221

Response	Percent
Yes	64%
No	9%
I Don't Know	27%

MOU Contents

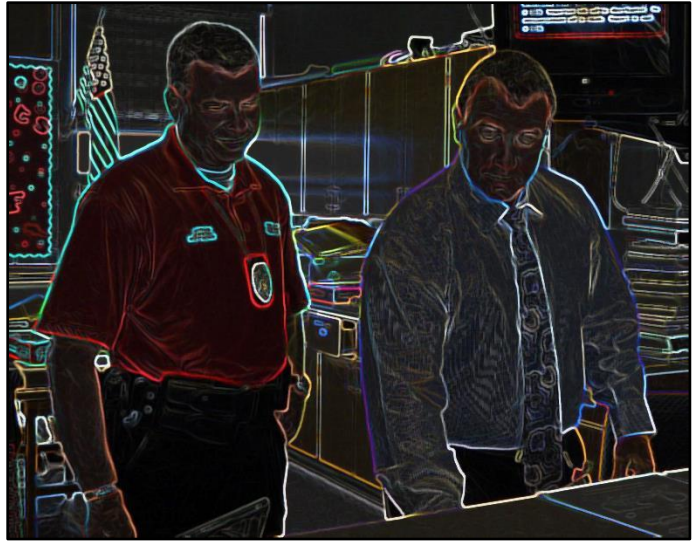
The working partnership between a school and a law enforcement agency should be clearly defined in an MOU and many resources provide guidance about the contents of these agreements. The federal COPS Office recommends addressing the time and resource commitments expected from each agency; specific objectives of the partnerships with clearly defined targets; guidelines for information and data exchange; child protection policies; a management and accountability framework; and strategies for working with outside agencies that provide services to youth.⁷⁶

An additional COPS Office publication lists two pages of factors to address in an MOU, including an officer's discretion to arrest; under what circumstances officers may pat-down, search or interrogate students; parental notification; transporting students; access to educational records; enforcing student discipline; attending meetings and events; teaching and counseling roles, and attire.⁷⁷



The American Civil Liberties Union has also stressed the importance of a governance document for SROs that distinguishes between discipline to be handled by school officials and criminal conduct to be handled by law enforcement; protecting the civil rights of youth in school; transparency and accountability; defining the role of the SRO within the context of the educational mission of the school; minimum training requirements; and promotion of non-punitive approaches to student behavior.⁷⁸

Minnesota SROs who indicated their department had an MOU with the school (n=141) were asked to indicate whether their agreement contained certain items provided on a preset checklist (Figure 24). It was most common for an MOU to include clarification about the party responsible for supervising the SRO; managing costs related to SRO salary; equipment and training; and the party responsible for evaluating the SRO (60% to 65%). Written contracts also included the times that SROs were expected to be present at schools (59%).



SROs were least likely to report that their MOUs specifically included policies on how and when youth should be questioned, detained, or have pat-downs and searches (31% to 32%). It was also relatively common for SROs to not be entirely familiar with the contents of their MOU. For all questions about the MOU, between 20 percent and 30 percent of officers selected “I don’t know.”

Several officers indicated that the contract between their departments merely delineated how payment would be made:

- *“Our contract is just a monetary agreement with the school district—all above issues dealt with when needed.”*

Program Funding

At one time, law enforcement agencies provided all or most of the funding for SRO positions through federal grants from the Department of Justice. However, as these grant funds have diminished, programs have increasingly been forced to find alternative funding strategies to maintain their programs. It is recommended that schools and law enforcement agencies split costs so that neither partner feels put upon, both are invested in the program, and the cost is reduced for each party.⁷⁹ Cost sharing can also reduce the likelihood that officers are pulled away from schools to other law enforcement duties.⁸⁰ The federal COPS Office also recommends that others be educated about the program and encouraged to financially support the effort including city officials and county boards.⁸¹

In the Minnesota SRO survey, it was most common for SROs to indicate that the funding for their position was provided by a combination of school district and law enforcement agency funding (60%). Numerous financial splits were mentioned between law enforcement and schools including 80/20, 60/40 and 50/50. Just 5 percent of SRO positions were funded by their law enforcement agency alone; and 31 percent by a school district alone. Three percent of SROs did not know how their position was funded.

Fourteen SROs (6%) indicated their positions are funded by state or federal grant funds in addition to school district and law enforcement agency funding.

- *“There needs to be more funding for these positions. The position is very valuable to students, schools and the community but many SROs are pulled in too many different directions.”*
- *“After 10 years they are thinking of cutting my position this year.”*

The School-Law Enforcement Partnership: Summary and Recommendations

- **Memoranda of understanding or other contracts between schools and law enforcement agencies are strongly recommended.** While 64 percent of SROs indicate there is an MOU, 9 percent said there is none and 27 percent were unsure. **Officers must be knowledgeable about the existence and contents of an MOU to preserve relationships and limit liability for schools, SROs and law enforcement agencies.**
- Contents of MOUs in Minnesota most often included agreement on the party responsible for supervising and evaluating SROs, as well as the party responsible for SRO training, salary and equipment. It was less common for MOUs to contain clarification on SROs’ role in school discipline and when SROs can search, detain and question students. It is recommended that these issues are clearly addressed in MOUs. **Minnesota schools and police would benefit from a model MOU template that addresses all these critical issues.**
- Funding for SRO programs is predominantly accomplished through a mixture of school and law enforcement agency funding. Only 6 percent of programs are funded with additional federal or state grant resources.

SRO Training

The federal COPS Office reports that the most effective SRO programs are those that provide pre-service training for SROs. While much is learned while on the job, SROs should have basic skills before they are placed in a school to “sink or swim.” SROs interviewed for the COPS report stated that they would do things poorly or avoid certain tasks altogether until they are adequately trained. In addition, SROs can make serious mistakes that can compromise relationships or even jeopardize the existence of the entire program.⁸²

The COPS Office recommends training in the following areas before SROs begin their assignment:

- 1) **Teaching:** Unless they have previously taught in a school setting or been an instructor in the police academy, SROs cannot walk into a classroom and be effective. SROs need training in how to develop lesson plans and manage a classroom.
- 2) **Mentoring and Counseling:** Many SROs are not prepared for the role as a counselor or mentor, or the onslaught of youth who come to SROs with problems or wanting help. Basic training is needed to be able to meet the needs of these youth.
- 3) **Working Collaboratively with School Administrators:** SROs are in a unique position in that they have two bosses—one at the police department and one at the school. They need to be able to balance the different objectives and styles of these two entities and work with school personnel as a team.
- 4) **Managing Time:** SROs routinely will face the demands of school staff, students, parents, police supervisors and even patrol officers who want to transfer their juvenile cases to the SRO. SROs need to be trained to multitask, establish priorities and even ignore some demands.
- 5) **Applying Juvenile Laws and Case Law:** There are complicated issues related to law enforcement presence in schools including search and seizure; interrogating minors; confidentiality; and privacy issues related to records. SROs must also be familiar with juvenile delinquency statutes. They must be knowledgeable because schools will go to SROs as the authorities on legal issues.

Beyond these key skills-and-knowledge areas, the COPS Office supports that SROs attend pre-service trainings related to child development and psychology; working with kids in schools (as opposed to adults in the community); handling especially difficult students; learning school policies and procedures; and preparing safe-school plans.⁸³ The National Association of School Resource Officers also promotes training that focuses on the special nature of the school campus, student needs and characteristics, and the educational and custodial interests of school personnel.⁸⁴



Literature about SROs supports training in many areas including community policing in schools; legal issues; cultural fluency; problem solving; safe school preparation; child development; mental health; and teaching and classroom management techniques.⁸⁵ Officers may go into schools without realizing that policing in schools is vastly different than policing in communities and that it can be difficult to satisfy the law while trying to adhere to administrative rules and school policies.”⁸⁶

The perceived inadequacy of law enforcement training to meeting the complex needs of youth in schools is a recurring critique of SRO programs by opponents. Not only are there no national standards for SRO training,⁸⁷ many states have no state-level standards, and there is no consistency in regard to training topics even where training is required.

When officers do receive training, it tends to be related to technical issues like juvenile law or school safety-and-security. Training often does not include topics such as mediation, de-escalation, or recognizing behaviors related to trauma or abuse.⁸⁸ In addition, SROs rarely possess knowledge of youth developmental psychology, how to secure the cooperation and respect of youth, or the legal protections that need to be taken when working with youth with individualized education plans (IEPs).⁸⁹

According to the ACLU, “Just as we require other professionals entrusted to work in our school—teachers, counselors, administrators—to satisfy rigorous training and certification requirements, we propose that SROs likewise obtain the tools necessary to work with student populations.” The ACLU promotes 40 pre-service hours and 10 hours of annual in-service trainings on: child and adolescent development and psychology; positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS); conflict resolution; peer mediation and restorative justice; children with disabilities or other special needs; and cultural competency.⁹⁰

In Minnesota, all licensed peace officers must complete 48 hours of continuing education every three year licensing period.⁹¹ Participants in the Minnesota SRO survey were asked whether they have received any training or POST Board continuing education credits specifically related to their position as an SRO. In total, 87 percent of SROs state they have received SRO specific training whereas 13 percent have not (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Have You Received Any Specific Training or POST Credits Related to Your Role as an SRO? (%) n=225	
Response	Percent
Yes	87%
No	13%

Training Topics

Of the 193 SROs who received SROs specific training, over 90 percent report that they have received training in school related law and an active shooter. Over seven-in-10 SROs also had training in school-based threat assessments and school-based emergency planning. These are formal tools and methods used to plan for and respond to safety and security emergencies on campus. Approximately half of SROs who had received training learned about working with school administrations; student data/records privacy; special education students and community policing (Figure 26).

Less than half of the SROs surveyed reported they had received training on child development or youth brain development, or the effects of trauma on youth. Teaching and course planning methods as well as counseling and mentoring training had also been received by fewer than half of SROs.

**Figure 26.
Specific SRO Training Received (%)
n=193**

Topic	Percent
School-Related Law	92%
Active Shooter	90%
School-Based Threat Assessment	75%
School-Based Emergency Planning	72%
Working with School Administration(s)	56%
Student Data/Record Privacy	53%
Special Education Students	52%
Community Policing	50%
Child/Brain Development	47%
Teaching/Course Planning	42%
Effects of Trauma on Youth	39%
Mentoring/Counseling	37%
Restorative Justice	36%
Specific Curricula (ie. D.A.R.E.)	34%
Positive School Climate	31%

It was least common for SROs to report having received training in restorative justice (36%), specific curricula such as DARE (34%) or positive school climate (31%). SROs were given the opportunity to submit other training they have received. Topics included juvenile gangs, suicide postvention, adolescent mental health and forensic interviewing.

Total Training Hours

The number of school-related training hours SROs have received varies considerably, as one would expect, depending on the length of time in the SRO position. Just over half of SROs who have received training possess 80 hours or more (51%), followed by 28 percent who possess between 40 and 80 hours of training. Twenty-one percent of SROs report less than 40 hours of SRO related training.

Most of the literature focuses on the timing and content, rather than a recommended number of SRO training hours. Many methods are deemed acceptable for SRO training including classroom instruction, SRO job shadowing, formal field training and reviewing written materials. A review of successful SRO programs had training requirements ranging from 40 hours of pre-service training to as high as 120 hours of in-service training over the summer when school is out of session.⁹² The ACLU recommends at least 40 hours of pre-service and 10 hours of in-service training annually on the topics of child and adolescent development and psychology, children with disabilities and special needs, cultural

competency; and positive behavioral interventions and supports, conflict resolution and restorative justice techniques.⁹³

Training Providers

The greatest numbers of Minnesota SROs indicate they have received training on school, youth and SROs either from within their own agency (62%) or from Minnesota’s Juvenile Officer’s Association (MNJOA) (62%). The MNJOA was founded in 1955 and is a professional association of law enforcement officers who work with or have interest in juveniles in the field of law enforcement.⁹⁴ In 2011, MNJOA received a grant to offer a series of SRO trainings around the state. Youth-related trainings also occur at MNJOA’s annual conferences.

Over half of Minnesota SROs (53%) have also received training from the National Association for School Resource Officers. It was also common to receive training from another law enforcement agency (47%), the school or district (41%), or the Minnesota School Safety Center (31%).

In Minnesota, the School Safety Center (MnSSC) existed in statute from 2006 to 2010—funding was reestablished in 2013. Located in the Minnesota Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, the purpose of the MnSSC is to serve as a safety resource to schools, law enforcement, emergency responders and community partners by providing information, guidance, training and technical assistance for school safety planning. In 2014, the MnSCC resumed SRO training along with other school safety training topics.⁹⁵

Nearly two-in-10 SROs (18%) selected “other” as the training source. These responses included the Minnesota D.A.R.E. Officer’s Association; the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension; various county attorneys’ offices and self-education (Figure 27).

Figure 27.
Who Provided Training Related to Schools, Youth or SRO Skills/Knowledge? (%)
n=193

Provider	Percent
My Law Enforcement Agency	62%
Minnesota Juvenile Officer's Association (MNJOA)	62%
National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO)	53%
Another Law Enforcement Agency	47%
School or School District	41%
Minnesota School Safety Center (MSS)	31%
Other	18%

Training Needed

All SROs surveyed, including those who had indicated receiving no specific SRO training, were invited to share comments on what additional trainings would benefit them as an SRO. Of the 222 survey participants, 157 (69%) provided suggestions. Comments were coded for themes using qualitative content analysis. The most prominent training needs expressed are indicated in Figure 28.

Collectively, Minnesota SROs are most interested in remaining educated and apprised of changes to case law related to juveniles and schools (23%). Second is the desire to be adequately trained to respond to an active shooter in the school (20%) followed by training in external threats, emergency preparedness, lockdown procedures and other aspects of school safety and security (20%).

**Figure 28.
SRO Training Needed (%)
n=157**

Training Needed	Percent
Current Juvenile Case Law & School Law	23%
Active Shooter	20%
External Threat/ Lock Down/Emergency Preparedness/ School Safety and Security	20%
Working With and Understanding Special Education Students/ EBD	12%
Drug and Gang Training	12%
Juvenile Interviewing, Interrogation and Miranda	11%
Current Information/Education on Social Media	9%
Juvenile and School Search and Seizure	8%
Youth Mental Health/ Understanding Behavior	8%

Minnesota SROs also express interest in learning more about special education services, IEPs, and youth receiving special education for emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) (12%). An additional 8 percent of SROs desire training on youth mental health and better understanding youth behavior. Agreements could be established between schools and law enforcement agencies such that when school staff receives specialized training related to students, that SROs are invited to attend. In this manner, school staff and SROs will have the same information and agreed-upon strategies. Conversely, when SROs are trained in school-related law, searches, interviews and arrests, school administrators could be present to gain information about the legal scope of law enforcement in schools.

A lesser number of Minnesota SROs are interested in additional training related to interviewing and interrogating juveniles, and search and seizure laws related to juveniles and schools (11% and 8%, respectively). Collectively 9 percent of SROs want training about youth social-media sites and technology updates. Conflicts among students can begin or escalate on social media sites and carry over into the school setting. SROs express the need to remain current on these technologies so they can respond appropriately.

Those are the commonly requested topics. SROs also requested training related to child abuse and child protection; bullying and cyber bullying; youth data privacy; cross training with other emergency agencies; training to work effectively with school administrations; truancy prevention; suicide prevention and postvention; mentoring; creative program ideas and curricula; issues of poverty; restorative justice and mediation; and parent conflict resolution. SROs articulated the desire for basic training for both new SROs, and advanced topics for veteran SROs.

- *“Basic SRO training to start. I was told by the state that there is no funding for SRO training.”*
- *“Advanced SRO training.”*
- *“More internet-based training around Facebook, Twitter, and other way kids communicate today.”*
- *“More on Restorative Justice and mediation.”*
- *“A uniform statewide response to active shooters/outside threats.”*
- *“A wide variety of topics related to juvenile behavior, prevention methods, and mental health.”*

SRO Training: Summary and Recommendations

- **It is recommended that SROs receive specific training related to common school-based law enforcement issues either before they begin as an SRO or shortly thereafter. Included is training on counseling and mentoring; teaching methods; time management; juvenile case law; and how to work effectively with administrators.** In Minnesota, less than half of SROs report training in these areas. Minnesota SROs are far more likely to report having received training in active shooters, external threats, and conducting school safety assessments.
- The majority of Minnesota SROs (87%) report having received some specialized training related to the SRO position. Common training entities include the Minnesota Juvenile Officers’ Association, NASRO, and trainings provided by law enforcement agencies, including their own.
- **In Minnesota there is no standard length of SRO required to begin working in schools or to be certified as an SRO. This is in part because Minnesota has no agency or authority responsible for monitoring SROs. The state could benefit from developing a standard curriculum and number of training hours to improve the consistency of SRO knowledge and skills in the state.**
- The largest percentage of SROs expressed interest in additional training on school related law and case law (23%). One-in-five officers desire more training on active shooters and external threats to the school (20%, respectively). Officer comments indicate a need for both basic and advanced SRO training topics.
- **It is recommended that cross-training occur for SROs and school staff.** SROs should have the opportunity to attend school-staff trainings related to students and safety, and school administrators would benefit from attending a law enforcement training related to school-based law including searches, interviews and arrests.

Appearance and Equipment

The literature does not take a strong position on the attire worn by SROs, but rather reiterates that this should be included in the interagency MOU. The federal COPS Office advises that officers remain in full uniform “...as an important element to providing a visible deterrence to crime.”⁹⁶ This can depend upon special duties during the day or involvement in after-school activities. Conversely, it has been suggested that a full uniform may intimidate students whereas a “soft uniform,” such as a department logo shirt, makes officers more approachable.⁹⁷

Minnesota SROs were asked to indicate their typical school day attire (Figure 29). Over half of all SROs (55%) indicate they wear a full law enforcement uniform while in schools—that’s 10 percent above the national average. An additional 20 percent of Minnesota SROs wear a partial or soft uniform. One-quarter (25%) indicate they typically wear “plain clothes.”

Figure 29.
Typical School-Day Attire (%)
n=221*

Attire	Percent
Full Uniform	55%
Partial/Soft Uniform	20%
Plain Clothes	25%
* One refusal	

- *“All the kids in town know me and it would be nice to wear a 'soft' uniform while working the school on days. Wouldn't have to be everyday but wouldn't hurt every once in a while.”*

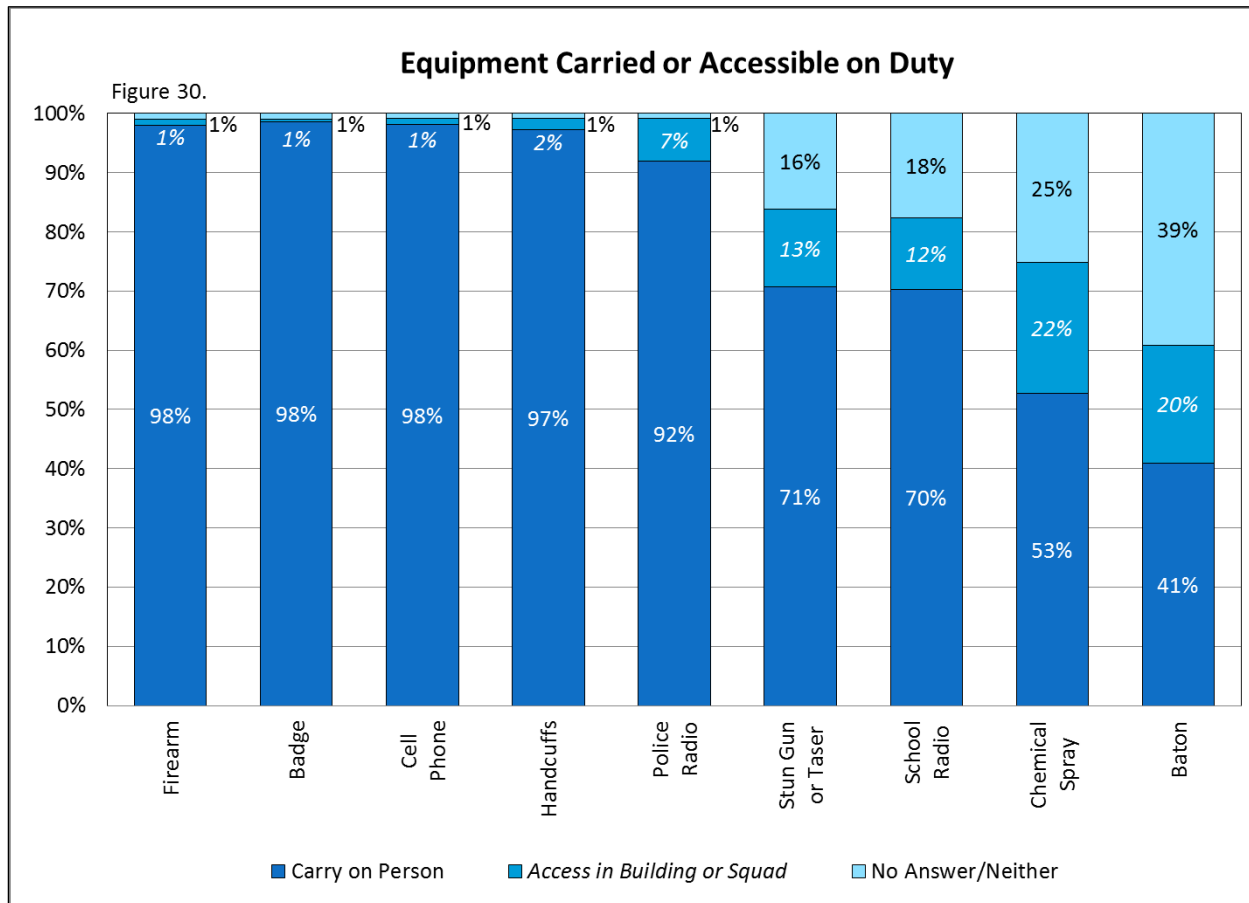
Equipment Carried

SROs surveyed were asked what equipment they typically carry on their person while in schools, as well as the equipment they have access to in the school building or their squad car. The majority of Minnesota SROs, (97% or more) indicate they carry a badge, firearm, cell phone and handcuffs while at school; 92 percent carry a police radio (Figure 30).

A 2002 survey of SROs conducted by NASRO found that 95 percent of SROs carry a firearm in their capacity as an SRO, and 90 percent believe that an unarmed SRO puts students at greater risk of harm or injury.⁹⁸

Officers were less consistent regarding carrying or access to other equipment. Approximately seven-in-10 officers carried a stun gun or taser (71%) and a school radio (70%). Just over seven-in-10 officers (72%) indicated they had access to a long gun in the building or in their squad car, but just 34 percent have access to a gun locker. Half of Minnesota SROs carry a chemical irritant (53%).

In 2001, NASRO conducted a survey of nearly 700 SROs who attended their conferences nationally. In addition to their firearm, 98 percent of officers reported carrying handcuffs and 93 percent carried pepper spray or mace. The survey also found that 85 percent of SROs reported carrying a baton while just 7 percent carried a stun gun. This survey data, however, is now over 12 years old and tasers have become more reliable and ubiquitous in law enforcement practice. In 2001, 45 percent of SROs had access to a shot gun and 16 percent had access to a long rifle.⁹⁹



Equipment Needed

Minnesota SROs were invited to express what additional equipment they wish were provided for their work. In total, 113 officers provided comment.

Far and away the most desired equipment was a gun locker in the building to store a long gun, rifle or assault weapon (50%). An additional 26 percent of SROs expressed that they would like to have a long gun (implying they do not have access to one presently); or they want additional long guns for additional school settings where they serve.

- *“A gun locker and an additional shotgun and/or rifle to secure in the school during the school year since I would not be able to get to them in my vehicle during an emergency.”*
- *“I have one rifle in a gun locker in the high school. I wish I had a similar set-up at the middle school.”*

An additional 20 percent of SROs named additional tactical equipment they would like on hand including ballistic blankets, shields or tactical vests (9%) followed by tasers (4%). A list of other tactical equipment comprised the remaining 7 percent including extra ammunition, breaching equipment, riot gear, “battle bags” or “go bags” and gas masks.

SROs also requested non-tactical equipment primarily related to communications and technology. Six percent of SROs expressed the need for or upgrades to cell phones and school radios. In addition, 16 percent of officers wished for access to or improved laptops, tablets or I-pads. They especially desired software that could link to their law enforcement databases.



- *“Better school radios. I have 3 programs within my school and each one has their own radio and frequency.”*
- *“A radio and phone that actually work in the all brick and steel school building.”*
- *“Laptop that can connect to in squad systems and city intranet.”*
- *“A way to check where the students should be in the building, see if they are suspended, see who checked in to the building...”*
- *“A portable electronic device to allow access to the schools video camera system as the SRO moves throughout the building.”*

Other requests of SROs were better quality school surveillance equipment (5%); access to department vehicles or marked squads (3%); soft uniforms (3%); or specific needs such as drug testing kits/PBTs, trauma kits, an AED, hand-held metal detectors, video camera for interviews and student ID card readers (6%).

Appearance and Equipment: Summary and Recommendations

- Over half of Minnesota SROs surveyed (55%) report wearing a full law enforcement uniform while working as an SRO. Generally the presence of a uniformed officer is promoted as a visible deterrent to crime.
- The vast majority of Minnesota SROs carry a firearm in schools (98%).
- Minnesota SROs are most likely to request gun lockers in the school for their long guns, as well as access to additional long guns. SROs also requested better tactical equipment in the event of active shooters and external threats.
- **Technology upgrades are also high on the priority list for Minnesota SROs. Better radios, cell phones, laptops, and school surveillance equipment were commonly cited as equipment needs. Schools and law enforcement agencies should delineate in the MOU whose responsibility it is to maintain which technology and equipment needs.**

School Duties

According to the federal COPS Office, lack of data makes it challenging to say with certainty which SRO activities are most effective. However, it is important for SROs to choose activities that directly relate to specific school-safety goals.¹⁰⁰ The report goes on to indicate that problem solving skills are essential to SRO program success. Problem solving includes changing the conditions that give rise to crime problems rather than just responding to incidents as they occur. Activities include scanning data for recurring trends; analyzing causes of the patterns; developing and implementing responses; and assessing the impact of the response.¹⁰¹

According to National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), “Officers’ law-enforcement knowledge and skill combine with specialized SRO training for their duties in the educational setting...” As a result, the skill set is unique among law enforcement and education personnel; it enables SROs to protect the community and the campus while supporting the educational mission.”¹⁰² In addition to traditional law enforcement tasks, SRO activities can include a supportive activities and programs, depending on the type of school to which an SRO is assigned.

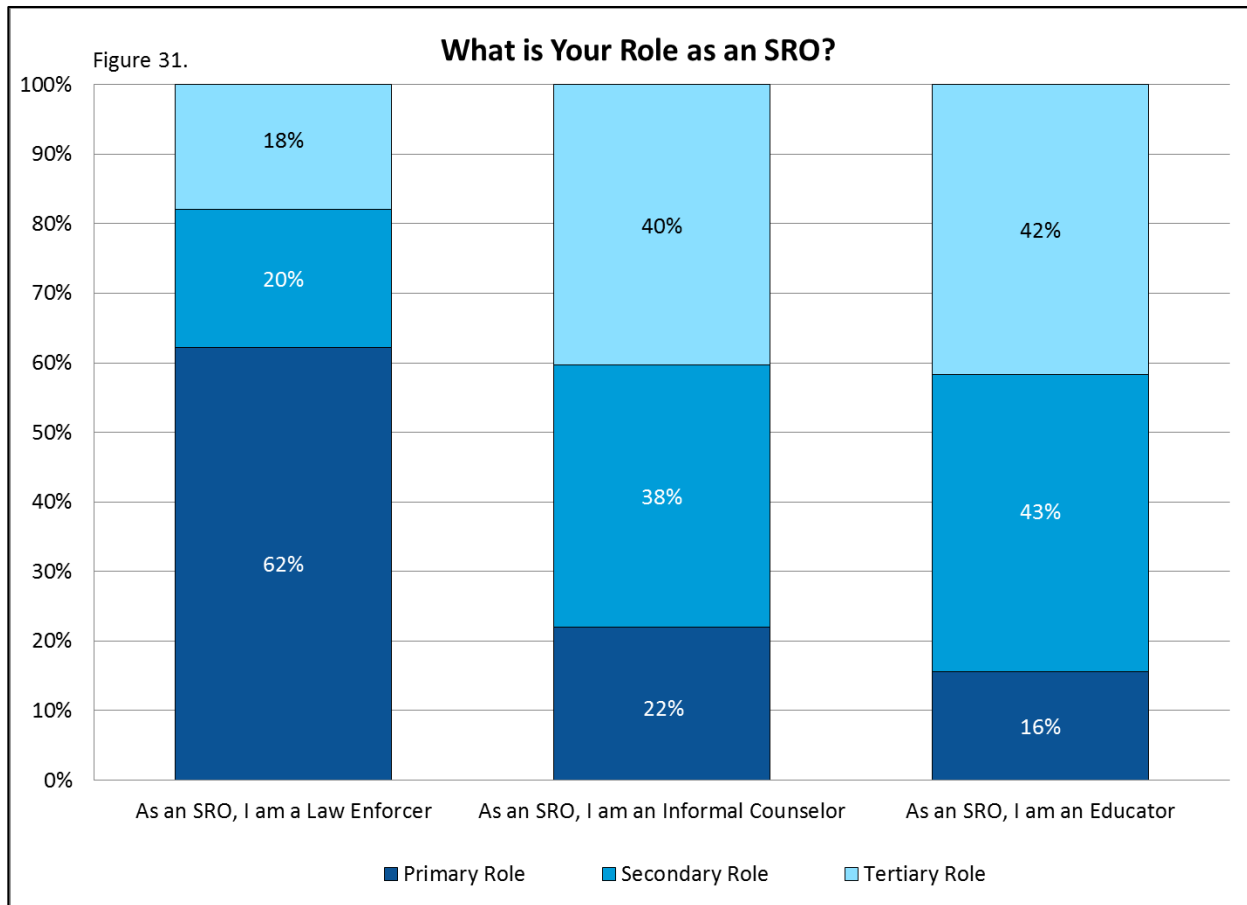
Both NASRO and the federal COPS Office promote a three-part model of school-based policing. NASRO’s “triad” divides an SRO’s responsibilities into three areas: teacher, counselor and law enforcement officer.¹⁰³ The federal COPS Office officially recognizes the three roles of SROs as: safety expert and law enforcer; problem solver and liaison to the community; and educator.¹⁰⁴ The extent to which an officer engages in these roles will depend on the level of crime and disorder in the school; the wishes and culture of the school administration; and the personality and skills of the SRO.¹⁰⁵ One of the most frequent and destructive mistakes SRO programs make is “to fail to define the SRO’s roles and responsibilities in detail before—or even after—the officers take up posts in the schools.”¹⁰⁶

According to a national survey of 322 law enforcement agencies conducted in 2000, SROs on average spent 50 percent of their time on law enforcement activities, 25 percent on counseling or mentoring; and 13 percent on teaching. The remaining 12 percent of their time was spent on other activities such as meetings.¹⁰⁷

Primary Role as an SRO

Based on the triad model, SROs surveyed for the Minnesota study were asked to rank how they view their primary, secondary and tertiary role. Figure 31 depicts the response distribution. Over six-in-10 Minnesota SROs identified *law enforcer* as their primary role (62%) while just over two-in-10 selected *informal counselor* (22%). The smallest percentage of officers selected *educator* as their primary role (16%).

Over six-in-10 SROs view their primary role in schools as a law enforcement officer (62%).



Studies suggest that how SROs view their primary role in schools can affect which activities they engage in most, as well as their attitudes and beliefs about school issues. For example, one study found that SROs who identify primarily as law enforcement had a more negative view of special education students (which includes youth with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders) compared to SROs who viewed their role as educator.¹⁰⁸

The Minnesota survey of SROs supports that an officer’s self-concept can influence the activities they engage in most and their opinions about students and school policies. In Minnesota, statistical analysis of survey responses revealed that:

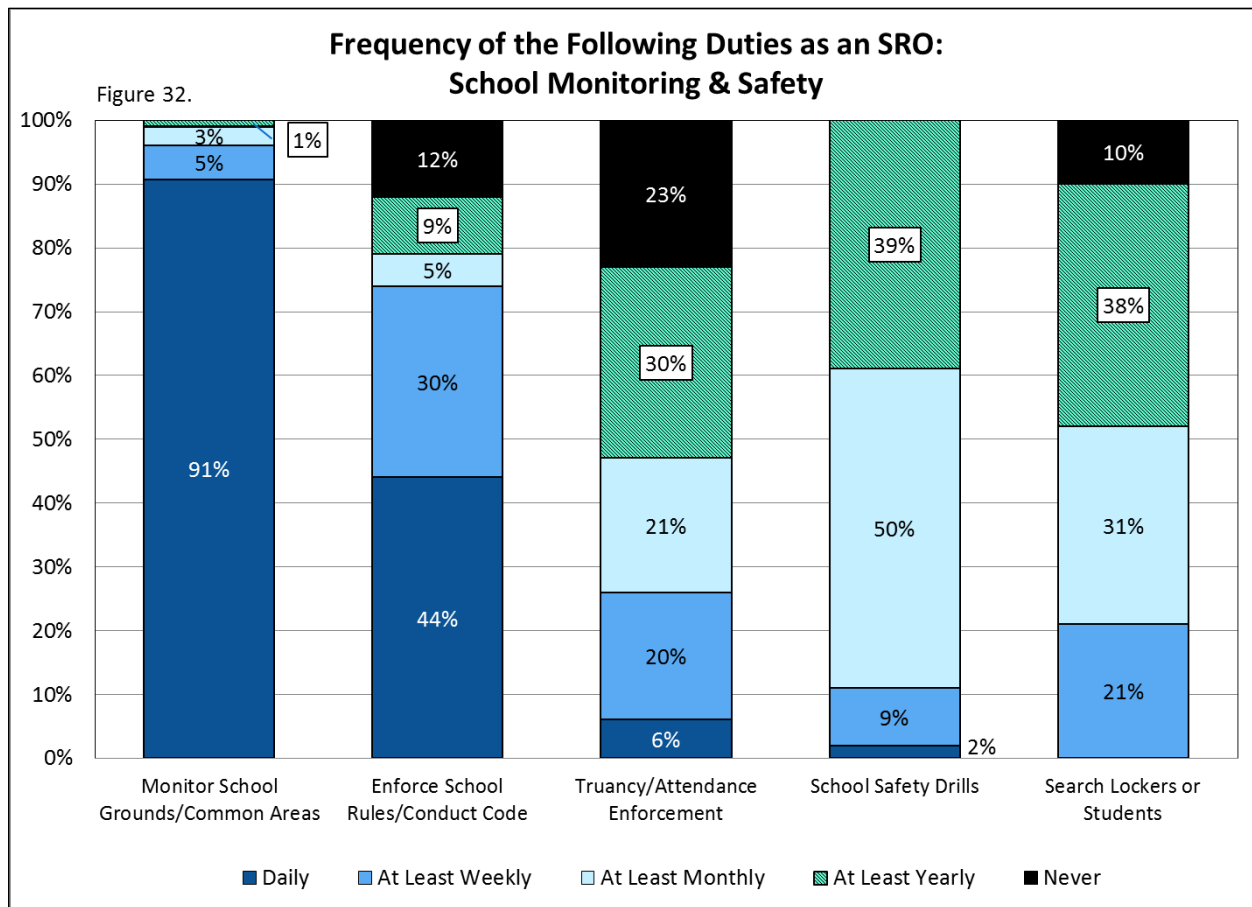
- SROs who primarily identify as law enforcement officers are statistically more likely to support zero tolerance policies than those who identify primarily as educators or counselors.
- Those who primarily identified as counselors and educators are statistically more likely to have training on school climate, counseling, and special education students than those who primarily identify as law enforcement officers.
- SROs who identify as counselors and educators are statistically more likely to report engaging in counseling and mentoring activities daily than those who identify as law enforcers.

- Finally, SROs who identify primarily as educators are statistically least likely to report enforcement of student code of conduct.

SROs participating in the Minnesota survey were asked to indicate how frequently they are involved in various roles within the school, ranging from daily to yearly. As a follow up question, they were asked whether they feel they are placed in each role *too much*, *an appropriate amount*, or *not enough*. The duties have been divided into three categories to represent the NASRO triad model: monitoring and safety; student accountability and support; and student teaching/staff training.

Monitoring and Safety Duties

Minnesota SRO survey participants overwhelmingly report that they are involved in monitoring school grounds and common areas *daily* (91%). Minnesota SROs also appear to be actively involved in enforcing school rules and code of conduct. Over four-in-10 officers report *daily* enforcement of rules (44%) and an additional three-in-10 officers enforce school rules at least *weekly* (30%). A smaller proportion of SROs (12%) report they are *never* involved in enforcing school rules or code of conduct (Figure 32).



SROs are considerably less likely to report enforcement of truancy or attendance. Just over half of SROs enforce attendance on a *monthly* or *yearly* basis (51%) while an additional two-in-10 report they *never* enforce attendance or truancy (23%).

SROs were also asked to report how often they conduct school safety drills. Half of officers (50%) report conducting school safety drills at least *monthly* while an additional 39 percent conduct drills at least *yearly*.

Another potential activity of SROs involves searching students and student lockers for weapons or contraband such as illegal drugs. The ACLU cautions that searches and interrogations are an area where SROs can potentially violate the civil rights of students. The standard of suspicion required for schools to conduct searches (reasonable suspicion) is less than the standard required for law enforcement (probable cause). Schools and SROs must not conspire with one another to override the rights of students such as an SRO asking a school staff to do a search or vice versa.¹⁰⁹

In addition to searches of lockers, SROs may feel it necessary or be called upon to search students and their belongings, as well as students' vehicles. Furthermore, SROs may need to interview or interrogate students, or place youth under arrest—both of which have special concerns with students who are minors. In order to avoid the violation of student's civil liberties, SROs must be trained in federal and state case-law related to juveniles and students in the school setting specifically. Legal requirements may vary from state-to-state regarding the notification or presence of a guardian. Legalities also apply to confidentiality and the sharing of school and police records related to youth.^{110,111}

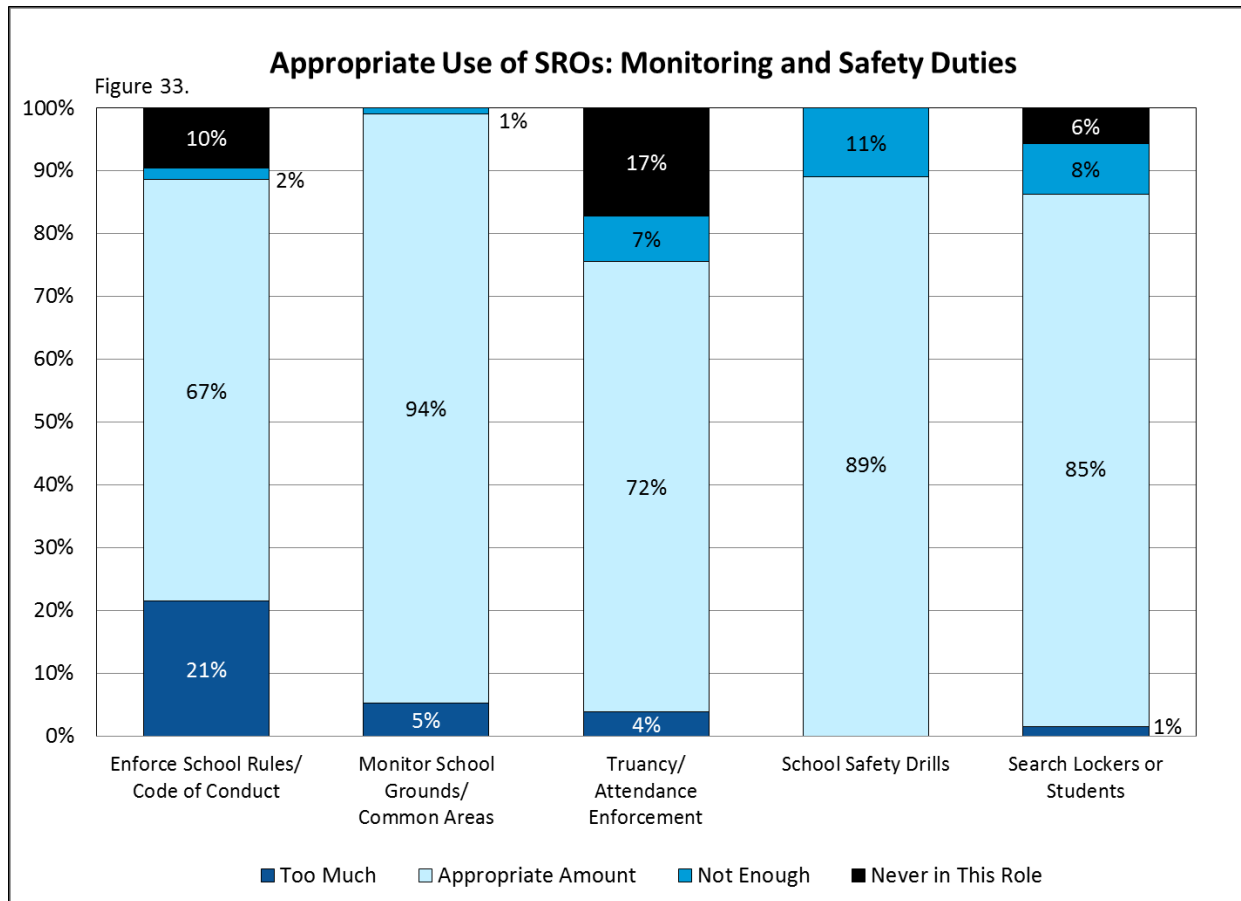
Minnesota SROs were asked the frequency with which they search students or student lockers. Searches were never reported as a *daily* practice but 21 percent of SROs report conducting searches at least *weekly*. Combined with an additional 31 percent of SROs who search student or lockers *monthly*, over half of SROs are involved in searching students or lockers at least *monthly* (52%). One-in-10 officers (10%) state they *never* search students or lockers.

Perceived Appropriateness of Monitoring and Safety Duties

SROs were asked to rank their perceived appropriateness of participation in school duties related to monitoring and safety. Generally, between 67 percent and 94 percent of SROs feel they are used in a monitoring or safety capacity *an appropriate amount* (Figure 33). Of all SROs, 21 percent feel they are involved in the enforcement of school rules and code of conduct *too much*. Five percent or less feel they are too often involved in monitoring school grounds.

- *"The teachers often attempt to use me as their classroom disciplinarian and I hate that...I also feel like the administration places me in a position where I am asked to enforce school rules too frequently. I don't believe that should be the role of an SRO."*

Two-in-10 SROs feel they are used "too much" to enforce school rules or student code of conduct (21%).



At the end of the survey, SROs were asked to report the most satisfying aspect of being an SRO. The protection of students and preservation of safety were common responses. Said one officer: *“I find knowing the kids are coming to a safe environment for most of the day satisfying. For some kids, school is the only place they get to eat good food, are safe from the dangers of home, and are in a positive environment.”* Another officer said the most satisfying aspect of the position is *“creating a safe learning environment, protecting children from terrorism and dangerous persons, keeping the school safe, and being able to make the kids feel safe at school.”*

Just over one-in-10 SROs (11%) feel they do not do safety drills enough and 8 percent feel they do not do enough searches of lockers or students.

- *“School staff doesn’t have the time to dedicate to things like school safety, nor do I believe they find it as important as I do. It would be very time consuming to do drills on all the different safety procedures that should be drilled. School safety is constantly changing and it’s hard to get schools to dedicate the time or money to it.”*

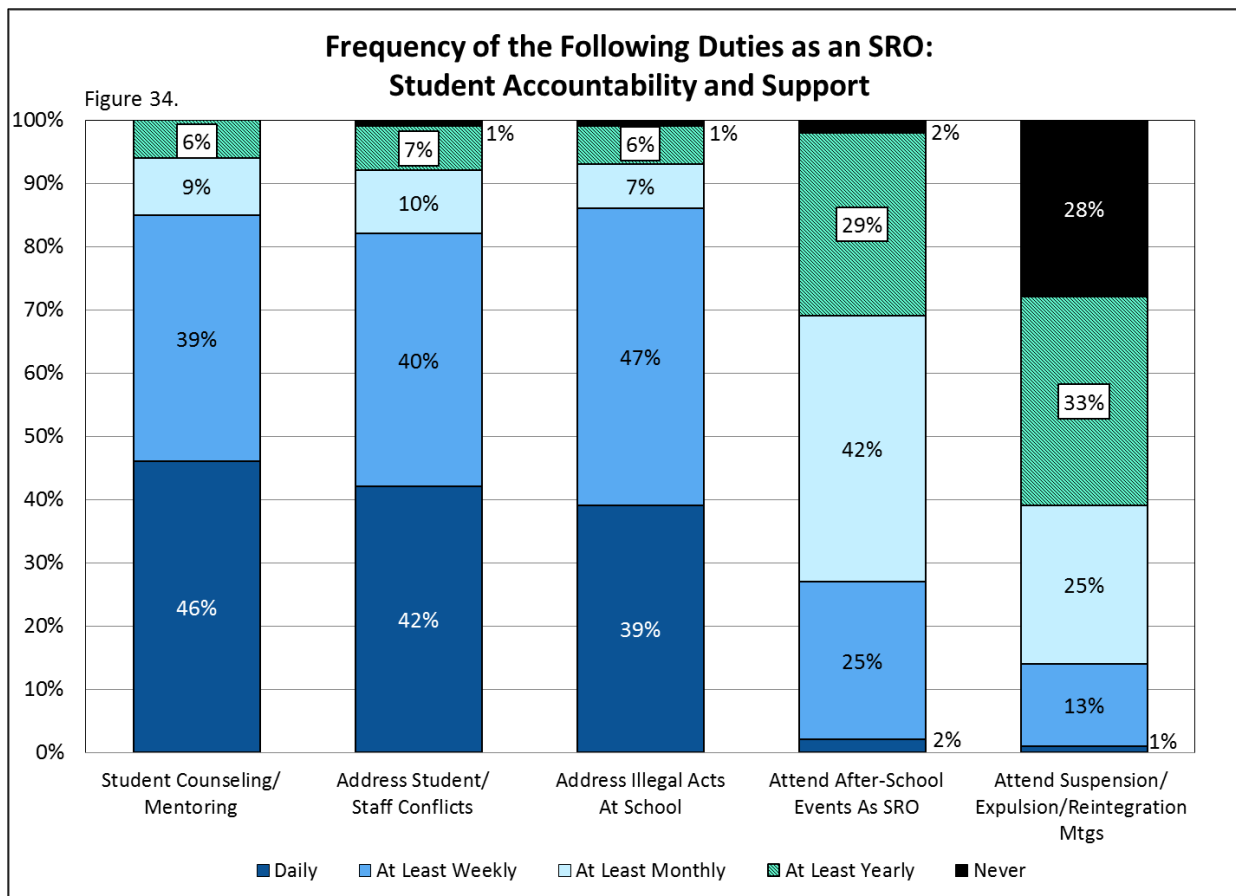
Student Accountability and Support Duties

As it relates to student accountability and support, the most frequent SRO duties involve daily counseling or mentoring of students (46%); addressing conflicts between students or between students and staff (42%); and addressing illegal acts at school (39%). Collectively, over 80 percent of SROs indicate that they take part in each of these three activities *at least weekly* (Figure 34).

Nearly half of SROs (46%) engage in student mentoring or counseling activities daily.

Somewhat less common is participation in after school events or activities in the role of an SRO. Twenty-seven percent of SROs express that they are involved in after-school events *weekly* or *daily*, but *monthly* was the most common response (42%).

Finally, SROs were least likely to report being involved in suspension or expulsion hearings, or meetings related to school reintegration following a period of suspension. This is likely due, in part, to an infrequency of these activities in some schools. Nevertheless, 38 percent stated they are involved in these disciplinary due process activities *monthly* or *yearly*, while nearly three-in-10 SROs (28%) reported that they are *never* involved in these proceedings.

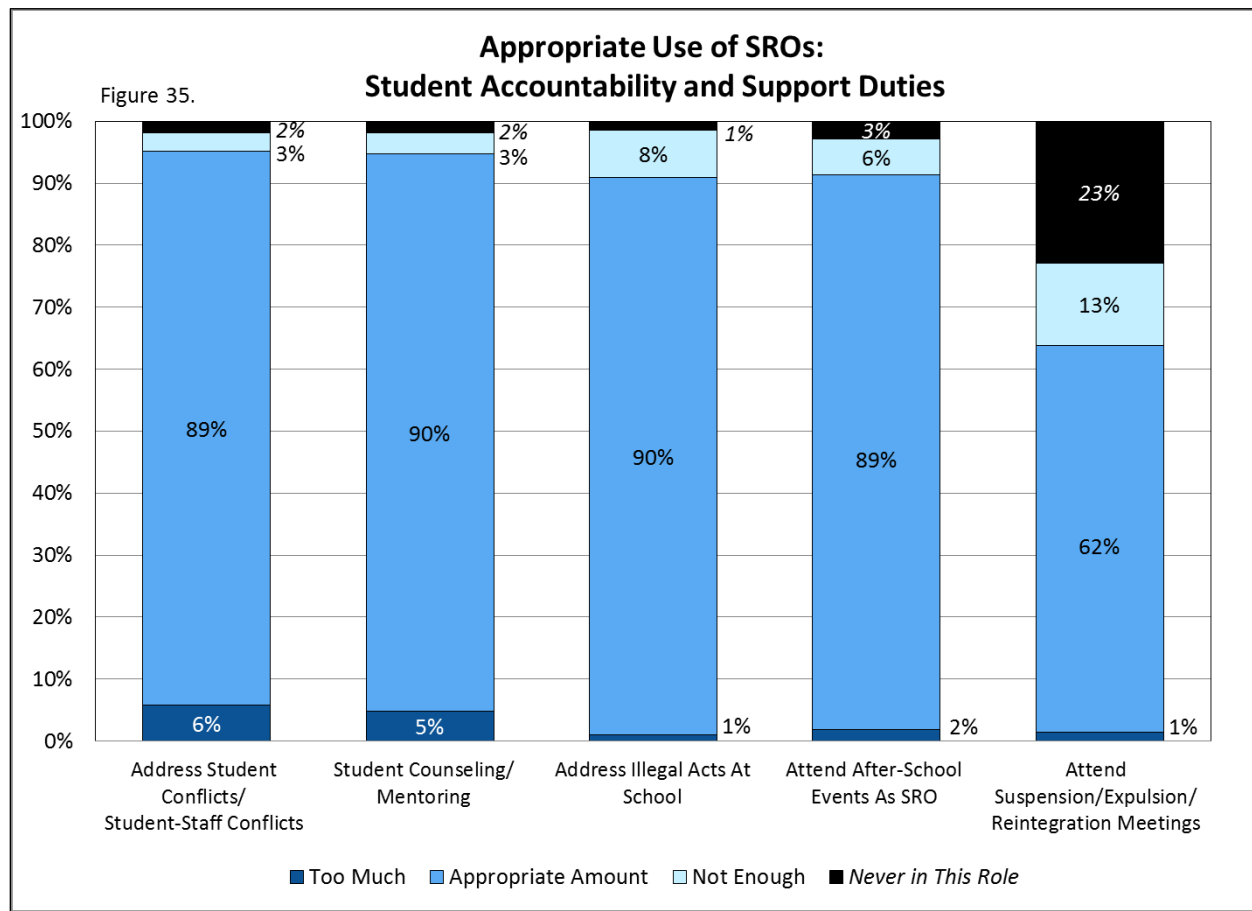


Perceived Appropriateness of Student Accountability and Support Duties

Overall, 89 to 90 percent of SROs feel they were used *an appropriate amount* in roles of student accountability and support. However, 6 percent of SROs felt they were used to address conflicts *too much*, followed by 5 percent who felt they were placed in the counseling or mentoring role *too much* (Figure 35). Comments provided by SROs, however, speak to both the stress and the importance of serving youth in a mentoring capacity:

- *“I have a total of about 3,000 students and 400 staff. That is a lot of issues for one SRO.”*
- *“[We] need some training in counseling because once the students get to know you they come with personal issues going on, looking for guidance because their parents aren’t around.”*
- *“[An SRO is] unbelievably important to some kids who don’t feel they have safe adults to talk to.”*

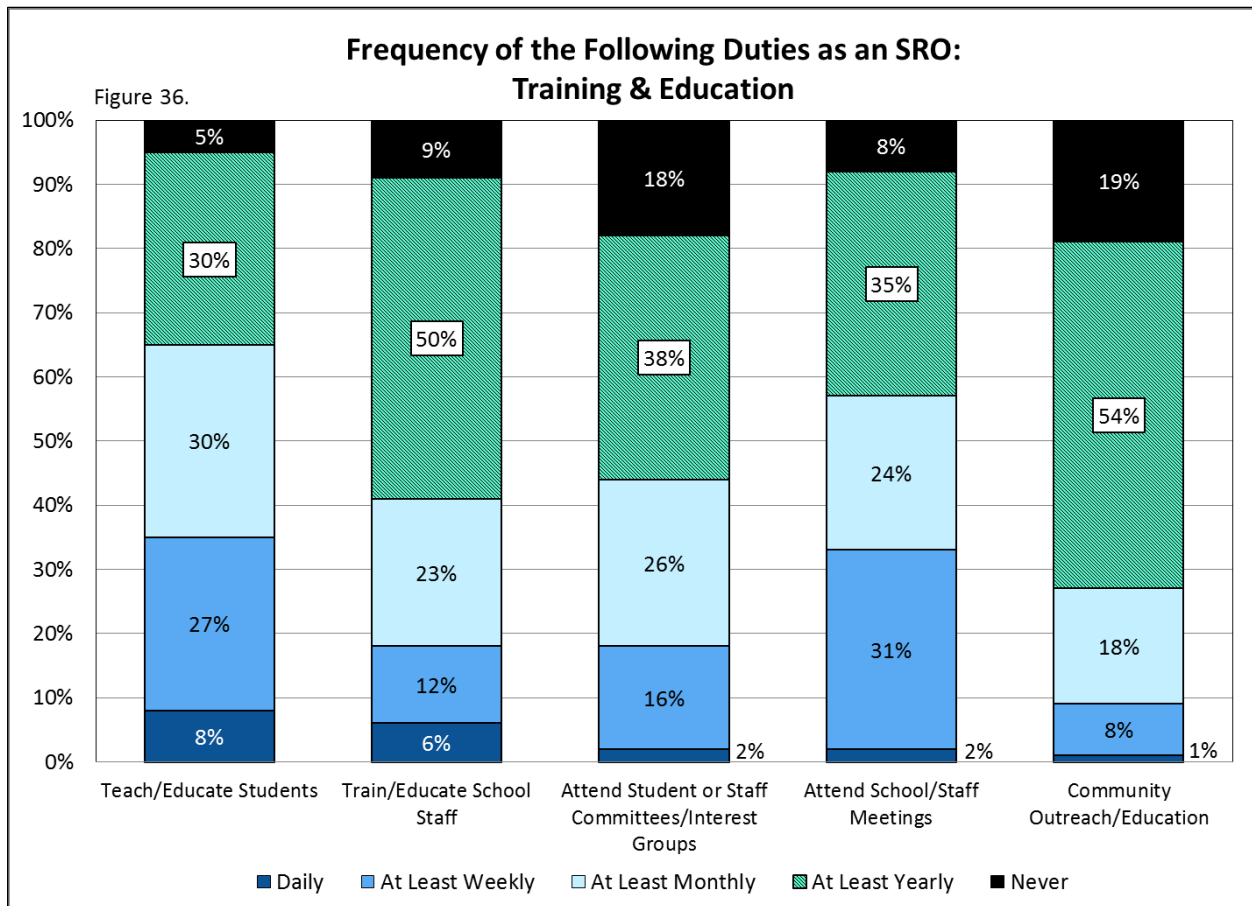
Some SROs feel they could be utilized more often to address illegal acts at school (8%) and as an SRO presence at after-school events (6%). In this category of duties, however, SROs were most likely to report they are *not used enough* in meetings related to suspensions, expulsions and student reintegration (13%).



Student Teaching and Staff Training Duties

As the third role in the SRO triad, Minnesota SROs were asked how often they are involved in activities related to teaching, training and community outreach. Of the three SRO roles, Minnesota respondents were least likely to report regular involvement in these activities.

Figure 36 illustrates that Minnesota SROs are most likely to be involved in teaching students *at least weekly* (35%) or attending school or staff meetings *at least weekly* (33%). Training and educating of school teachers and staff is most likely to occur *at least yearly* (50%) followed by *yearly* training or educating in the community (54%). Nearly two-in-10 officers report that they *never* participate in community education or outreach (19%). According to the federal COPS Office, community outreach is an integral part of the SRO role. SROs should be a liaison to community-based resources and services for youth, be actively involved in community relations, and garner support from the community for the SRO program.^{112, 113}



Another way SROs can support the school community is through involvement in student and staff committees, interest groups and initiatives. Four-in-10 SROs report they are involved in such activities *at least monthly*. Involvement in these relationship-building activities is likely affected by how much time an officer has to give to each school coupled with how thin they are stretched with other responsibilities.

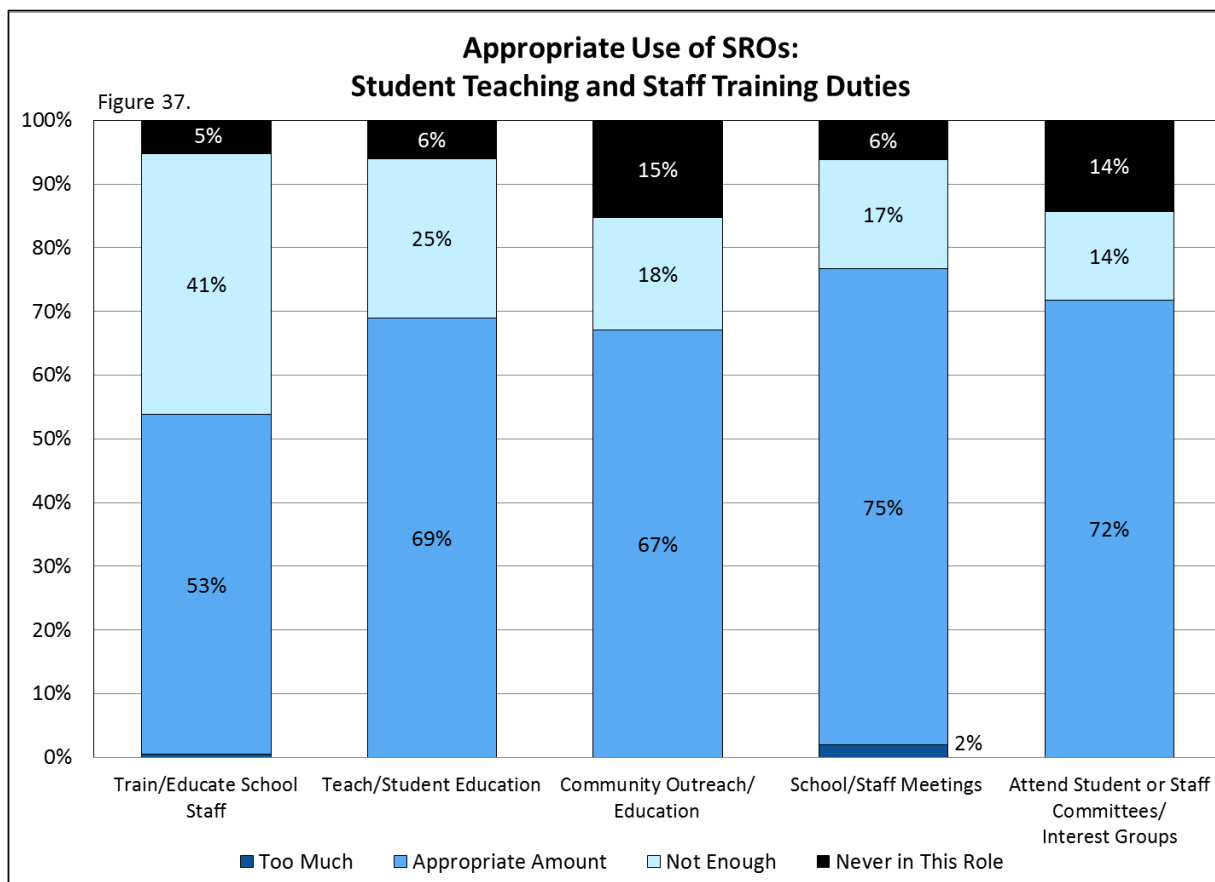
Perceived Appropriateness of Teaching and Training Duties

Minnesota SROs are most likely to feel that they are underutilized as teachers and educators. Over four-in-10 SROs (41%) felt they are *not used enough* for educating and training school teachers and staff, followed by 25 percent who feel they are *not used enough* for educating students (Figure 37). Several SROs shared that the most satisfying aspect of the SRO position for them is related to teaching—especially for students:

- *“Educating students and making them think.”*
- *“Teaching both students and staff.”*
- *“Teaching D.A.R.E.”*
- *“I really enjoy being a part of a teacher’s classroom discussion on different topics.”*
- *“Being able to educate students in drugs, bullying and internet safety.”*

41% of SROs feel they are “not used enough” to teach students.

Nearly two-in-10 officers (18%) believe they are *not used enough* for community education and outreach followed by 17 percent who feel they should attend more school and staff meetings. Fourteen



percent feel they could have more participation in special staff and student committees and interest groups. With the exception of attending meetings (2%) almost no SROs feel they are used in a teaching or training capacity *too much*.

School Duties: Summary and Recommendations

- In Minnesota, SROs are most likely to self-identify their primary role as a law enforcer (62%), followed by an informal counselor (22%); and finally an educator (16%). How an SRO views their primary role in the school can affect the duties they choose to engage in as well as attitudes about students and school policies.
- As it relates to school safety and monitoring, SROs are most likely to be involved in the *daily* monitoring of school grounds and common areas (91%) followed by *daily* enforcement of school rules and code of conduct (44%). Two-in-10 officers feel they are involved in enforcement of school rules *too much*. **Literature supports that SROs not be regularly involved in school disciplinary issues or classroom management.**
- Student accountability and support is another large part of daily SROs duties. Forty-six percent of SROs are involved in counseling and mentoring activities *daily*, and 42 percent address staff and student conflicts *daily*. Just under four-in-10 report *daily* involvement with addressing illegal acts at school (39%).
- Minnesota SROs are least likely to be regularly involved in teaching staff and students or engaging in community education or outreach. More than any other category, SROs feel they are not used in the training and educating capacity in the schools as much as they could be for both staff (41%) and students (25%).
- The roles and responsibilities of SROs will vary depending on the unique safety and security needs of schools and communities. **SROs should play roles that are active in addressing the conditions that give rise to crime problems and the relevant safety goals of the school.**

Teaching and Training

NASRO supports SROs' involvement in teaching regularly. In this role, SROs "impart valuable, specialized knowledge to students and staff, build relationships with students, and improves students' perceptions of law enforcement."¹¹⁴ The federal COPS Office also affirms that SROs can complement an educational curriculum by emphasizing the fundamental skills needed for responsible citizenship. No research exists, however, on which classes are most useful or how to measure an officer's effectiveness in the teaching role.¹¹⁵

The majority of Minnesota SROs (78%) report that they are involved in activities related to teaching students or training staff. The survey provided SROs with a list of training and education topics and asked participants to check all the topics they teach. SROs were further asked to indicate if they teach students, staff or both. Space was given for SROs to enter additional topics for which they provide instruction.



Teaching Students

It was most common for respondent SROs to teach students about how the criminal or juvenile justice system works (82%); drug education (81%); and general crime prevention (80%). In addition, SROs commonly educate students on careers in law enforcement, internet safety and crimes; and bullying (74% to 78%).

Figure 38 is just a sampling of topics taught to students by SROs. Other topics include civics, driver's education, gang awareness and education, how and when to call 911, and school emergency protocols. Safety topics covered include those related to driving, biking, buses, stranger danger and dating.

Figure 38.
Education Provided to Students by SROs (%)
n=174

Topic	Yes (%)
How the criminal or juvenile justice system works: Offenses, offense levels, charges, etc.	82%
Drug Education	81%
General crime prevention: Staying safe/protecting belongings	80%
Careers in Law Enforcement	78%
Internet safety/sexting/ technology-based crimes	75%
Bullying	74%

Training Teachers

It was more common for officers to be involved with teaching students than teaching school teachers and staff. For 79 percent of SROS, training teachers and staff in emergency protocols was most common (Figure 39).

The second most frequent topic of instruction provided to teachers and staff was general crime prevention (46%) followed by how the justice system works (41%). About one-third of SROs provided staff training on internet-based safety and crimes (35%) or drug education (33%). Nearly three-in-10 officers also teach staff about gangs (31%) and bullying issues (29%).

While this set of questions focused specifically on training given by SROs to teachers and staff, comments shared by SROs at the end of the survey illuminate the need for better cross-training between SROs and school staff.

When SROs were invited to share the most challenging aspects of their position, many comments were made regarding school staff not understanding the scope and limitations of the SRO position. These roles not only need to be defined and documented in an MOU, but also communicated clearly to school staff. Comments made by SROs support the need to emphasize cross-training:

Topic	Yes (%)
Emergency Protocols	79%
General crime prevention: Staying safe/protecting belongings	46%
How the criminal or juvenile justice system works: Offenses, offense levels, charges, etc.	41%
Internet safety/sexting/ technology-based crimes	35%
Drug Education	33%
Gangs	31%
Bullying	29%

[It is challenging to/when...]

- *“Getting some members of administration to accept that I am a police officer, not an educator and employee of the school. I enforce laws and investigate crime. I am not there to ‘scare’ and intimidate people.”*
- *“Constantly needing to explain to staff what my role is and who my supervisor is.”*
- *“[a challenge is] administrative personnel who investigate incident without knowledge of the law or knowledge of illegal substances.”*
- *“Lack of training with school administration explaining why we cannot charge everything.”*
- *“Inaccurate information in the public as to what I can and cannot do i.e. interviews without parents present.”*
- *“Work with staff so that they feel supported but also understand our limitations.”*

Teaching and Training: Summary and Recommendations

- Over three-quarters of Minnesota SROs (78%) report that they are involved with teaching students or training the school staff. Of SROs who teach students, 41 percent feel they are underutilized in this role. **Schools and SROs should discuss the SRO's desire for teaching and training, assess the SRO's skills in this area, and provide teaching and training opportunities related to the school's safety goals.**
- Officers most commonly teach students about the justice system, drug and gang education, careers in law enforcement, and general crime prevention and safety. Internet safety and bullying are also topics SROs teach in Minnesota schools.
- SROs most commonly train school staff and teachers about emergency preparedness, general crime prevention and how the justice system works. Training is also given related to drugs and gangs.
- **Comments shared by Minnesota SROs illuminate the need for more training of school staff on the role of SROs in schools as well as the scope and limitations of SROs' duties and authority. The lack of understanding in this arena comes through as a potential point of contention between SROs and school staff members.**

Relationships

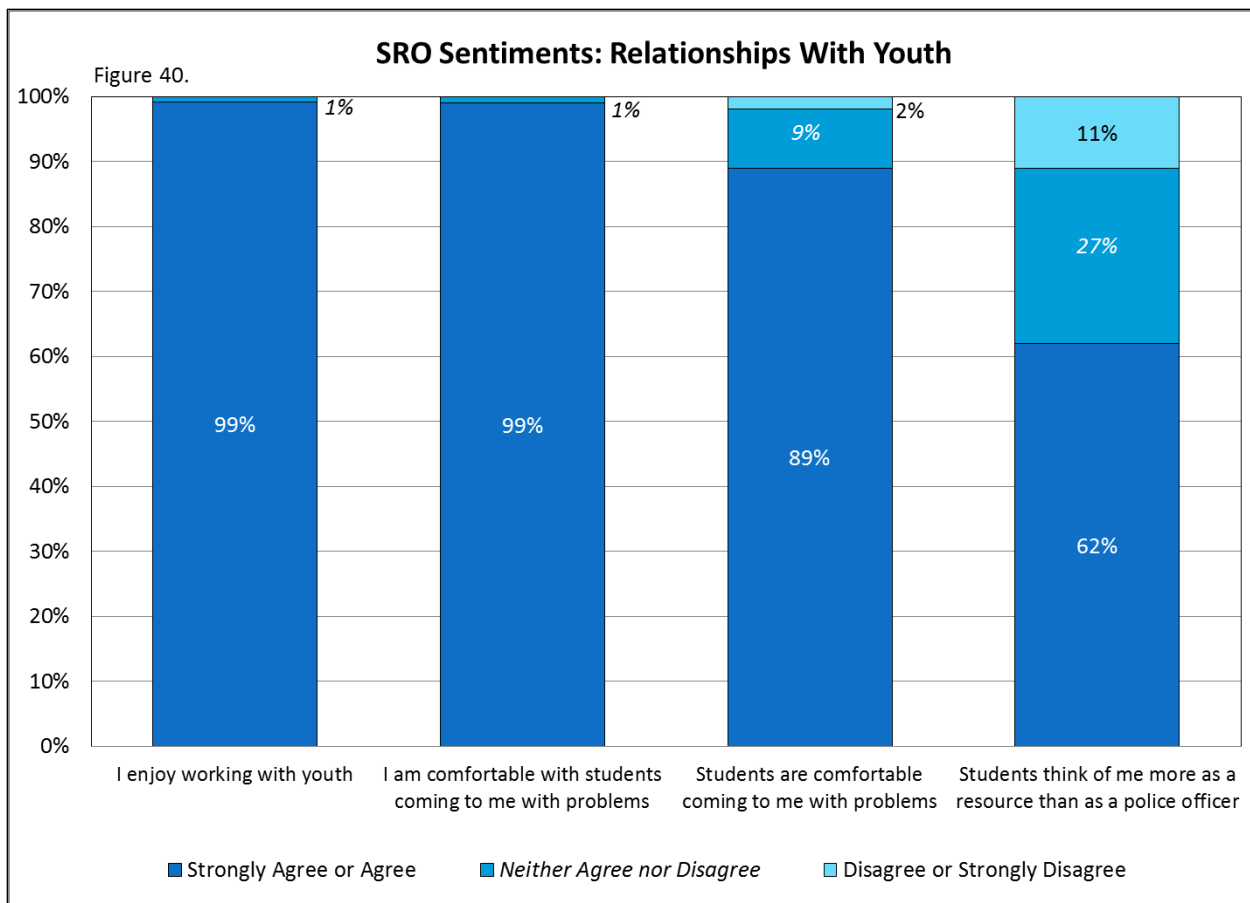
A benefit of the SRO position is that it can build relationships among law enforcement, students and community members. In the context of these relationships, youth build trust with officers and are more likely to inform them when there is potentially illegal or dangerous situations arising in the school or community.¹¹⁶

SROs not only have to navigate relationships with students, school administrations, teachers and staff, they must also balance their relationship with their law enforcement agency. SROs are at risk of becoming isolated from their departments or having their work undervalued by their peers. These issues should actively be addressed by an SRO's law enforcement agency.¹¹⁷

Minnesota SROs who participated in the survey were asked a series of questions about their relationships with youth, school administrators and their law enforcement agency.

Relationships with Youth

In total, 99 percent of SROs either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they enjoy working with youth (Figure 40). Ninety-nine percent of officers report they feel comfortable with students coming to them with their problems and 89 percent of SROs believe that *students* are comfortable coming to them.



Minnesota SROs were asked to rate their agreement with the statement: “students think of me more as a resource than as a police officer.” Just over six-in-10 SROs (62%) express agreement, whereas one-in-10 express disagreement (11%). Nearly three-in-10 officers *neither agree nor disagree* (27%).

When SROs were asked to elaborate on the most satisfying aspects of their jobs, working with and developing relationships with students was the top response, followed by helping youth to make better decisions, and having a positive effect on youths’ lives:

- *“I enjoy going on calls while on patrol in the summer and having students greet me and excited to see me. [Also] coming to a call when another officer is struggling with communicating with a student and having the student open up to me because he or she knew me from school.”*
- *“The most satisfying part of my position as an SRO is how I can help make a positive difference in student’s lives. I can let them know that they have someone who cares for them and wants them to be successful. I am there for them every day.”*
- *“I believe having an SRO in the buildings and working as an informal counselor and mentor makes a significant difference in some students’ lives and I do not believe it is recognized enough by people in politics, schools and the public.”*
- *“[It is satisfying to] help those kids who don’t have much guidance at home. Hope that I can change their attitudes or offer support for those that want to talk about issues.”*

99% of SROs agree that they enjoy working with youth.

Finally, an important role for SROs is to change or challenge negative perceptions about law enforcement.¹¹⁸ Thirty percent of Minnesota SROs indicate that a specific benefit of the SRO position is that helps youth to see police as people who do not have to be feared or hated. SROs also feel they help school staff to see law enforcement in a different light:



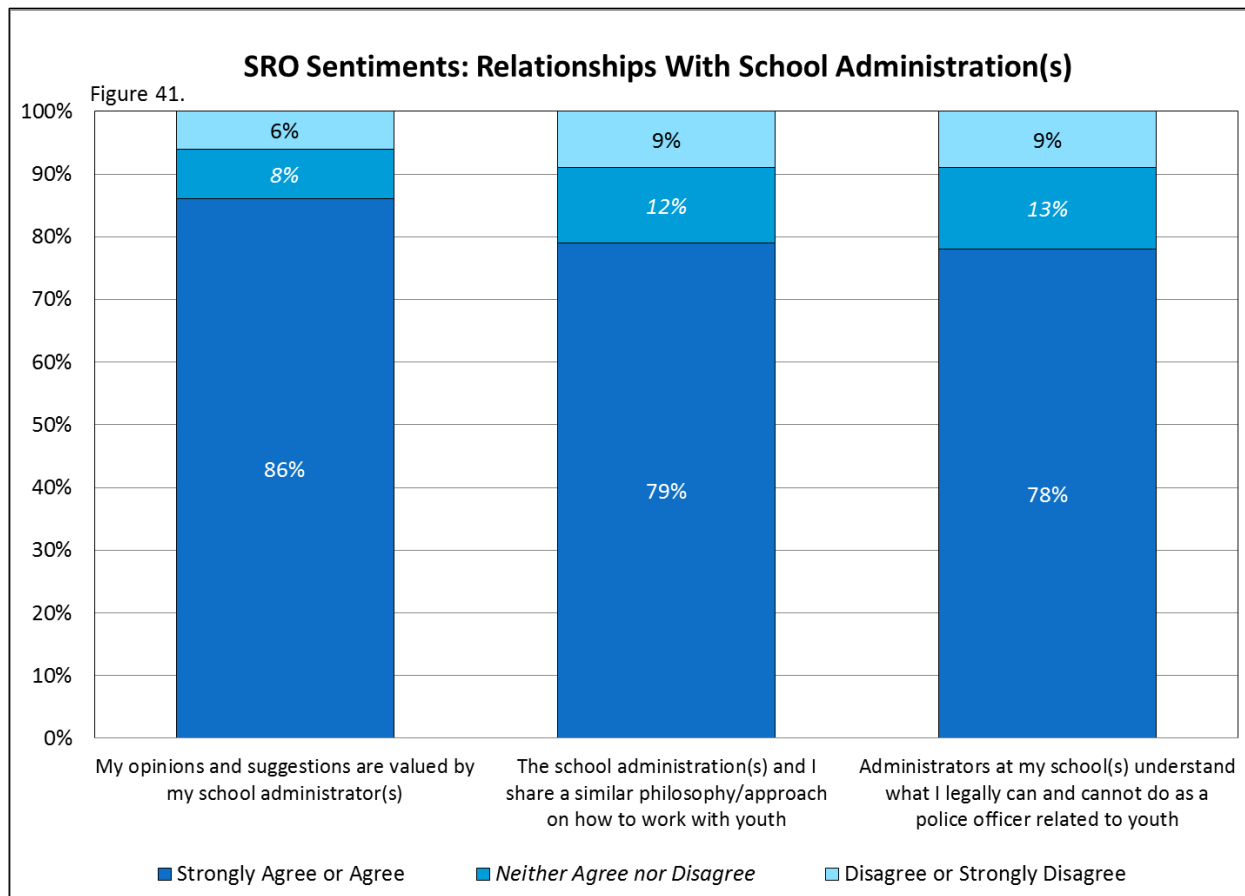
[A satisfying aspect of being an SRO is...]

- *“Working with those students who hate the police and have had negative dealings with the police. I can build a relationship with those students and have them say ‘hi’ to me when they are out of school with their friends and trust me with other issues in their lives.”*
- *“Showing them [youth] that police don’t have to be feared.”*
- *“[Youth will tell you] they now see officers differently because of the relationship with you.”*

- “Showing kids I’m in school to help and guide them as much as I am there to keep them safe.”
- “Being approachable and overcoming stereotypes of the police.”
- “I enjoy showing students a different side of law enforcement.”
- “I have enjoyed working with youth to change their perspective on police officers in the community. I have been able to bridge the gap between them and me.”
- “Humanizing police to students and staff.”
- “Showing students and faculty that police officers have personalities and often share similar interests. Showing them the human side of police that they didn’t know existed.”

Relationships with School Administrators

Minnesota SROs were asked several questions about their relationships with school administrations (Figure 41). The vast majority of SROs (86%) indicated *agreement* with the statement: “My opinions and suggestions are valued by my school administrator(s).” A small percent of officers (6%) *disagreed or strongly disagreed*.



Overall, nearly 80 percent of SROs (79%) felt that they share a similar philosophy or approach on how to work with youth as their school administration(s); 9 percent expressed disagreement. Finally, 78 percent of officers agree that the school administrations understand what an SRO legally can and cannot do as a police officer related to youth (arrests, searches, interviews, etc.).

At the end of the SRO survey, participants were invited to share the most satisfying and challenging aspects of being an SRO. In both questions, relationships with the school staff, teachers and administrations were common. Of those who provided comments about satisfying aspects of the job (n=189), 16 percent specifically mentioned working with the staff or getting support from the school.

- *“The administration at my school is the most positive reason for wanting to stay [as an SRO].”*
- *“I love my assignment but it could be a lot different if the school administration wasn’t as easy to work with as they are.”*
- *“Overall it is a great position, but I can see also how it could be a nightmare. The district you work in and the staff you work with play a large part in the success of the program. Everybody has to be dedicated and committed to the position in order for it to be successful.”*

A larger percentage of SROs (25%) in some way included relationship with the schools as a challenge in the position. The following quotes submitted by Minnesota SROs illustrate some of the conflicts with schools that can emerge from the school-law enforcement partnership:

- *“Each administration has their own style of doing things. It’s tough too sometimes to switch styles from building to building.”*
- *“[It is challenging to] deal with a lot of different personalities and philosophies about education, discipline and enforcement.”*
- *“The political game between doing what you feel needs to be done and what the school wants you to do.”*
- *“School administrations view their buildings as their own and do not respect input from law enforcement.”*
- *“I love my job and highly respect the people at the school and the jobs they do. 99% of the staff give me the same in return, however there is a resistant 1% that do not. That 1% is enough to make me question whether or not I will continue the assignment and that is extremely unfortunate.”*

While some of the issues raised by SROs could be addressed more clearly in an MOU, some require cross-training among SROs and school staff and relationship-building. Said one SRO:

- *“In the schools I’ve worked in, and I’ve worked with staff from about a dozen schools, it has really been interesting to learn how to be a resource to staff, work with staff, and ultimately build sustainable professional relationships with staff to meet the needs of students. To many that doesn’t sound challenging but I think it is particularly difficult for police officers to do.”*

Relationships with Law Enforcement Agency

Law enforcement agencies need to make supervision of SROs a priority. Supervision helps to identify and address problems with the partnership early and can ease transition into the position. In addition, supervision sends the message that department leadership values the SRO position. As a part of supervision, law enforcement agency leadership should be familiar with the role and activities of the SRO. Supervisors may choose to visit the SRO at school, review cases and arrests, interview school staff and students, and offer formal performance evaluation and goal setting. Evaluation of SROs' performance may need to include different criteria than the standard police department evaluation for other officers.¹¹⁹

As SROs, officers are often balancing the needs of the schools in which they serve with those of their law enforcement agency. Over one-third of officers (35%) *agree* that they often feel pulled between the expectations of their law enforcement agency and those of the school (Figure 42). A concern often voiced by survey respondents is that they are stretched too thin across too many schools; too large of a student body; or are given too many additional responsibilities in the agency:

- *"[A challenge is] I cannot be more proactive in the school. My job is not just working in the schools. I carry a full investigations case load....I get pulled out of the schools all the time—most of the time for that matter."*
- *"It is difficult to satisfy the wants, needs and desires of school administration vs. law enforcement supervisors because no one really understands what goes on in my day. They sometimes think they know, but I feel they would learn a lot by actually spending some time with me in my school offices or as I interact with the kids."*
- *"It is sometimes difficult when law enforcement administration is pulling you in one direction and school administrators are pulling in a slightly different direction..."*
- *"[A challenge is] all the different roles I have to play on a daily basis. Trying to balance my work from the police department with my every day duties at the school."*
- *"I think it is challenging that the police administration may not understand the amount of work and the specialized skills that you need to be excellent as an SRO."*

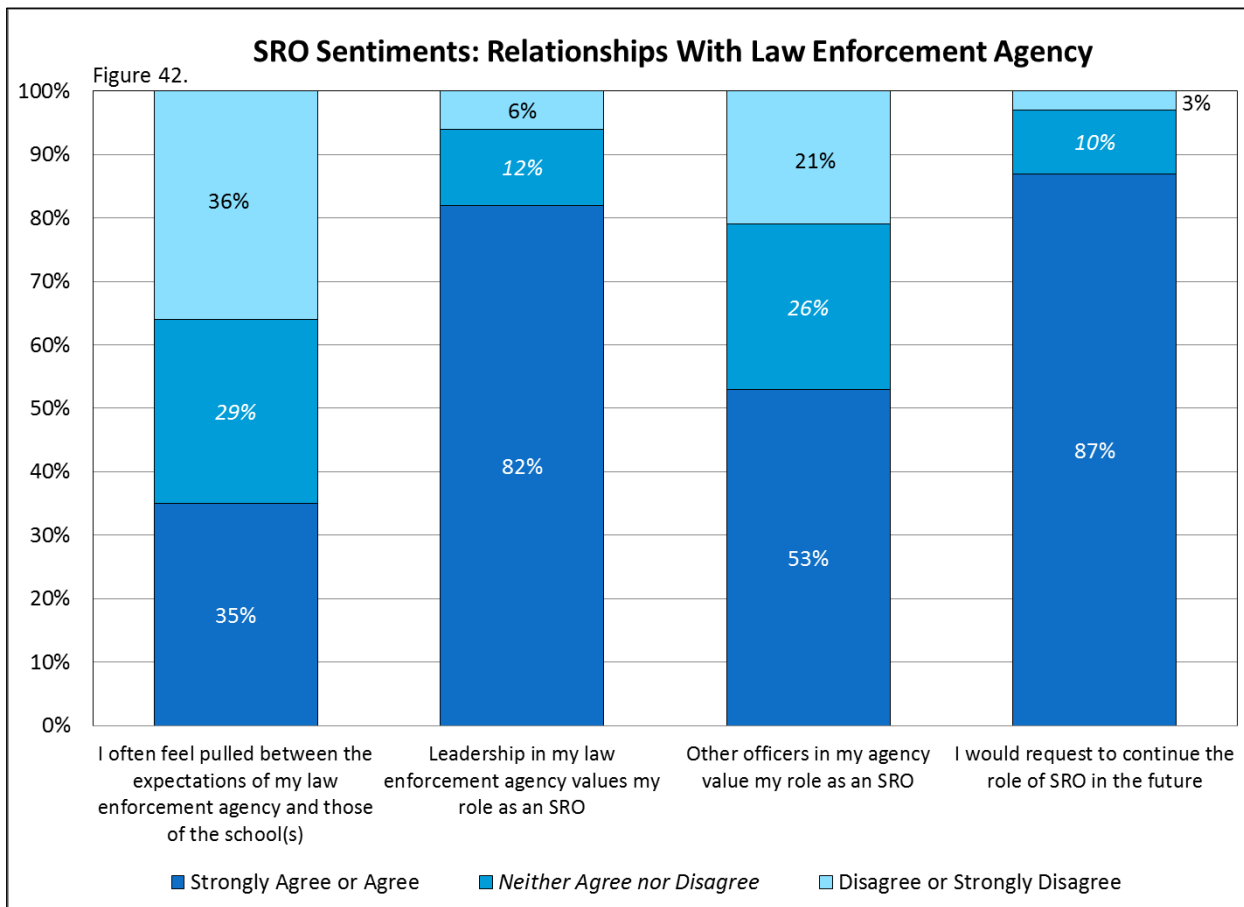
Nearly one-third of SROs (35%) agree with feeling pulled between the expectations of their schools and their law enforcement agency.

Despite these concerns, 82 percent of SROs agree that the leadership in their law enforcement agency values their role as an SRO. A greater number yet, 87 percent, state that they would request to continue the role of SRO in the future.

SROs raised concerns about becoming isolated from their department or not being given respect by their law enforcement peers. Law enforcement agencies can neutralized these perceptions by having patrol officers shadow the SRO, and by having SROs patrol or do other police work when school is not in

session to prevent peers from feeling like SROs are not “real cops.”¹²⁰ Only half of Minnesota SROs surveyed (53%) *agree* that other officers in their agency value their role as SROs, with 21 percent expressing disagreement. One respondent shared:

- *“Unfortunately other officers in my department talk negatively about my position, calling it “babysitting” or “kiddie-cop” etc. After years of hearing this, newer officers have developed a negative perception of this role...”*



Other SROs also shared comments about the challenges they face with their peers or law enforcement leadership:

- *“[A challenge is] other officers not respecting what we do.”*
- *“My partners (on patrol) do not value my position as an SRO.”*
- *“[A challenge is] losing connections with police coworkers during the school year.”*
- *“It feels like very little support from other officers and administration.”*
- *“Very hard but satisfying job that other officers just don’t understand.”*

- *“Often times working alone and unsupervised can be challenging when working with new and unique situations.”*

The extent to which SROs feel isolated, disrespected or torn between their department and the school varies. Many SROs also shared comments about how much they enjoy the autonomy of the position, how much they feel supported by their team, and how they value the diversity the position brings:

- *“The job is ever changing.”*
- *“I like the variety between working the school and handling investigative cases as assigned. At times it is like having two jobs.”*
- *“[A benefit is] all of the different roles that I have to play on a daily basis. I’m a police officer, administrator, counselor and teacher.”*



- *“Being the ‘go to person’ for the patrol division when it comes to the youth of the community.”*
- *“I enjoy being involved in the very dynamic environment of a school....Schools are a fun and interesting place to work. It is never boring!”*
- *“Having the support from [my] school administration and staff, as well as from [my] law enforcement administration.”*

Relationships: Summary and Recommendations

- Generally, Minnesota SROs report feeling comfortable with students coming to them with problems (99%) and feel that students are comfortable coming to them in return (89%). Many SROs share that being a support person to students and making a difference in their lives is one of the most satisfying aspects of the SRO position.
- Nearly eight-in-10 SROs agree that they have positive relationships with their school administrators including feeling that their opinions are valued; that they share a similar philosophy in how to work with youth; and that administrators understand what they legally can and cannot do as police related to youth. Nevertheless, one quarter of the nearly 200 SROs who provided comments (25%) mentioned issues with school administrators or staff as a challenging aspect of the position.
- SROs are at risk of feeling undervalued and isolated from their law enforcement agency. While some enjoy the autonomy, others feel over extended or at odds with the wants and needs of the school administration and their law enforcement agency. **Law enforcement leadership**

should model respect for the position, provide adequate supervision, and take steps to keep SROs connected to the department and other officers.

- Comments shared by Minnesota SROs emphasize the importance of clear roles and quality training with school administration, teachers and staff about the role of an SRO. **Preserving good working relationships with school administrators and staff, cross-training, and information sharing are key to effective SRO programs.**

Special Education Students

Students receiving special education services are a topic which requires special attention, as SROs have often been accused of being insensitive to this population. Minnesota has 13 categorical disability areas where youth are eligible for special services, classroom accommodations and individualized education programs (IEPS). Disabilities include physical or sensory impairments, learning disabilities, cognitive impairments and developmental delays, autism spectrum disorders, and emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD).¹²¹

Since students receiving special education can exhibit an array of behaviors which are potentially disruptive, there is a likelihood that SROs will be called by teachers or school administrators to respond to issues involving these youth. A concern is that the attitude of SROs toward these students may impact the strategies chosen to manage the situation.¹²²

National data collected by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights found that students receiving special education services represent 25 percent of students referred to law enforcement and students arrested, while they are 12 percent of the overall student population. Students with disabilities are twice as likely as other students to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions.¹²³



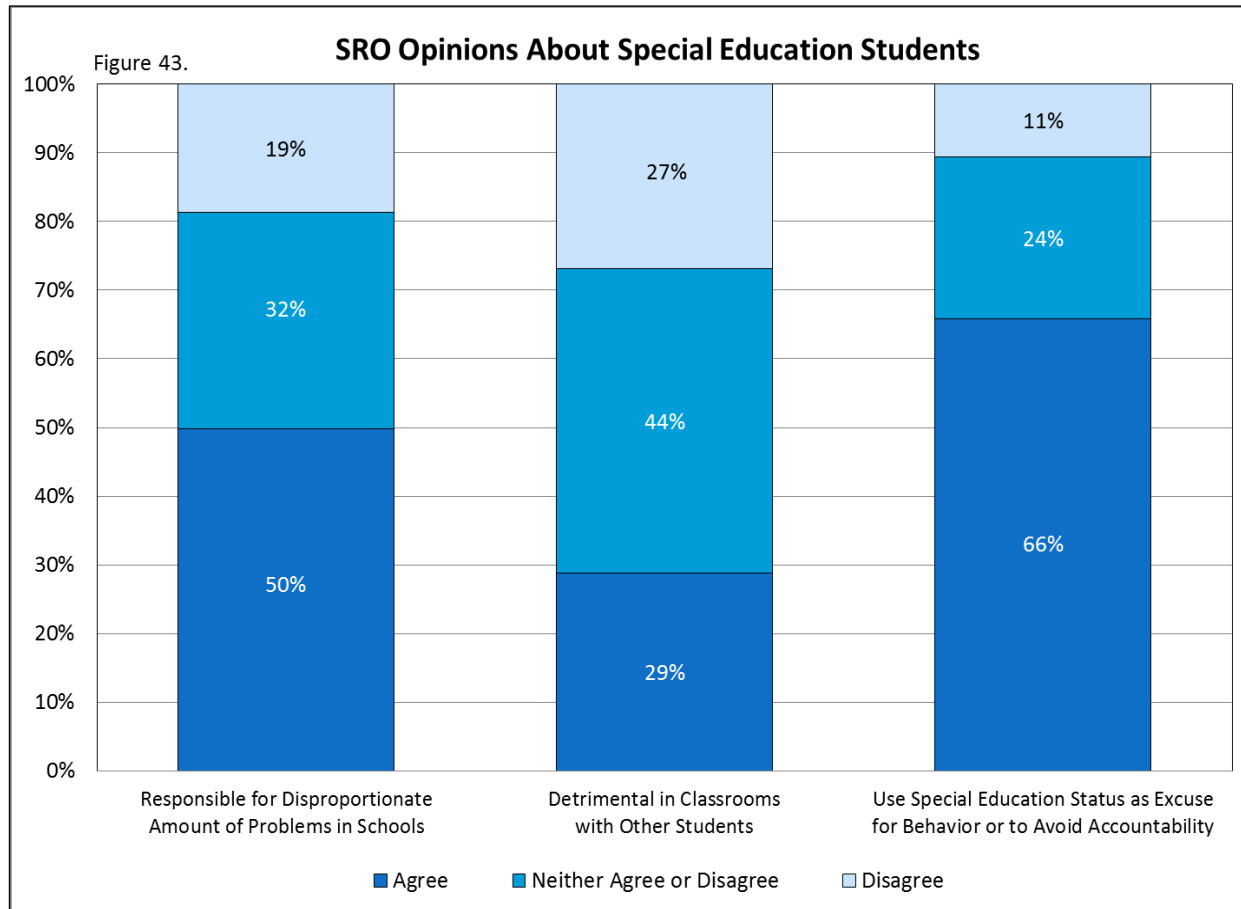
Youth receiving special education services, and those meeting EBD criteria specifically, are overrepresented in disciplinary incidents in Minnesota schools. In the 2012-13 school year, students receiving special education services were just over 13 percent of total K-12 enrollment but accounted for over 41 percent of total disciplinary actions resulting in suspension.¹²⁴ Of youth ages 5-to-18 receiving special education services, youth meeting EBD criteria are 13 percent, but they account for nearly 20 percent of all school discipline incidents.^{125, 126} EBD criteria can involve aggressive, hyperactive or impulsive behavior, as well as atypical communication styles or interpersonal relationships, or depression and anxiety, all of which can adversely affect educational performance.¹²⁷ In Minnesota, black or African American youth receive services for EBD at a rate higher than any other race.¹²⁸ Involvement in disciplinary incidents does not necessary result in a referral to law enforcement.

A study of SROs in the state of Kentucky sought to assess attitudes and opinions about students receiving special education services. The Minnesota SRO survey included a similar set of questions. In Kentucky, 55 percent of SROs expressed at least some level of agreement with the statement “special education students are responsible for a disproportionate amount of problem behaviors at my school.” In Minnesota, 50 percent of SROs agreed with a comparable statement (Figure 43).

Two-thirds of SROs agree that students use their special education status as an excuse for their behavior or to avoid accountability (66%).

In Kentucky, 54 percent of SROs felt it was detrimental to the learning of other students to include special education students in classrooms with other students. Minnesota SROs were less likely to agree with this statement (29%), however the Minnesota survey allowed for officers to *neither agree nor disagree* which was not an option for the Kentucky SROs.

Finally, SROs were asked whether students use their special education status as an excuse for their behavior or to avoid responsibility. Eighty-five percent of Kentucky SROs agreed compared to two-thirds (66%) of Minnesota SROs. Again, Minnesota respondents could select a neutral response whereas Kentucky SROs could not.¹²⁹



The Kentucky study hypothesized that one explanation for SROs’ negative perception of youth receiving special education services stems from a lack of understanding of the unique needs of the population. With special education students receiving school-based discipline at a higher rate, the belief that these students are problematic can further solidify negative perceptions over time. It is important, therefore, that SROs receive specialized training to develop the skill-set and knowledge necessary to work effectively with youth receiving special education services. The findings also call for close working relationships and collaboration among SROs and trained special education teachers.¹³⁰

When Minnesota SROs were invited to share aspects of the SRO position that are most challenging, youth receiving special education services, specifically EBD youth, were included among the comments.

In this study, Minnesota SROs also requested more training on how to work effectively with special education populations:

- *“Additional training on Special Education students, specifically EBD students, including assessing threats from special education students.*
- *“Anything to assist with Special Education students.”*
- *“Dealing with Special Ed. Students.”*
- *“Working with students with special needs.”*
- *“Special Ed. - the differences in students’ level of processing.”*
- *“Special Education! A majority of my contacts are with special education (behavior) students and specialized training would be extremely beneficial.”*
- *“Training on Special Education students: How to properly deal with autistic students, brain function of special ed. students (why they do what they do).”*
- *“Working with special needs or Special Education children.”*
- *“Training with working with EBD children.”*

Special Education Students: Summary and Recommendations

- Nationally and in Minnesota, youth receiving special education services are overrepresented in school disciplinary incidents.
- Minnesota SROs report youth receiving special education services as being among the most challenging aspects of the position. Numerous SROs state that additional training on special education, and EBD specifically, would be helpful.
- **Youth receiving special education services, namely for Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (EBD) are at heightened risk for contact with SROs. Training in how to work effectively with these youth and cross-training with special education teachers is a recommended practice.**

Violations of the Law

One of the most controversial aspects of law enforcement in schools is the potential immediacy with which students can be held accountable with a formal justice system response for behavior at school. SROs must use their discretion as law enforcement officers to balance safety and security needs of the school with the institution's educational mission.¹³¹ Also, there is the potential for law enforcement to be brought into issues which, prior to the establishment of SRO programs, would have been addressed with school-based consequences.¹³²

An important part of any law enforcement-school partnership is the interagency agreement or MOU that delineates what issues will be addressed with a law enforcement response and which will be addressed with school based discipline or sanctions. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) cautions that problems arise when behavior could technically be addressed by either system, potentially leading to confusion among officers, teachers, parents and students alike.¹³³ As an example, absent clear guidelines, rowdy student behavior in the halls or cafeteria



could be considered criminal disorderly conduct, or a pushing altercation could be charged as assault. The ACLU recommends that absent a real and immediate threat to students, teachers or public safety, incidents involving public order should be considered school discipline issues. Among these are: disorderly conduct, disruption of school or public assembly, loitering, trespassing, profanity and fighting that does not involve a weapon or physical injury.¹³⁴ The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges also urge collaboration to “commit to keeping school misbehavior...out of the formal juvenile delinquency court.”¹³⁵

School to Prison Pipeline

Critics of law enforcement in schools suggest that SROs, in conjunction with harsh school discipline policies, have contributed to a phenomenon known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The pipeline results when students receive school-based discipline which can lead to school disenfranchisement. Data support that the presence of SROs in schools has resulted in more arrests and formal justice system processing of youth for minor offenses which, in the absence of SROs, would have been uncharged.¹³⁶ A study of national school data found that schools using law enforcement officers report offenses to the police at a significantly higher rate than those that do not use law enforcement officers.¹³⁷ A U.S. Congressional Research Service publication on SROs in schools cautioned that the deterrent value of SROs could be offset by the monetary costs of placing officers in schools on a more wide-spread basis, or by the social costs of having more youth enter the juvenile justice system for relatively minor offenses.¹³⁸

Use of a formal, police response to illegal and undesirable behavior at school has also been shown to disparately affect youth from communities of color, low income youth, and those receiving special education services. The Justice Policy Institute explains that youth who experience harsh school-based sanctions and arrest are more likely to have lower school achievement, drop out of school, stop progress toward educational goals, and are more likely to experience incarceration and other formal justice system consequences.^{139,140}

During the 2012-13 school year there were 54,690 disciplinary incidents in Minnesota schools resulting in an out-of-school suspension of one day or more. Just under 1 percent of incidents resulted in expulsion, exclusion from school for the remainder of the school year, or administrative transfer to another setting.¹⁴¹ MDE reports that 6,565 incidents (12%) involving 5,476 unique students included a referral to law enforcement.¹⁴² It is unknown how many referrals to law enforcement resulted in a formal citation or charges.

During the 2012-13 school year, approximately 12% of disciplinary incidents in Minnesota schools involved a referral to law enforcement.

According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, in 2011-2012 there were disproportionately high suspension and expulsion rates for students of color, especially black students who were suspended or expelled at a rate three times that of white students. Furthermore, while black students are 16 percent of total enrollment, they represented 27 percent of referrals to law enforcement and 31 percent of students subject to school-related arrest. American Indian students were also overrepresented in referral to law enforcement (3%) and arrest (2%) when they were just 1 percent of the U.S. student body.¹⁴³

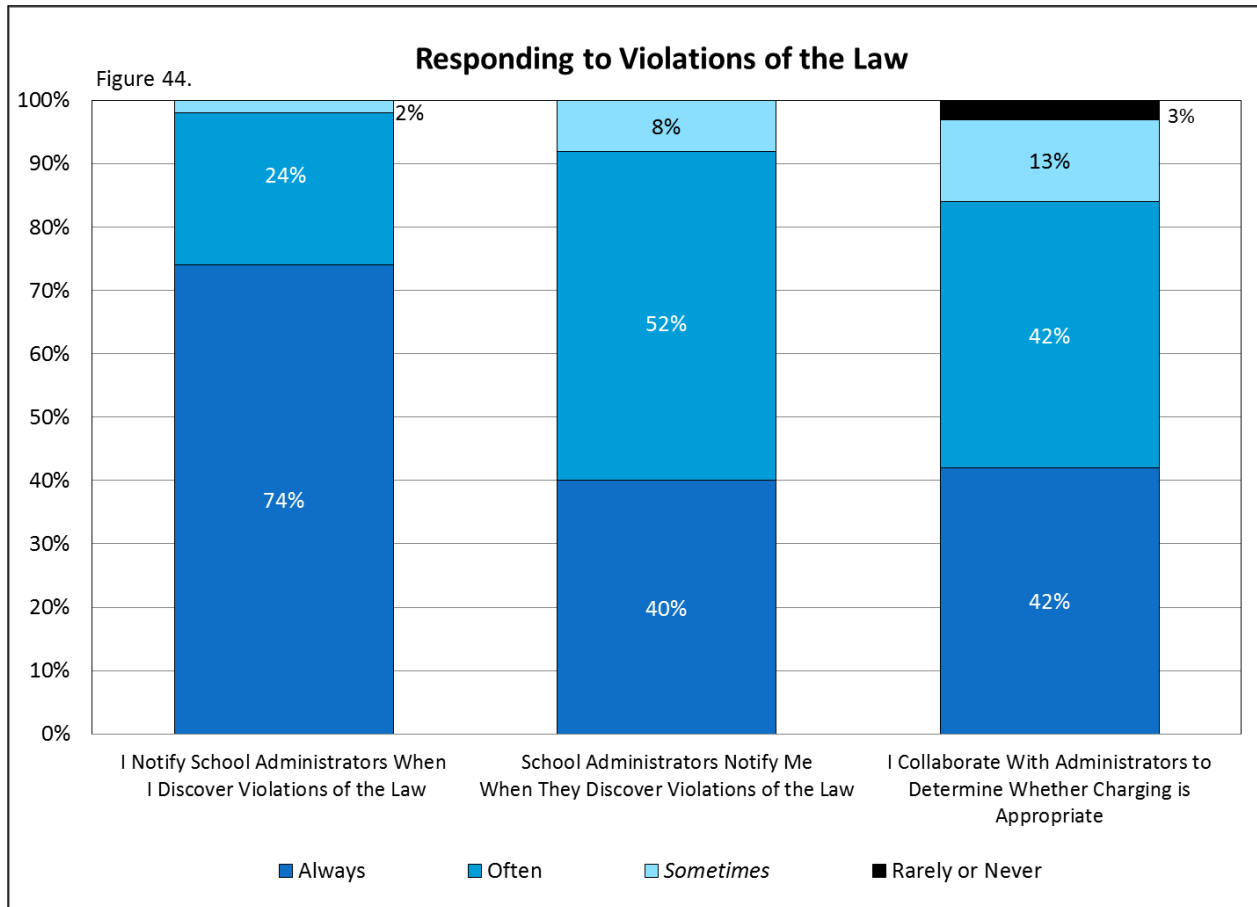
During the 2011-2012 school year in Minnesota, 60,060 incidents occurred where a student was suspended for one day or more, or was expelled. By far the largest single offense was “disruptive or disorderly conduct” resulting in more than 23,000 suspensions or expulsions (39% of total disciplinary incidents). The second largest incident was “fighting” (14% of incidents) which is a category separate from assault.¹⁴⁴

Notification and Collaboration

Minnesota SROs were asked to respond to a series of questions related to how violations of the law are handled at their school(s). The questions seek to illuminate the extent to which SROs and school administrators work collaboratively to hold students accountable, and whether SROs feel pressure to charge (or not charge) students involved in illegal acts.

When SROs discover violations of the law, nearly three-quarters report they *always* notify school administrators (74%), followed by an additional quarter of officers (24%) who *often* tell the school administration (Figure 44). SROs do not, however, report the same level of information moving from the school administration to them. Four-in-ten officers (40%) state that the school administration *always* notifies the SRO when a violation of the law is discovered whereas 52 percent say administrators *often* notify the SRO.

In terms of collaborative decision making, over four-in-10 officers (42%) report that they *always* collaborate with school administrators to determine if charging a student is appropriate. A smaller number (13%) responded that they *sometimes* collaborate with the school. Just 3 percent report that they *rarely or never* collaborate on the charging decision.



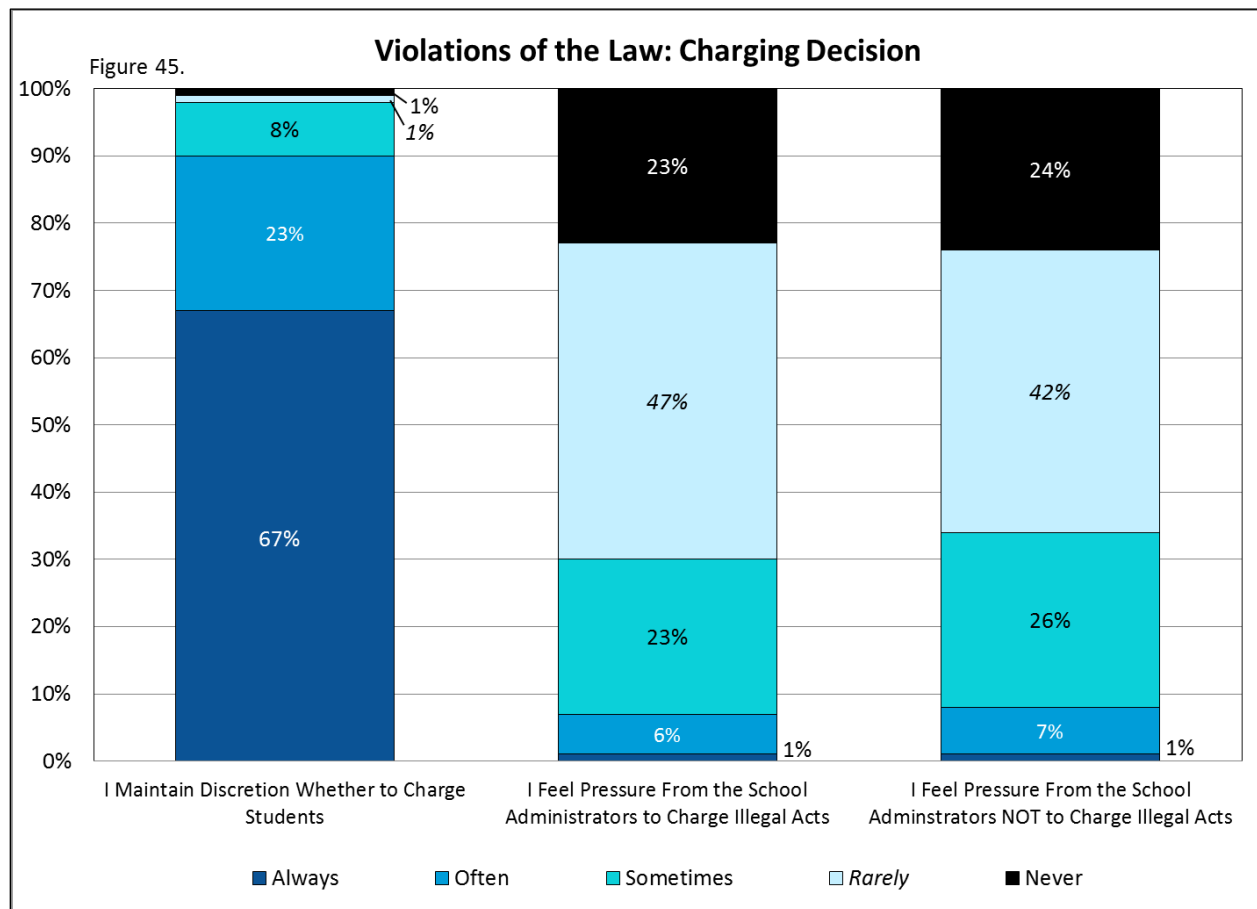
Comments submitted by many SROs illuminate the challenges officers and schools face related to fair and equitable enforcement of school rules and the law:

- *“There is at times an awkward volley between myself and school administration on whether it’s a school issue or a crime.”*
- *“[It is challenging] to accept how the school chooses to discipline some students and not others for the same offense.”*
- *“[It is challenging] to balance accountability and being compassionate about their [students’] upbringing. Always remembering they are a product of their upbringing BUT also that isn’t a free pass. Also knowing the serious impact of a criminal record.”*
- *“[A challenge is] balancing which incidents should be handled through school discipline and which should go to court.”*

Discretion and the Charging Decision

In general, Minnesota SROs express that they maintain the ultimate discretion as to whether or not a student should be charged for behavior or actions at school. Two-thirds of SROs say they *always* maintain the discretion to charge (67%) followed by nearly another quarter of officers (23%) who *often* maintain the charging discretion (Figure 45).

SROs do not typically appear to feel pressure from the school administration to charge or not charge youth who violate the law at school. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of SROs say they *rarely* or *never* feel pressure from school administrators to charge or not charge students. About one-quarter of SROs state they *sometimes* feel pressure to charge (23%) and a comparable percent report they *sometimes* feel pressure from the school not to charge (26%).



Comments provided by individual officers illustrate that the use of a justice system response is not typically desirable, and that sometimes officers and school administrators grapple with different value systems around holding youth accountable:

- “Having to arrest or cite a juvenile is always hard to do especially when you get to know some of the kids on a personal level. It’s discouraging when you talk to a kid over and over about what not to do and they do it anyway.”*

- *"[It's challenging] to get kids to understand that when they commit crimes they really do go to jail. Many don't get it until it's too late."*
- *"[It is challenging when] the school administration questions the discretion I have in my position."*
- *"I find it most challenging when illegal activity, such as drug or alcohol use continues even after various prevention efforts or personal conversations. It's hard to remember that there will always be work to do and that one conversation or prevention effort will not stop all activity."*
- *"I have one administrator who thinks everything needs to be charged out, while his boss feels criminal charges should not be filed for behaviors at school. I receive very conflicting messages which makes my job very difficult."*
- *"I find that the administration wants me to throw the book at some trouble students who they have a hard time dealing with."*

Two-thirds of SROs (67%) report they always maintain discretion whether or not to charge students.

While not specific to illegal or delinquent acts, some SROs shared comments and concerns about behavioral issues among students and the lack of response from the school or, worse yet, staff modeling behaviors for which youth would be punished:

- *"Things are bad and getting worse because schools can't discipline students...and there is more pressure than ever to keep problem students in mainstream classes. At some point we have to ask ourselves where the rights of the students who are actually trying to get an education take precedence over the individuals who are only there to cause disruptions."*
- *"[It is challenging when] the same kids get away with conduct problems and the school not suspending them."*
- *"Way too much leniency and no accountability for students. The leniency is not helping the students succeed."*
- *"[It is challenging] working with school staff that are very punitive or very passive and not consistent."*
- *"[It is challenging] seeing school personnel violating school rules and then screaming at students for violating the same rules. [Also] seeing school personnel treating students differently based on the student."*
- *"Often times they [school administrators] don't enforce their own policies making our job harder."*

- *“Consistency among school administrators within the same school and definitely in different schools is lacking.”*
- *“School staff seems to live in a different utopia than cops. They have no idea how to maintain control in their building, don’t enforce their own rules and are inconsistent with their own rules...and expect me to jail and hold every naughty kid.”*
- *“Dealing with a lot of different personalities and philosophies about education, discipline and enforcement.”*

Violations of the Law: Summary and Recommendations

- SROs in Minnesota overwhelmingly indicate that they collaborate with school administrators when making a decision whether or not to charge youth for illegal acts at school; however, they also report that they maintain ultimate discretion in the charging decision.
- The majority of SROs state that they generally do not feel pressured by school administrations to charge or not charge students involved in illegal acts.
- Many SROs voiced concerns that school staff is too lenient on youth or is inconsistent with enforcement of rules and expectations. The variability among individual staff or at different education settings in which the SROs serve is clearly a potential area of contention.
- **Schools and law enforcement agencies must be clear on which issues will be addressed by schools and which will be handled by the SRO. This will reduce role confusion and result in greater consistency for students.**

Justice System Diversion

“Juvenile diversion” refers to policies and programs designed to channel youth out of the formal juvenile justice system.¹⁴⁵ Research shows that many adolescents will engage in some sort of illegal behavior but few will continue offending. Evidence emerged in the 1990s based on the risk-need-responsivity principle, that it was harmful to bring low-level youth into the justice system.¹⁴⁶ Diversion is an opportunity to hold low-level or one-time offenders accountable without setting them on a criminal course.¹⁴⁷

In 1995, Minnesota required that all county attorneys have at least one juvenile diversion program. This policy was intended to limit the number of youth entering the formal justice system, emphasize restorative justice, and develop responsible alternatives to the juvenile justice system.¹⁴⁸

Because youth can potentially receive formal citations or charges for delinquent behavior at school, participants in the Minnesota SRO survey were asked if they offer any school-level diversion in lieu of a citation or petition. The majority of SROs (65%) indicate that there are diversion opportunities available, whereas the remaining one-third of SROs (35%) indicate there are not.

Nearly two-thirds of SROs (65%) report they offer school-based diversion in lieu of formal citations or petitions.

Those SROs who do offer diversion (n=129) were asked to describe some of the methods used. Forty percent of SROs referred to or named juvenile diversion program(s) that exist in Minnesota statute (Figure 46). These programs are typically operated by (or contracted by) county attorneys or probation departments. These programs may be open to referrals directly from schools and SROs, rather than requiring a citation or charge be sent to the county attorney. SROs explain that diversion programs may be used in response to alcohol violations, sexting, bullying, smoking, fights, property offenses and other low-level offenses at school.

- *“The first offense will almost always be referred to our diversion coordinator. The child will then complete a program and have the citation dismissed.”*

The second most common diversion opportunity named by SROs is community service. Community service hours can be assigned by SROs, principals or other administrators, or by school counselors. Sometimes the service hours can be completed at the school, while in other cases students must complete service in the community:

Figure 46.
Diversion Methods Used by SROs in Schools (%)
n=129

Method	Yes (%)
Diversion services through the county attorney, or a community-based/contracted provider	40%
Community service, school clean-up or repair	33%
Restorative Justice	22%
School-based sanctions/loss of privileges or activities	13%
In-house probation/behavior contract with SRO	5%
ISS/OSS/Saturday School	5%
Victim restitution/repayment	5%

- *“The Assistant Principals established public service hours or detention as diversion.”*
- *“Clean/wipe up the cafeteria tables after lunch and/ or pick up garbage on the school grounds.”*

Restorative justice techniques were mentioned as a component of school-based diversion by 22 percent of SROs. Restorative justice activities (RJ) are those that emphasize repairing the harm caused by crime. Restorative justice principles typically require the involvement of the victim, the offender and the community to find resolution and repair.¹⁴⁹ RJ activities described by SROs include letters of apology to victims, supervised mediation between victim and offender, family group counseling, circle sentencing and peer counseling.

- *“Restorative Justice Program. Give the youth an option of meeting with the victim and talking about what they did and also doing some kind of community service, instead of getting charged and going to court.”*
- *“If an SRO is not using some form of Restorative Justice, shame on them, their department and schools.”*

Finally, a small percentage of SROs (5%) describe the use of behavior contracts or agreements with students. If a student violates the law, an officer will write a formal citation but “hold it” to give the youth the opportunity to change their behavior:

- *“In-house probation with a note in police report. ‘No same or similar’ for their high school career.”*
- *“Behavior contracts-allows for an unofficial probation for the entire school year.”*
- *“Offer to delay a citation for a few months and not file it if the offender stays out of trouble for a set period of time.”*
- *“I’ve issued both juvenile and regular criminal citations to students and then offered to tear them up if their conduct and/or attendance is perfect for a specified amount of time. I will also work with staff or administrators to come up with a ‘punishment’ for students who are willing to take advantage of an alternative to arrest.”*

Juvenile Justice Diversion: Summary and Recommendations

- Two-thirds of Minnesota SROs report having some form of diversion available ranging from formal programs to informal agreements between the SRO and the student.
- Diverting youth engaged in low-level delinquency from formal contact with the juvenile justice system is a best practice.

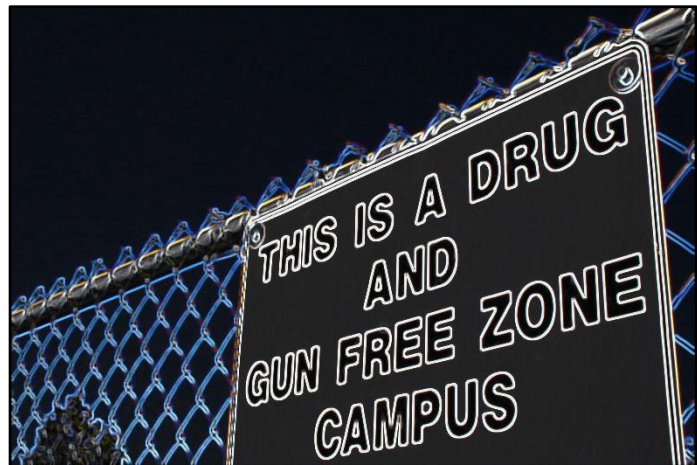
- Partnerships with community-based agencies can provide youth with opportunities for service, learning and accountability without the stigma or consequences associated with formal justice system involvement.
- **School administrations and SROs should work together to agree upon and establish alternative consequences for delinquent behavior at school to reduce the number of youth entering the justice system through arrest.**

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES

The federal government entered the arena of school safety issues in 1984 with the creation of *drug-free school zones*, and in 1990 with the establishment of *gun-free school zones*. In both instances, enhanced federal penalties could be applied if an individual was charged with possession of drugs or guns in schools or within a zone of 1,000 feet around a primary or secondary school.^{150, 151}

In 1994, the U.S. Congress passed the *Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA)*, which dictated a uniform response by schools to students' possession of a gun on school property. The act requires schools to expel students, for a period of not less than one year, if they are determined to have brought a gun to school or to any event under the control or supervision of the school. The act also requires that schools have policies whereby expelled youth will be referred to the criminal or juvenile justice system.¹⁵² States' receipt of federal education funds was contingent upon the creation and implementation of state policies consistent with the GFSA.

The GFSA has been given the moniker *zero tolerance* because it mandates a predetermined consequence for certain offenses. While the GFSA was initially limited to guns, explosives and devices that can fire projectiles, amendments broadened the bill to include any instrument that may be used as a weapon. Nationally, local school districts have further broadened the federal mandate to include drugs, alcohol, fighting, threats or even swearing.¹⁵³ Consequently, reports of students being expelled for minor or trivial actions are ubiquitous in the media.



Proponents of zero tolerance assert that the policy increases the consistency of school discipline and leads to improved school climate by removing the most troublesome students. Zero tolerance is also intended to serve as a deterrent by sending the message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated. There is, however, little empirical research to validate the effectiveness of these disciplinary measures.¹⁵⁴ A task force of the American Psychological Association (APA) which convened specifically to explore the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies stated: "It is problematic that despite 20 years of implementation and nearly 15 years of federal policy, the research base on zero tolerance is in no way sufficient to evaluate the impact of zero tolerance policy and practices on student behavior or school climate."¹⁵⁵

Opponents to zero tolerance point to studies showing that policies are upheld inconsistently and disparately applied to youth of color and special education students. This inequitable application of the rules, say opponents, breeds resentment among students.^{156,157} Schools with high suspension and expulsion rates report less satisfactory ratings of school climate and evidence of lower school-wide academic achievement. And, rather than reducing the likelihood of disruption, school suspension in general appears to predict higher future rates of misbehavior and suspension among those students who are suspended.¹⁵⁸

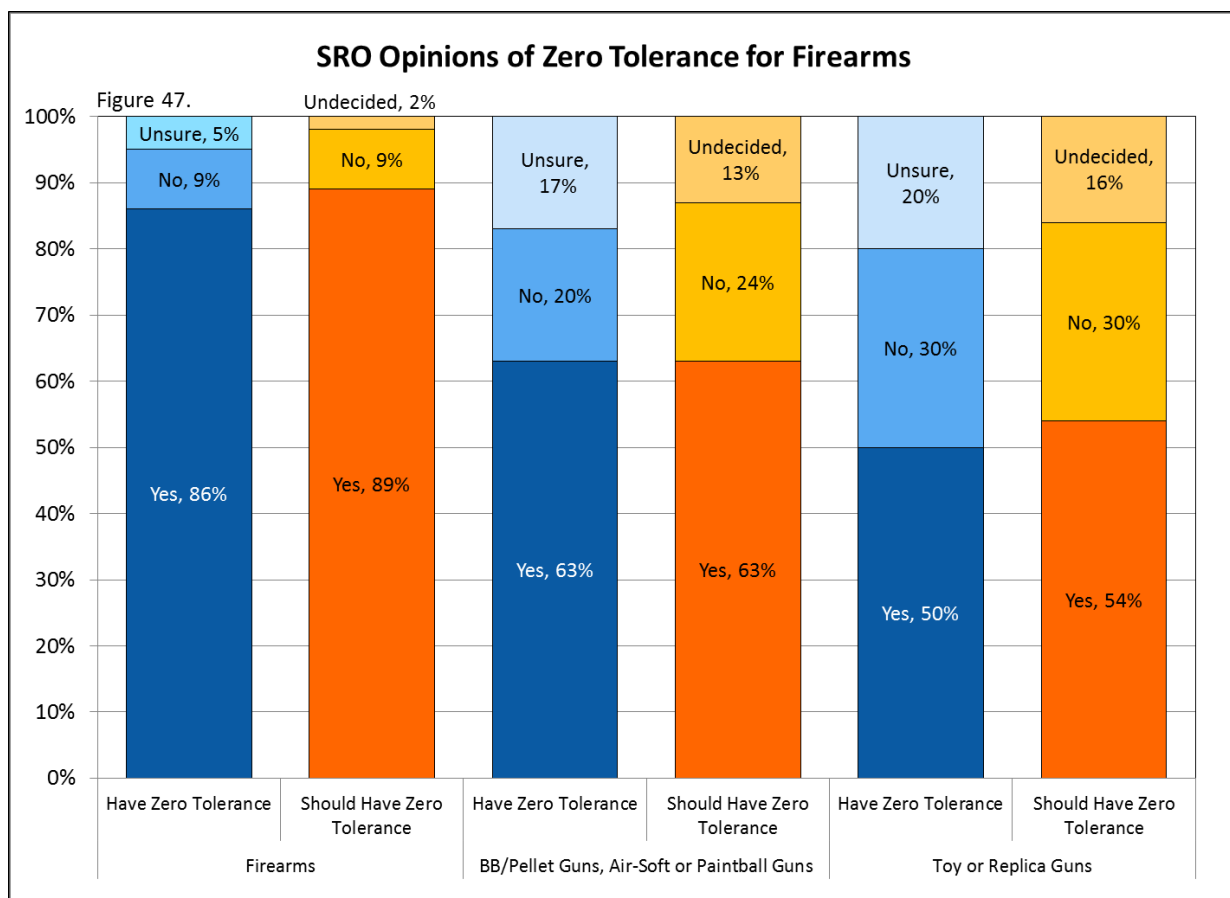
Finally, zero tolerance policies do not take into account what is known about youth brain development, maturation and decision-making, when lapses in judgment are the developmental norm.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, zero tolerance policies themselves do little to address the underlying reasons why youth bring weapons to school.¹⁶⁰ Opponents of zero tolerance policies strongly support the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions Systems (PBIS), trauma-sensitive training, and restorative justice practices with graduated sanctions. These address the root causes of behaviors and keep students connected to school.^{161,162}

Firearms

Minnesota SROs were asked to report whether their schools have certain behaviors for which students are automatically expelled from school, beginning with firearms and replicas. In addition, SROs were asked whether, in their opinion, schools *should* have a zero tolerance policy.

In the 2012-2013 school year, MDE reported 19 disciplinary incidents where a firearm was brought to school. Ten incidents involved handguns and nine involved long guns. Disciplinary incidents involving weapons of any kind are just under 2.5 percent of all disciplinary incidents and hand/long guns are involved in 1.4 percent of all weapons related incidents.¹⁶³

Eighty-six percent of respondents indicate that their schools have zero tolerance for firearms. Largely, Minnesota SROs express agreement that there should be a zero tolerance policy for firearms at school



(89%)—9 percent of officers do not support an automatic zero tolerance policy for firearms (Figure 47).

In the 2012-13 school year, MDE reported 105 disciplinary incidents related to pellet, BB, air gun or paintball guns.¹⁶⁴ Over six-in-10 SROs indicate their schools have zero tolerance policies for weapons fired by spring or air cartridges. A comparable percentage of SROs (63%) support zero tolerance policies for non-lethal, projectile-firing weapons. Conversely, nearly one-quarter of SROs (24%) do not feel there should be automatic expulsion for these items on school grounds.

Finally, officers were asked about zero tolerance for toy or replica guns, which generally cannot fire projectiles. Replica guns, noted one SRO, are unique from toys in that they are made to look very much like real firearms. In 2012-13, MDE reported 80 disciplinary incidents involving a replica or toy gun.¹⁶⁵

Half of SROs (50%) indicate that a zero tolerance policy exists for toy/replica guns. SROs were most divided as to whether they felt there should be a zero tolerance policy. Fifty-five percent are in favor and 30 percent are opposed.

Other Weapons

While federal zero tolerance policies pertain to firearms only, many schools have expanded zero tolerance to include other weapons, namely knives. In Minnesota schools, weapons related disciplinary incidents are driven by knives and other sharp implements. In 2012-13 there were 309 disciplinary incidents connected to a knife, 252 related to a pocket knife with a blade of 2½ inches or greater, and 401 related to a pocket knife with a blade less than 2½ inches. Finally, 133 incidents involved sharp objects that were not knives such as razor blades or Chinese stars.¹⁶⁶ Collectively, knives and sharp object resulted in 1,095 disciplinary incidents or just over 2 percent of all disciplinary incidents.

Overall, SROs were slightly more likely to state that there *should* be zero tolerance for knives and cutting implements than presently exist in school policies. Nearly half of all SROs (49%) feel there should be zero tolerance for knives and three-in-10 support zero tolerance for other cutting instruments (30%). The largest percentage of *undecided* officers (21%) surround zero tolerance for the possession of sharp objects and cutting instruments (Figure 48).

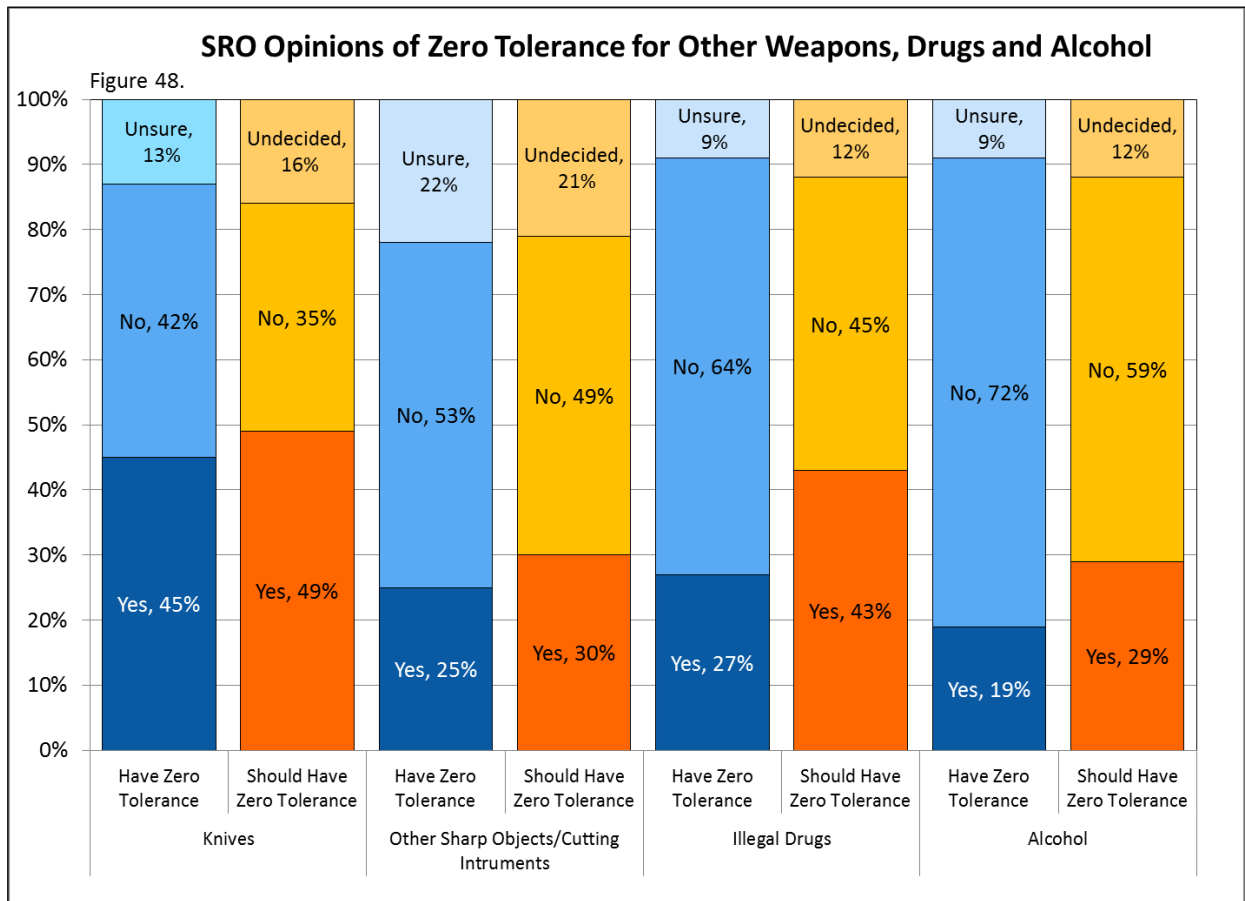
Nearly nine-in-10 SROs support zero tolerance for firearms at school. Less than half (49%) support zero tolerance for knives.

Alcohol and Drugs

Disciplinary incidents related to drugs and alcohol are more common than those for weapons. In 2012-13, there were 537 disciplinary incidents related to alcohol and 2,309 incidents related to illegal drugs. These 2,846 incidents account for 5.5 percent of total disciplinary incidents.¹⁶⁷

The area with the largest gap between policy and opinion for SROs is related to drugs and alcohol. SROs report that 27 percent of their schools presently have zero tolerance policies for illegal drugs, whereas 43 percent of officers feel there *should* be a zero tolerance policy (Figure 48). Alcohol follows a similar pattern with 19 percent of schools having a zero tolerance policy and nearly three-in-10 SROs (29%)

supporting zero tolerance policies for alcohol. Collectively, SROs support greater zero tolerance policy for drugs and alcohol than presently exist.



Perhaps not surprisingly, SROs are divided on the topic of zero tolerance. Numerous SROs provided comment that intent and the totality of the circumstances needs to be determined before implementing zero tolerance policies:

- *“It really depends on the item [weapon] and the manner in which it was used. I don't think you can just put a blanket over everything and say there needs to be zero tolerance.”*
- *“I don't like zero tolerance policies because each case should be evaluated individually. Expulsion may be appropriate for some seemingly minor infraction based on the circumstances.”*
- *“I believe each situation needs to be looked at independently.”*
- *“The intent needs to be considered. Some schools hide behind Zero Tolerance because they don't want to make tough decisions.”*

SROs are least likely to support zero tolerance policies related to alcohol (29%).

Zero Tolerance Policies: Summary and Recommendations

- Minnesota SROs are most likely to support zero tolerance policies for firearms (89%) and spring or air-fired weapons (63%). Just over half support zero tolerance for toy or replica guns (54%).
- Minnesota SROs are least likely to agree upon zero tolerance policies for alcohol (59%, No) and sharp items or cutting instruments other than knives (49%, No). Comments provided by numerous SROs favor the individual assessment of each situation rather than the use of blanket zero tolerance policies.
- **In the absence of strong evidence that zero tolerance policies enhance school safety, coupled with evidence of inequitable application, Minnesota should review the use of zero tolerance policies in schools especially related to incidents that do not involve firearms.**

Impact of SROs in Schools

A matter of considerable debate among policy makers and researchers alike is whether law enforcement-school partnerships have made academic institutions for youth safer. In order to fully assess the impact of SRO programs, one would need both a treatment period (when SROs are present in a school) and a control period (a period when no SROs are present), or data from a treatment school and a comparable control school.¹⁶⁸ In addition, the studies must have reliable outcome goals and data collection methods.¹⁶⁹ There is a need for systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of SROs in schools.¹⁷⁰

Conditions such as these rarely exist or the studies occur on such a small scale they cannot be applied generally to SRO programs as a whole. A preliminary intention of this report was to assess for the impact of SROs in Minnesota schools by exploring disciplinary data and referrals to law enforcement in schools with SROs compared to comparable schools without. Unfortunately, the Minnesota Department of Education Disciplinary Incident Reporting System (DIRS) does not have data over a sufficient period of time to allow for analysis.



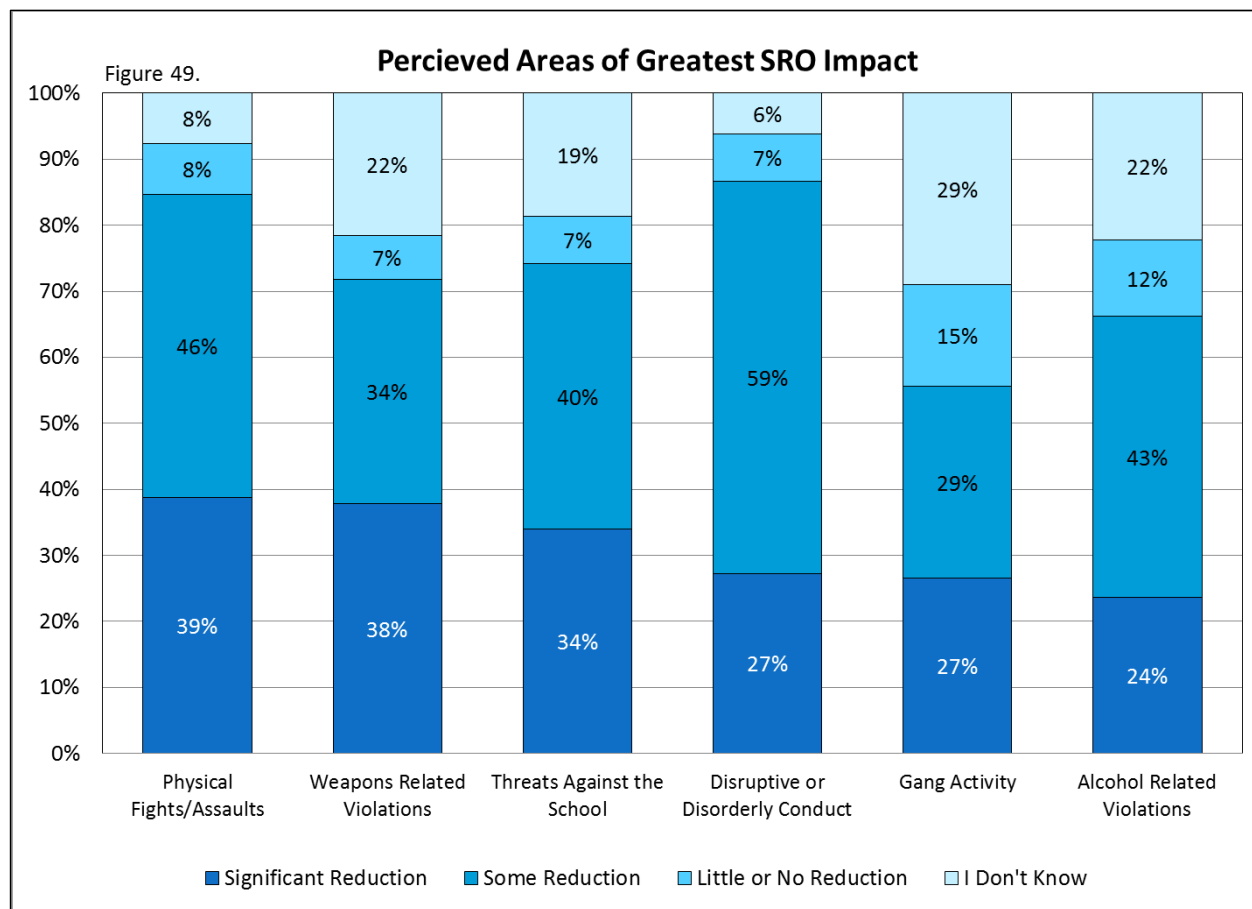
Consequently, it is often the case (this study included) that evaluations rely primarily on the perceptions of SROs themselves, school personnel, or students to determine program effectiveness. To date, there have been few, if any studies that have met the methodological rigor necessary to determine the impact of SRO programs.¹⁷¹ Studies of SRO effectiveness that measure safety outcomes show mixed results. Some show an improvement in safety and a reduction in crime; others show no change. There is research suggesting that although SRO programs do not significantly impact youth criminality, the presence of an officer nonetheless can enhance school safety. The presence of SROs may deter aggressive behaviors including student fighting, threats, and bullying, and may make it easier for school administrators to maintain order in the school and address disorderly behavior in a timely fashion.¹⁷²

A confounding variable in the analysis of SRO programs is that youth involvement in crime has been declining over the past 20 years, both inside and outside of schools. Nationally, juvenile arrests have declined 43 percent between the peak in 1996 and 2010. In Minnesota, juvenile arrests declined 55 percent between the peak in 1998 and 2011.¹⁷³ Again, while one study may point to this as evidence that SRO programs are reducing illegal acts at school, another will cite this as evidence that SROs in schools have had no overall effect on juvenile behavior. During the same era when SROs were entering schools, funding became available to increase school security equipment and much attention has been given to improving positive school climate. Isolating the effect of an SRO program can be very difficult if not planned carefully and measured objectively.

Greatest Impact

Generally, SROs perceive that they have a positive effect on schools. In 2001, a NASRO study found that 99 percent of SROs surveyed felt their presence at school improved school safety and prevented crime and violence.¹⁷⁴ Minnesota SRO survey participants were asked to rate whether they feel there has been any change to school issues or climate resulting from the presence of an SRO at their school(s). Officers selected from a list of pre-determined categories.

The areas in which the greatest number of officers perceive an effect of their presence are physical fights and disorderly conduct at school. In total, 85 percent of Minnesota SROs perceive at least some reduction in fights; 39 percent perceive a significant reduction. In total 86 percent of officers note at least *some reduction* in disruptive or disorderly conduct—a smaller number (27%) perceive a *significant reduction* (Figure 49).



Other categories in which Minnesota SROs perceive significant reductions due to their presence include weapons related violations (38%); threats against the school (34%); gang activity (27%); and alcohol related violations (24%).

Nationally, incidents of victimization at school have declined substantially since the mid-1990s. In the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, students ages

12-to-18 reported significantly lower rates of victimization at school in 2012 as compared to the peak years of 1992 and 1993:¹⁷⁵

- Self-reported violent crime ^m victimizations in schools declined from 91 per 1,000 students in 1993 to 29 per 1,000 students in 2012—a decline of 68 percent.
- Self-reported theft ⁿ victimizations in school declined from 114 per 1,000 students in 1992 to 24 per 1,000 students in 2012—a decline of 79 percent.
- The total rate of self-reported victimizations declined from 194 per 1,000 in 1993 to 52 per 1,000 students in 2012—a decline of 73 percent.
- Victimization rates in schools have rose between 2010 and 2012.

Nationally, students report significantly lower rates of victimization at school in 2010s as compared to the 1990s.

The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) is a comprehensive assessment of youth attitudes and behaviors given every three years to public school students in grades 6, 9 and 12. Numerous questions in the MSS are intended to evaluate student safety at school. Between 1998 and 2010, many indicators of school safety have improved from the perspective of Minnesota Students:^{176, 177}

- Fewer 9th graders report using drugs or alcohol before or during school in the past 12 months in 2010 than in 1998 (7% versus 14%).
- Fewer 9th graders report having been offered, sold or given illegal drugs at school in the past 12 months in 2010 than in 1998 (15% versus 26%).
- Fewer 9th graders report carrying a gun or other weapon at school in the past 30 days in 2010 than in 1998 (6% versus 10%).
- Fewer 9th graders report having been threatened at school by another student in the past 12 months in 2010 than in 1998 (19% versus 28%).
- In 1998, 91 percent of 9th graders *agreed or strongly agreed* that they feel safe at school; in 2010 responses were slightly higher at 93 percent.

^m Rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault and simple assault.

ⁿ Theft includes attempted and completed purse-snatching, completed pickpocketing, and all attempted and completed thefts, with the exception of motor vehicle thefts.

Most Satisfying

At the end of the survey, SROs were invited to share what they find most satisfying about their position. While many of these comments have been included throughout the report, this section illustrates the totality of the comments made.

Of the SROs who provided responses (n=189), the greatest number (63%) express that they most like getting to working with students. This includes establishing relationships and connections, getting to know students, and helping students every day (Figure 49). SROs express liking *“working with the youth, being with the kids, connections and relationships with youth, and building rapport and helping kids in need.”*

- *“I have had my ups and downs with the job of being an SRO, but at the same time I like the kids and want them to know there are people out there that care about them and are there to help if they need it. I guess that is why I keep going back!!!”*
- *“It is the most important job in law enforcement that I have ever done. I find it hard to believe that we went so many years without a specific position to build relationships with youth....This may be one of the most important positions we have.”*

In addition, nearly one-third of officers (32%) like that they have the opportunity to be a positive influence in students’ lives. They want to help students make good decisions, have a positive impact on their future, and make a difference in their lives:

[A satisfying aspect of being an SRO is...]

- *“Talking with them you know you are changing their lives for the better.”*
- *“Watching them change and develop and sometimes being a part of that change.”*
- *“Having an opportunity to affect the lives of kids who are at a crossroad as to what kind of person they are going to be.”*
- *“That I get to work with today’s youth and tomorrow’s future. Helping just one straighten their path is satisfying.”*
- *“The opportunity to see them change for the better year to year.”*

Figure 50. Most Satisfying Aspects of Being an SRO (%) n=189	
Most Satisfying	Percent
Working with, helping, or developing relationships with students	63%
Contributing to/seeing positive changes, better decisions or improved lives for students	32%
Being a role model, mentor, advisor or trusted adult for students	16%
Working with, helping, developing relationships with school staff	16%
Helping students/staff to see law enforcement in a new way; better perceptions	16%
Teaching or educating students	9%
Keeping students and staff safe and secure; contributing to a safe learning environment	7%
Being involved and connected to the community	7%

- *“I truly feel we have the opportunity to change the outlook or outcome of students substantially more than adults.”*

SROs feel a rewarding aspect of the job is being a role model to students; providing them with advice or a trusted adult, or being a mentor (16%):

- *“It’s good to know, especially in our community, that kids can have a positive mentor.”*
- *“Having them see me as someone they can trust.”*
- *“Being a good role model for the students.”*
- *“I don’t always know why but the students really look up to law enforcement. If you can treat them fairly and properly, even the kids with behavior problems will look up to you.”*

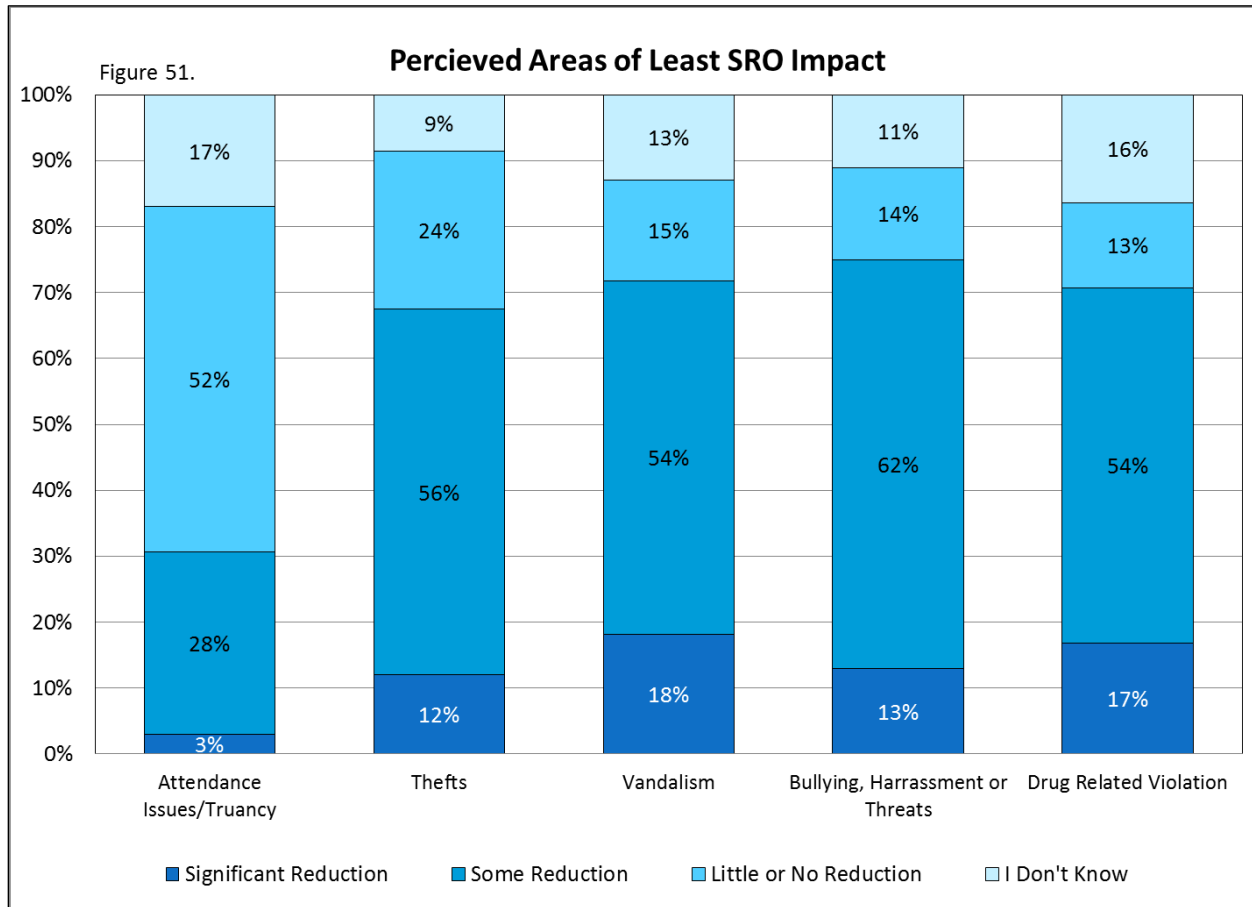
Finally, 16 percent of SROs state that working and developing relationships with school teachers and staff is a satisfying aspect of the job:

- *“Building relationships with staff, students and community.”*
- *“I love working with the students and staff...”*
- *“The position has allowed me to meet a lot of people that work in various other professions (social work, psychology, teachers, administrators) and that has really helped me round my own personality out. In the past I only worked with police officers for the most part...so it really helped me in my personal life to be able to see the perspectives, opinions, etc. of those that work in other professions.”*

Least Impact

Based on survey responses, the area where Minnesota SROs feel their presence has had the least impact is on attendance and truancy. Just over three-in-10 SROs articulate *some reduction* in these behaviors (31%) while over half of officers (52%) indicate *little to no reduction* (Figure 51).

Following attendance, Minnesota SROs are least likely to feel that the presence of SROs has resulted in a *significant reduction* on thefts (12%) or bullying, harassment or threats (13%). Seventeen percent of SROs feel a *significant reduction* has occurred in drug related violations and 18 percent perceive a *significant reduction* in vandalism. This is not to say SROs feel they have been ineffective in these areas—just that they have not been the greatest areas of impact. More than half of SROs feel they have contributed to *some reduction* in vandalism and drug violations (54%), thefts (56%), and bullying, harassment and threats (62%).



Of note is the relatively high percentage of SROs who indicate they *don't know* if their presence has had an effect on school issues. Said one officer: *"I don't have any data to compare to."* Clearly defining school safety goals and devising quality data collection methods are essential to assessing the impact of SRO programs. Minnesota agencies should take a role in helping define and measure objective outcomes for SRO programs. These data will help identify the impact of SRO programs on safety and student wellbeing.

Most Challenging

At the end of the survey, SROs were invited to share aspects of the job they find most challenging. While many of these have been shared throughout the report in the various topic sections, this portion of the report illustrates the totality of the comments made. Of the SROs who provided responses (n=180), the most common challenges (25%) are related to the inappropriate or inconsistent expectations placed upon them at schools, or conflicting demands between education and law enforcement roles (Figure 52).

Secondly, SROs find certain students challenging to work with, namely those who will not change their behavior despite interventions and those who are EBD or receiving special education services (18%).

A common challenge raised by SROs that did not emerge in any other area of the report is related to interactions with the parents and families of youth. Seventeen percent of SROs indicate parents are challenging, yet only two SROs indicate the need for training

on how to better work with and engage parents. Often a specific complaint or concern about parents or families was not indicated—all that was submitted under challenges was “parents” or “dealing with parents.” The following is a selection of comments shared by SROs:

“[It is challenging...]

- *“To work with parents who want to blame the system for their child’s issues.”*
- *“When parents refuse to work with SROs and schools to help their child.”*
- *“Parents who never seem to think their child did anything wrong.”*
- *“Parents who are the reason [their children] are the way they are!”*
- *“Parents not holding their child accountable for their actions.”*
- *“Many of the questionable/illegal habits I deal with are behaviors learned from the student’s home environment.”*
- *“Many parents have me on speed dial. They have lost the ability to work with one another or think for themselves. They immediately call me to resolve issues with their kid even if it is not a law enforcement issue or anything I am legally obligated to do.”*

Apparently, Minnesota SROs could benefit from training on how to effectively engage with parents, guardians and family members. However, the literature reveals few suggestions or resources regarding training content. In working with youth, SROs will necessarily work with families. Teachers, social workers, and others who routinely interact with families may need to be leveraged for best-practices training in how to develop trusting, non-adversarial relationships with the adults in students’ lives.

Figure 52. Most Challenging Aspects of Being an SRO (%) n=180	
Most Challenging	Percent
Inconsistent or inappropriate use or expectations of SROs; conflicting demands of education vs. law enforcement	25%
Challenging students; students who won’t change behavior; working with special education students	18%
Working with parents	17%
Too many roles or demands on time	17%
School staff or administrators; staff applying rules and expectations inconsistently	12%
Feeling isolated or undervalued from peers in law enforcement	6%

SROs report as an additional challenge that the position has too many roles or makes too many demands on their time (17%). Recall that “time management” was one of the pre-service training topics recommended by the federal COPS Office. SROs comment about being spread too thin, across too many schools or too large a student body. Several SROs lament balancing an investigations caseload with their school duties or patrol duties, or not having enough hours in the day to get their duties done:



- *“When you share your time between two schools you definitely hear about it, although not directly—more passively if one or the other school feels like they got more time that week.”*
- *“A challenge is making sure I devote enough time to each school and spend time following up on my cases in an appropriate amount of time....In a nutshell, the biggest challenge is time.”*
- *“Being busy every day all the time. It may not be big stuff, but a ton of little things.”*
- *“Always could have been somewhere ‘more’ to prevent something from happening but you can’t be in two places at the same time.”*

Finally, 12 percent of SROs report that working with school staff or administrations is a challenge. Working more collaboratively with school administrations, however, is an area where some SROs request additional training.

- *“Working with staff. Their minds are definitely more difficult to change on the role and presence of a police officer in the school. They are more set in their ways that a ‘police officer’ is who a person is, rather than what their profession is.”*
- *“Trying to collaborate with the school district, especially HR and their interpretation of FERPA and data privacy hindering us from acting with a common sense approach.”*
- *“School administrators often forget you are an officer of the law! They also think everything is an emergency!”*
- *“There are too many expectations in regard to pleasing admin. We [SROs] deal with the city council, chief, supervisors, school board, school superintendent, school principal, teachers, etc. It can be very difficult at times!”*

Impact of SROs in Schools: Summary and Recommendations

- Minnesota SROs are most likely to self-report contributing to a *significant reduction* in school fights and assaults (39%), weapons related violations (38%) and threats against the school (34%).
- Minnesota SROs are least likely to feel they have contributed to a *significant reduction* in bullying, harassment and threats (13%) and drug violations (12%). Over half of SROs (52%) feel their presence has contributed *little to no reduction* in truancy or attendance issues.
- **Collaboratively, Minnesota agencies should help define measures of success for SRO programs and develop data collection and assessment strategies using existing databases to further explore the impact of SROs on school safety and student wellbeing.**
- SROs report the most satisfying aspects of their job include working with youth and developing relationships with students. SROs also value contributing to a positive change for youth and helping them to make good decisions or turn their lives around.
- SROs report the least satisfying aspects of their job are the inconsistent or inappropriate use of SROs in schools, and the conflicting demands of their schools and law enforcement agencies. In addition, some SROs perceive students' parents or guardians as disengaged or difficult. **Training on how to establish trusting, non-adversarial relationships with students' family members is a potential need.**

Conclusion

The presence of law enforcement in schools has become commonplace over the past twenty years. In Minnesota, nearly three-in-10 public schools are reported to have contact with school resource officers. In high schools, the number is as high as six-in-10.

The results of this study highlight the perceived benefits and obstacles of law enforcement in schools from the perspective of the officers and deputies engaged in the work. Minnesota SROs overwhelmingly report that they enjoy working with youth and school staff and feel they are used appropriately in schools. Many report it is the most rewarding and valuable law enforcement position they have held. But there are challenges. Clearly defining and adhering to the role of SROs in schools; adequate training to understand and navigate relationships with youth, families and school administrators; and sufficient time and resources to dedicate to each of the schools they serve are just a few of them.

Based on the responses shared by Minnesota SROs and a review of recommended practices in the literature, the following broad recommendations are indicated to enhance the quality and consistency of SRO programs in Minnesota:

- Law enforcement agencies should appoint only those officers who actively wish to work with youth in a school setting to the position of SRO. The length of the assignment should be long enough to allow officers to establish positive working relationships and learn the unique nuances of working in this environment. If possible, other duties in the department should be limited or reasonably allocated to allow sufficient time to serve schools.
- All schools and law enforcement agencies should have a Memorandum of Understanding in place that clearly states the roles and duties of SROs. MOUs should address many issues that can potentially cause strain between law enforcement and schools including the SRO's role in school discipline, illegal conduct, search and seizure, interrogations, and parental notification. Minnesota ought to create a template MOU that can be modified by schools and law enforcement agencies, but which identifies all the essential elements of MOUs to protect officers and schools from legal liability and reduce role ambiguity.
- SROs should feel that they are well trained and adequately prepared to work in schools. This includes pre-service training and ongoing education related to youth and school-related issues. In addition to training on the unique safety and security needs in schools, SROs should be trained in youth and adolescent development and psychology, mental health and trauma, special education, counseling and mentoring, and working with families. Minnesota should consider the creation of a standard SRO training curriculum or certification to ensure all SROs have baseline knowledge and skills in these areas.
- Establishing and preserving relationships is an essential element in the success of SRO programs. These relationships are developed organically but can be protected by clear communication and cross-training. SROs should have the opportunity to attend certain trainings for educators, especially those related to behavior management and working with special education students. Reciprocally, school administrators and staff should be educated in the role of SROs in schools and legal limitations for officers.

- A goal of SRO programs should be to work in a prevention capacity to address the conditions in schools that give rise to crime or vulnerability. The role of SROs in the enforcement of school rules or codes of conduct should be minimal. Whenever possible, SROs and schools should work together to be sure that the use of formal, justice-system response is limited to illegal acts that pose a true threat to public safety. The creation of informal and formal diversion opportunities, use of restorative justice techniques, and positive school climate initiatives can potentially reduce the number of Minnesota youth entering the justice system for school-related issues.
- Finally, little has been done in Minnesota to evaluate the impact or effectiveness of law enforcement in schools. The state should explore data collection strategies that measure changes to school disciplinary incidents, referrals to law enforcement, and other school climate indicators based on the presence of SROs. Data evaluation and research should be grounded in scientific method, have objective outcome measures, and account for other factors potentially influencing school safety and crime.

The findings of this study demonstrate that SROs in Minnesota find value in their positions and the work they do in schools. SROs believe their presence has contributed to reduced crime and conflict at schools, reduced threats against the school, and improved relationships between law enforcement and youth. Opportunities exist in Minnesota to further explore the role and impact of SROs in schools from the perspectives of school administrators and staff, students and community members.

Appendix A: Participating Law Enforcement Agencies with SROs

The following 126 Minnesota law enforcement agencies submitted one or more completed SRO surveys for this project:

- Albert Lea Police Department
- Anoka County Sheriff
- Anoka Police Department
- Apple Valley Police Department
- Austin Police Department
- Barnesville Police Department
- Baxter Police Department
- Belle Plaine Police Department
- Bemidji Police Department
- Benson Police Department
- Bigfork Police Department
- Blackduck Police Department
- Bloomington Police Department
- Brainerd Police Department
- Brooklyn Center Police Department
- Brooklyn Park Police Department
- Burnsville Police Department
- Cambridge Police Department
- Carver County Sheriff
- Champlin Police Department
- Clay County Sheriff
- Clearwater County Sheriff
- Coleraine Police Department
- Columbia Heights Police Department
- Coon Rapids Police Department
- Cottage Grove Police Department
- Crosby Police Department
- Detroit Lakes Police Department
- Dodge County Sheriff
- Douglas County Sheriff
- Duluth Police Department
- Eagan Police Department
- Eagle Bend Police Department
- Eden Prairie Police Department
- Edina Police Department
- Elk River Police Department
- Fairmont Police Department
- Faribault Police Department
- Farmington Police Department
- Forest Lake Police Department
- Fridley Police Department
- Golden Valley Police Department
- Goodhue County Sheriff
- Grand Rapids Police Department
- Hennepin County Sheriff
- Hermantown Police Department
- Hopkins Police Department
- Howard Lake Police Department
- Hutchinson Police Department
- Inver Grove Heights Police Department
- Isanti Police Department
- Jordan Police Department
- Kandiyohi County Sheriff
- Kasson Police Department
- Lake City Police Department
- Lakes Area Police Department
- Lakeville Police Department
- Leech Lake Tribal Police Department
- Lino Lakes Police Department
- Little Falls Police Department
- Mankato Department of Public Safety
- Maple Grove Police Department
- Marshall Police Department
- Mendota Heights Police Department
- Milaca Police Department
- Mille Lacs County Sheriff
- Minneapolis Police Department
- Minnetonka Police Department
- Minnetrista Public Safety Department
- Moorhead Police Department
- Mounds View Police Department
- New Brighton Department of Public Safety
- New Hope Police Department
- New Prague Police Department
- New Ulm Police Department
- North Branch Police Department
- North Saint Paul Police Department
- Northfield Police Department
- Oak Park Heights Police Department

- Oakdale Police Department
- Owatonna Police Department
- Park Rapids Police Department
- Pequot Lakes Police Department
- Pike Bay Police Department
- Pine County Sheriff
- Pine River Police Department
- Plainview Police Department
- Plymouth Police Department
- Pope County Sheriff
- Prior Lake Police Department
- Ramsey County Sheriff
- Red Wing Police Department
- Redwood Falls Police Department
- Richfield Police Department
- Robbinsdale Police Department
- Rochester Police Department
- Rogers Police Department
- Rosemount Police Department
- Roseville Police Department
- Saint Cloud Police Department
- Saint Peter Police Department
- Sartell Police Department
- Savage Police Department
- Olmsted County Sheriff
- Shakopee Police Department
- Sherburne County Sheriff
- Spring Lake Park Police Department
- St. Paul Park Police Department
- St. Louis Park Police Department
- St. Paul Police Department
- Staples Police Department
- Todd County Sheriff
- Wabasha Police Department
- Waite Park Police Department
- Waseca Police Department
- Washington County Sheriff
- Waterville Police Department
- Wayzata Police Department
- White Bear Lake Police Department
- White Earth Tribal Police Department
- Willmar Police Department
- Windom Police Department
- Winthrop Police Department
- Woodbury Police Department
- Worthington Police Department
- Wright County Sheriff

Appendix B: Non-Participating Law Enforcement Agencies with SROs

The following 32 law enforcement agencies indicated the presence of one or more SROs in the first survey but had no complete surveys submitted by individual SROs:

- Alden Police Department
- Blaine Police Department
- Buffalo Police Department
- Chaska Police Department
- Cold Spring/Richmond Police Department
- Crystal Police Department
- Dakota County Sheriff
- Deer River Police Department
- Fergus Falls Police Department*
- Fisher Police Department
- Fond du Lac Tribal Police Department
- Hastings Police Department
- Hibbing Police Department
- Isanti County Sheriff
- Lester Prairie Police Department
- Mahnommen County Sheriff
- Maplewood Police Department⁺
- McLeod County Sheriff
- Morris Police Department
- Orono Police Department
- Pelican Rapids Police Department
- Pennington County Sheriff
- Pipestone County Sheriff
- Princeton Police Department*
- Red Lake Tribal Police Department
- Sauk Rapids Police Department*
- Sibley County Sheriff
- South St. Paul Police Department[#]
- St. Joseph Police Department*
- Stillwater Police Department*
- Thief River Falls Police Department
- Winona Police Department

*Incomplete surveys submitted. Excluded from analysis.

⁺Position in transition. Unable to answer survey questions.

[#]Survey submitted after closing deadline. Excluded from analysis

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