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THE EXPANSION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN A FLORIDA COUNTY:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Criminal Justice
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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of school shootings, policymakers presented the expansion of school resource officers (SROs) in the nation's schools as a method for keeping students safe. Recently, policing in the United States has come under increased scrutiny, and several school districts across the country cancelled their SRO contracts with law enforcement agencies. Notably, these contradictory decisions have been made with limited empirical knowledge surrounding, the roles, preparedness, and impact of SROs. A county in Florida substantially expanded its SRO program in the 2016-17 school year creating a new unit within the local sheriff's office and an opportunity to investigate these topics. A convergent parallel mixed methods design was applied to examine this new unit, consisting of a quantitative strand using interrupted time series analysis to assess the new program's effect on school-based arrests and Baker Act apprehensions, and a qualitative strand collecting and analyzing participant observations of training requirements and in-depth interviews with the SROs to explore their responsibilities, roles, and preparation for the position. Qualitative findings demonstrate that the primary role of the SROs is safety and security, while some also engage in a secondary role of engaging in positive interactions with the school community. Ambiguity exists surrounding execution of these roles, with the SROs relying a great deal on other relevant actors during decision-making. SROs identified the importance of careful selection for the position, training requirements are described, and problems with the training are identified. Contrary to this study's hypotheses, quantitative results show that the new unit did not have a statistically significant impact on overall school-based arrests, but

disaggregating the data showed a significant impact on felony arrests. Similarly, there was no statistically significant impact on overall Baker Act apprehensions of students, however, there is preliminary evidence of an impact on elementary school-aged students.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On December 14, 2012, a lone gunman murdered 20 first graders and 6 staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Response to the massacre of so many young children was swift and immediate, but the narrative did not initially focus on gun control or the gunman's mental health. The National Rifle Association created a National School Shield Task Force calling for more armed personnel and school resource officers (SROs) in the nation's schools to improve safety (Hutchinson, 2013). In a remarkably similar response, executive actions taken by President Obama called for increased funding of SRO programs. Soon after, the COPS Office awarded \$45 million to law enforcement agencies across the country to fund an additional 356 SROs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013). Even before the tragedy at Sandy Hook, some academics suggested that SROs should be present at every school (e.g., Newman et al., 2004).

Although the media coverage surrounding Sandy Hook eventually died down, on February 14, 2018, a former student entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and carried out another mass shooting. In the aftermath, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission (MSD Commission) was created to investigate the tragedy, identify lessons to be learned, and make recommendations to policymakers for improving school safety (MSD Commission, 2019). A law enforcement perspective dominated the MSD Commission (ACLU of Florida, 2020). The chair and vice chair of the MSD Commission were a sheriff and chief of police. Eight out of sixteen commission appointees were either current or former law

enforcement officers (LEOs), while only one appointee was a mental health professional. The Florida legislature adopted many of the MSD Commission's recommendations, resulting in Florida being the first state to require armed staff or SROs in every public school (Whitaker et al., 2019). In the 2018-19 fiscal year alone, it cost Florida taxpayers over \$225 million to assign more SROs and armed personnel in the state's public schools (ACLU of Florida, 2020). Localities provided an additional \$157.6 million to fund more police in schools. These extensive costs are not limited to the state of Florida. A review of state expenditures and legislation across the U.S. in the months after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School estimated that over \$1 billion was added to school security budgets with a substantial portion devoted to hiring SROs (Phenicie, 2018; Whitaker et al., 2019).

Kupchik (2010) argues that no one seems to be asking the critical question of whether police officers *ought to be* in schools. Nolan (2015) also criticized the fact that much of the research and discussion surrounding school policing frames SRO programs as common-sense responses, rather than critically assessing whether they should be adopted in the first place. Indeed, policymakers seem to assume that a LEO on a school campus will improve safety. The MSD Commission's (2019a) initial report provides no critical discussion regarding the need for SROs or any of the empirical research surrounding the impact of SROs. However, the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School serves as a crucial reminder of the limitations of relying on an SRO for school safety. Although a full-time SRO was present on the high school's campus the day of the massacre, 17 students and staff were murdered. The MSD Commission (2019a) acknowledged that the SRO assigned to the high school was derelict in his duty,

failed to act according to law enforcement training, and hid while the gunman wounded and killed several students and staff members. Additionally, the SRO provided erroneous information and inappropriate instructions to responding law enforcement agencies which further hindered the response. The MSD Commission also found that even if the SRO had entered the building to attempt to stop the gunman, he arrived 1 minute and 39 seconds after the first shots were fired, and 21 victims had already been shot. The MSD Commission (2019a) concluded that “This makes clear that seconds matter and that SROs cannot be relied upon as the only protection for schools. Even if there is a rapid response by an SRO, it is insufficient in and of itself to safeguard students and teachers.” (p. 97). Despite these findings, later in the report, the MSD Commission advocates that one SRO per campus is inadequate, provides a recommended model for SRO staffing ratios, and makes recommendations for additional funds to be allocated to hiring more SROs.

Recently, there has been a substantial shift in how SROs are perceived. In the wake of high-profile police killings of Black citizens in the spring of 2020, there has been increased scrutiny of policing, including questioning of whether police should have a role in the nation’s schools (Balingit et al., 2020). This led to several school districts across the country (e.g., Minneapolis, Denver, San Jose) cancelling their SRO contracts with law enforcement agencies (Angst, 2020; Balingit et al., 2020). Importantly, these decisions by policymakers to expand or cancel SRO programs have been made with limited empirical knowledge surrounding the roles, preparedness, and impact of SROs, indicating a critical need for research examining these subjects to better inform the ongoing debate. The available studies do not thoroughly explore SROs’ perceptions of their training and duties, nor is there a developed body of research assessing the formal

actions undertaken by SROs within the school environment. With the federal government, states, and localities allocating a great deal of resources to SRO programs it is essential that policymakers and practitioners fully understand the implications of assigning SROs to schools for school staff, students, and the SROs themselves.

This mixed methods study addresses the experiences, perceptions, and impact of members of an SRO program that was integrated and expanded in one Florida County in August 2016. A convergent design is used allowing for the parallel collection of quantitative and qualitative data which is analyzed separately and then merged to develop a more complete understanding of the study's findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this dissertation, qualitative data was collected via interviews and observations to explore the experiences and perceptions of the SROs. Secondary analyses of quantitative data were utilized to assess whether the creation and expansion of the SRO program affected the number of school-based arrests and Baker Act apprehensions from the 2013-14 school year through the 2018-19 school year. Both types of data were collected and analyzed to bring greater insight into the SRO position than would be obtained by either type of data separately. Results of this dissertation add to the inchoate body of empirical research on SROs' perceptions of their job, training requirements, and impact on student outcomes, while also providing useful information to policymakers, schools, and law enforcement agencies regarding the possible consequences of expanding their presence in the schools.

Specifically, this mixed methods dissertation is guided by four research questions exploring SROs and their impact on their assigned schools, as well as a mixing of the two strands allowing for the synthesis and integration of the two parallel components.

Specifically, the qualitative research questions ask: 1) What are the responsibilities, duties, and/or roles of the SROs? And 2) How are SROs prepared for undertaking these responsibilities? The quantitative research questions ask: 3) Does the expansion of SROs affect the number of school-based arrests? And 4) Does the expansion of SROs affect the number of school-based Baker Act apprehensions? Results from the separate analyses of the qualitative and quantitative strands are integrated in the final chapter so that each separate strand informs the other strand to develop a more thorough understanding of SROs' responsibilities and preparation, as well as their impact on formal social control within the schools.

Chapter 2 describes the broader problem in school safety and discipline known as the school-to-prison pipeline and the research analyzing SROs' contributions to this problem. The chapter details what is known about the history of SROs, their expected roles within the schools, and SRO recruitment and training. Next, the literature regarding the consequences of SRO utilization for criminalization of school misconduct and Baker Act apprehensions is reviewed. The substantial limitations present in studies of SROs are then identified, providing a justification for the current study.

Chapter 3 consists of an overview of the theory and research informing the quantitative strand of the dissertation. Black's (1971) general theory of arrest is described, and the research supporting the theory is reviewed. Next, the theory's application in arrest decision-making for juvenile suspects is discussed. Police responses when encountering people with mental illness are then explored. Subsequently, the influence of the school context for SRO decision-making is examined. The chapter ends

with the theoretical framework guiding the hypotheses of the quantitative research questions.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the research methods selected and used in the current study. The convergent parallel mixed methods design is described and justified. The research questions, objectives, and hypotheses are then detailed. The site and participants in the study are described, and the procedures for selecting the participants are outlined. Qualitative data collection consisting of 43 interviews with SROs and their sergeants and participant observations of 18 training sessions are described, along with the analysis plan. The data and plan used for the interrupted time series analyses in the quantitative strand are also described.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the qualitative analyses. Qualitative description and thematic analysis generated six categorical themes addressing the relevant research questions and objectives. These findings provide insight into the roles, responsibilities, and activities of the SROs, SRO decision-making, and preparation for the SRO position.

Subsequently, the quantitative results are presented in Chapter 6. Univariate and bivariate analyses examine relationships at the individual, case-level. Using six years of data, interrupted time series analyses were then performed to assess whether the creation and expansion of the county's SRO unit had a statistically significant effect on school-based arrests and Baker Act apprehensions.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the qualitative findings and quantitative results. These findings and results are merged for purposes of additional analyses and comparison. The implications of the study are discussed, followed by a review of the

limitations of the research. A discussion of directions for future research is provided, and final conclusions posited.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

School resource officers (SROs)¹ are one facet of a broader problem identified in both juvenile justice and education research as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” There is no universally agreed upon or consistently provided definition of the school-to-prison pipeline. Most descriptions recognize the pipeline as a phenomenon where overly punitive disciplinary responses to school-based offenses increase the likelihood of students’ involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system. The term is also frequently used as a metaphor to characterize the trend towards increased criminalization of school misconduct, the increased reliance by school officials on the justice system to respond to student misbehavior, and the related consequences that ensue (e.g., Heitzeg, 2018; Krezmien et al., 2010).

The pipeline is associated with school officials’ overuse of exclusionary discipline in response to student misbehavior. Exclusionary discipline practices include out-of-school suspension and expulsion. These practices are deemed “exclusionary” because the student is removed from their usual classroom(s). At one time expulsions were considered the most serious action that could be taken against a student (Rosen, 2005). However, for infractions that could also be considered delinquent/criminal offenses, school officials may refer students to law enforcement. Relatedly, the regular presence of SROs on campuses means that there may automatically be a justice system response to

¹ As will be discussed later in this chapter, not all school-based law enforcement officers are considered SROs or use the SRO title. For ease of discussion, “SRO” is used to refer to all law enforcement officers assigned to a school.

school misbehavior, and regardless of the actions taken by the school administration, SROs may choose to arrest or petition the student. When this scenario occurs, students experience double the punishment for school-related misbehavior: exclusionary discipline doled out by school officials alongside punishment doled out by the juvenile or criminal justice systems.

Accordingly, entry into the school-to-prison pipeline may occur via two pathways. When students are excluded from their school through suspension or expulsion, entry into the pipeline may occur via the indirect pathway. In contrast, when there is a justice system response to school misbehavior, students may enter the pipeline directly. Importantly, these pathways are not mutually exclusive as exclusionary discipline may at times coincide with a law enforcement response to the same school-based incident. Whichever pathway is examined, the empirical evidence has been mounting over the last two decades regarding the existence of the pipeline and the resulting negative outcomes for students. Despite this, the body of research exploring the direct pathway is far less developed, especially surrounding the focus of the current study, SROs.

Entry Into the Pipeline

Exclusionary discipline practices act as a mechanism for indirect entry into the school-to-prison pipeline. When a student receives an out-of-school suspension or expulsion they may be left unsupervised to spend their time as they wish, allowing for a greater opportunity to engage in deviant behavior. For school-based incidents that can also be classified as a crime, school officials may refer students to the juvenile or criminal justice system, or alternatively, SROs may arrest students in response to the

incident. This means that students may also enter the pipeline directly via justice system personnel responding to their school misbehavior, a focus of the current study. There are many media accounts of seemingly outrageous arrests of students as young as five-years-old for incidents occurring at school (for a review see McCurdy, 2018). Nonetheless, the data on student arrests and referrals to the justice system are limited, resulting in less empirical research exploring direct entry into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Available national datasets provide an inconsistent picture of student arrests and referrals to the justice systems. For example, the 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection reflects that over 290,600 K-12 students were referred to law enforcement or arrested for school-based incidents (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In contrast, data from the *School Survey on Crime and Safety* (SSOCS) collected during the same school year (2015-16) show that 47 percent of schools reported one or more incidents to the police resulting in over 449,000 referrals to law enforcement (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention releases a yearly report on national juvenile arrest numbers, however, since the report relies on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, data are not available on whether a juvenile arrest occurred at school (Puzzanchera, 2020).

Relevant to the current study, Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice (FDJJ) publicly releases data on juvenile arrests occurring at school via an interactive dashboard on their website (FDJJ, n.d.a). An examination of juvenile arrests during the 2018-19 school year indicates that there was a total of 8,174 arrests of juveniles at Florida's schools, representing approximately 20 percent of all juvenile arrests in the state. The reported data only includes juveniles aged 10-17 and in 6th through 12th grades, also

excluding arrests for violation of probation. Importantly, Florida's criminal statutes do not specify a minimum age of arrest, meaning children younger than 10 and in elementary school can legally be arrested or referred to the juvenile justice system. Additionally, since high school students may be older than 17 these numbers likely underreport the number of student arrests, especially since arrest rates for young adults aged 18-20 are greater than those for juveniles aged 15-17 (Puzzanchera, 2020).

In addition to juvenile arrest data, FDJJ publicly releases information regarding civil citations, prearrest diversion initiatives, and other alternatives to arrest (FDJJ, n.d.b.). The interactive dashboard allows for the disaggregation of data based on whether the underlying incident was a school-based offense. In the 2018-19 school year, 4,387 juveniles were issued an alternative to arrest stemming from a school-based incident, representing approximately 46 percent of all such actions in the state that year. Therefore, during the 2018-19 school year at least 12,561 students were referred to the juvenile justice system via arrest or an alternative to arrest for a school-based incident, comprising 25 percent of total actions. Critical to the current study, the available national and state data do not indicate the source of justice system referrals or arrests, meaning there is no information on the contribution of SROs to justice system referral numbers state- or nationwide.

One reason for the lack of empirical research investigating the direct pathway of the school-to-prison pipeline is the relatively recent recognition of the phenomenon. Many large longitudinal data collection efforts did not inquire as to whether an offense placing a young person in the juvenile or criminal justice systems occurred at school so that most studies are unable to parse out the specific impact of justice system responses to

school-based offenses. A single study was located assessing the differential impact of arrests occurring at school versus those occurring in the community. Brancale and colleagues (2019) combined FDJJ and Florida Department of Education data from 2004 through 2013 to empirically examine this issue among first-time juvenile arrestees. Results demonstrated that first-time arrestees for school-based offenses experienced an approximately 3 percent lower rate of rearrest within a year of the arrest compared to the juveniles with first-time community arrests. An analysis of the characteristics of schools found to “over-arrest” students (as evidenced by a higher arrest rate in schools compared to community arrest rates) showed a higher percentage of students with disabilities and a higher rate of exclusionary discipline policies. Two critical limitations to the study were recognized by the authors. First, data did not include whether an SRO was assigned to the school or arrested the student. Second, the study only examined arrests, and did not include other methods for referral such as civil citations or notices to appear, which may also funnel students into the juvenile justice system.

Disparate Impact of the Pipeline

Advocacy groups have voiced concern surrounding *who* appears to be most impacted by the pipeline (Advancement Project, 2005; Children’s Defense Fund, 2007; Justice Policy Institute, 2020). A review of research surrounding the pipeline indicates that some populations of students are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline and referrals to the justice system, and consequently, are more likely to travel through the pipeline. Accordingly, the exclusionary discipline practices and law enforcement responses to school misbehavior that have become commonplace over the

last few decades may be contributing to both educational inequality and a further widening of disparities found in the justice system.

A great deal of empirical support exists surrounding exclusionary discipline practices disproportionately impacting students of color, but especially Black students (Blake et al., 2015; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Fabelo et al., 2011; Finn & Servoss, 2015; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Shollenberger, 2015; Skiba et al., 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Although there is substantially less empirical support, similar trends are suggested in analyses of student arrests and referrals to law enforcement. Analyses of the Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2015-16 school year indicates that Black students represented 15 percent of the student population but comprised 31 percent of school-based arrests and justice system referrals (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Unfortunately, since the Civil Rights Data Collection combines referrals and arrests at schools, there is no national data regarding the specific contribution of SROs.

A substantial body of evidence has accrued demonstrating that students with disabilities are also disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline practices (Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen et al., 2015; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The same students are also experiencing disproportionate entanglement with the juvenile justice system, leading to a greater possibility of direct entry into the school-to-prison pipeline. The 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection revealed that although students with disabilities made up 12 percent of the total student population, they consisted of 28 percent of the students referred to law enforcement or arrested at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Using a combination of the 2013-14 and 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection, further

analyses by the ACLU indicated that the presence of SROs influenced the arrest rate of students with disabilities (Whitaker et al., 2019). Nationally, schools without SROs had an average arrest rate for students with disabilities of 17 per 10,000 students. In contrast, schools with an SRO had an average arrest rate for students with disabilities of 51 per 10,000 students. When considering the intersectionality of race, gender, and disability in student arrests the data are even more grim. Nationally, Black boys with disabilities had the highest overall school-based arrest rate of any subgroup of students at 64 per 10,000 students. In 13 states, the arrest rate of Black boys with disabilities exceeded 100 per 10,000 students. Important to the current study, data from the state of Florida were not included in any of the analyses due to a great deal of missing data and identified discrepancies in Florida's reported numbers to the U.S. Department of Education.

Of particular interest to the current study are the experiences of students with mental illness who may be classified as a student with a disability. It is important to note that much of the research examining the relationship between exclusionary discipline or school-based arrests and disability status do not disaggregate by type of disability and are frequently unclear as to whether diagnosed mental illnesses are included in classifications of "students with disabilities." The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) (IDEA) requires states to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with a disability, meaning the IDEA's codified definitions provide some guidance when examining federal data. Under the IDEA, "child with a disability" is a very broad umbrella term covering a wide array of possible disabilities including specific learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia), other health impairments (e.g., ADHD), autism, emotional disturbance (e.g., bipolar disorder), speech or language impairment, visual impairment,

hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, intellectual disability (e.g., Down syndrome), and traumatic brain injury. This definition means that analyses that do not, or are unable to, disaggregate disability classifications may be masking substantial disparities within disability diagnoses.

Only a handful of studies could be located demonstrating this issue, with only one examining arrest. Fabelo and colleagues' (2011) longitudinal study of Texas disciplinary practices disaggregated student data, with the added benefit of examining whether there were any differences in both exclusionary discipline practices and contact with the juvenile justice system between types of disabilities. Results indicated that students identified as having an emotional disturbance experienced the highest rate of disciplinary actions of *any* category examined in the study. Ninety percent of these students had at least one disciplinary action from 7th through 12th grade, and half of the students experienced these actions 11 or more times. When controlling for over 80 variables in their multivariate analyses, a student's classification as emotionally disturbed resulted in a 24 percent higher probability of being subject to exclusionary discipline. In comparison, the probability of exclusionary discipline for students with a physical disability, mental retardation, or autism were 9 to 64 percent *lower* than students without a disability. When examining contact with the juvenile justice system, the study showed that nearly half (48%) of the students classified with an emotional disturbance had contact with the juvenile justice system. In comparison, 13 percent of students without a disability had contact with the juvenile justice system over the eight-year study period. Unfortunately, the study was unable to investigate the influence of SROs on the observed outcomes.

Pertinent to the current study, students with a diagnosed mental illness such as schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, or bipolar disorder, are included in the emotionally disturbed or emotional disability classification. Accordingly, there is the critical question of whether mental illness among students is being criminalized within school systems. The studies discussed above are unable to draw any causal conclusions. Under the IDEA such a practice is unlawful, and some school officials recognize the protection provided to students. In a national survey of school administrators, 19 percent of respondents identified policies on disciplining special education students as a factor limiting their efforts to reduce or prevent crime at their school (Diliberti et al., 2019). Nonetheless, some scholars (e.g., Losen et al., 2015) argue that if schools were abiding by the mandates of the IDEA and meeting the individualized needs of emotionally disturbed students, the expectation would be that such students would experience exclusionary discipline and justice system referrals at similar rates to the general student population.

With no available data allowing for an assessment of the direct contribution of SROs to the disproportionate arrest and referral rates of students with disabilities, it is difficult to examine how and why such disparities are regularly occurring. However, some scholarly investigations provide preliminary explanations. Casella's (2003) ethnographic study of two high schools demonstrated that school officials would label students as "dangerous" due to a psychological diagnosis. School officials would then use these preconceived determinations of "dangerousness" when justifying the suspension or arrest of the student in response to misbehavior. Casella (2003) observed that many of the incidents resulting in a student's arrest for breach of peace by the SRO could not be

labeled as “dangerous.” This means that stigma surrounding certain mental illnesses may contribute to disproportionate responses to misbehavior.

Another study conducted by May and colleagues (2012) explored the perceptions of SROs towards students receiving special education services. Survey results were illuminating for considerations of why students with disabilities are disproportionately arrested or referred to the justice system. The SROs responding to the survey estimated that approximately one-third of the law-related incidents they responded to at school involved special education students. Additionally, 55 percent of the SROs believed that special education students were disproportionately responsible for the problem behaviors at their school, and 85 percent believed that special education students used their status to avoid accountability for their problem behaviors. Most of the SROs (79%) disagreed that “students receiving special education services should receive less punitive treatment for their problem behaviors” (May et al., 2012, p. 7). Importantly, the study did not disaggregate student disability classifications, so researchers were unable to examine respondents’ perceptions of students with a mental illness specifically, but results do provide evidence of stigma and the need for SRO training courses to cover students with disabilities.

Taken together, the findings discussed in this section indicate that entry into the school-to-prison pipeline is disproportionately experienced by certain student populations. Students belonging to racial/ethnic minority groups and students with disabilities are both being referred to the juvenile justice system in numbers exceeding their enrollment percentages. Furthermore, there should be concern surrounding whether the responses of both school officials and law enforcement furthers the stigmatization of

individuals with a disability, especially students with a mental illness. Repetitive removal from the classroom, whether it be through exclusionary discipline or arrest, makes learning and instruction more difficult for any student. However, lost class time is arguably more poignant for students who may already find school to be a challenge due to their disability.

Policies and Practices Contributing to the Pipeline

The development of the school-to-prison pipeline did not occur overnight. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, trends in the criminal and juvenile justice systems directly influenced the emergence of new policies and practices that are now widespread in the nation's schools. The legislation and policies adopted at all levels of government to be "tough on crime", increase public safety, and combat youth gun violence were endorsed and mirrored by policymakers in the early 1990s creating the new policy area of "school safety" (Fabelo et al., 2011; Simon, 2007) and has resulted in schools resembling criminal justice institutions (Hirschfield, 2008).

Although juvenile crime rates in both the community (Puzzanchera, 2020) and at school (DeVoe et al., 2003) declined by the end of the 1990s, school safety issues continued to increase in prominence for policymakers and the general public alike due to highly publicized mass school shootings, especially the tragedy at Columbine High School in 1999 (Fuentes, 2018; Jonson, 2017). Flawed, nonstop media coverage after these events produced the perception that school shootings were more prevalent and lethal, although empirical evidence suggests otherwise (Jonson, 2017). Importantly, the percentage of youth homicides occurring at school remains at less than 3 percent of all youth homicides since 1992 (Wang et al., 2020), suggesting that the hysteria over school

shootings is misplaced. The most recent data collected on violent deaths occurring at school reveal that out of 50.6 million public school students enrolled in the 2016-17 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), only 18 students died by homicide at school (Wang et al., 2020), representing .0000003 percent of students.

In the immediate aftermath of school shooting incidents, policymakers and parents demanded the development and implementation of new safety and security practices to prevent the occurrence of a similar tragedy in their schools (Jonson, 2017), resulting in what some have termed “event-driven policy and legislation” (Carlton et al., 2017). These event-driven policies and legislation culminated in a slew of various school safety and security practices lacking in empirical support for their effectiveness in preventing school violence, and ultimately, the next school shooting incident (Jonson, 2017; King & Bracy, 2019). Instead, these policies and practices contributed to what Hirschfield (2008) labeled as *school criminalization*, defined as the “shift toward a crime control paradigm in the definition and management of the problem of student deviance” (p. 80). This shift resulted in schools looking, sounding, and acting more like criminal justice institutions, which in turn, has contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline by making it easier for the justice system to be involved in school disciplinary matters (Heitzeg, 2018; Kim et al., 2010).

Specifically, three trends in school safety are identified in the literature as feeding the school-to-prison pipeline: zero-tolerance policies, surveillance practices, and increased policing in the schools. These three trends many times work in tandem to facilitate a student’s entry into the pipeline. Prior to the early 1990s, there was a clear distinction between the juvenile justice system and the educational system, with school

administrators and teachers having the discretion to handle school discipline as they saw fit (Kafka, 2011; Simon, 2007). Schools did not automatically respond to student misbehavior with exclusionary discipline practices or by involving the justice system due to the detriment such sanctions would have on students' educational achievement (Brooks et al., 2000; Kafka, 2011; Simon, 2007). The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) is frequently identified in the literature as the pivotal turning point in education policy where the distinct boundaries between the justice and educational system became blurred (Dohrn, 2001; Heitzeg, 2018; Kafka, 2011; King & Bracy, 2019; Thurau & Wald, 2010).

The GFSA mandates that states accepting federal funds under the Act have in effect a state law requiring school districts to adopt a zero-tolerance policy for students bringing a weapon to campus. The state law must require expulsion of students for at least one year. In addition, the GFSA requires that schools refer any student who brings a weapon to campus to the criminal or juvenile justice system. These mandates mean that a zero-tolerance approach results in students automatically receiving a harsh punishment without consideration to individual circumstances or intent. States across the country quickly reformed their own laws to meet the requirements of the GFSA (Dohrn, 2001). By the 1996-97 school year, over 90 percent of public schools reported having zero-tolerance policies in place for student possession of firearms and other weapons (Heaviside et al., 1998), but many states and localities went beyond the mandates of the GFSA and expanded their zero-tolerance policies to require expulsions, suspensions, and/or referrals to law enforcement for a variety of delinquent and deviant behaviors (Brooks et al., 2000; Demarco, 2001; Kafka, 2011; Rosen, 2005; Stein, 2001). For

example, a 1997 national survey of school principals indicated that 79 percent of schools had a zero-tolerance policy for tobacco (Heaviside et al., 1998). In another example from a qualitative study of school discipline practices, one high school had a zero-tolerance policy in place for fighting, resulting in the arrest of all students involved in a school fight, with no consideration given to who was the aggressor (Kupchik, 2010).

As a result of these reforms, states experienced large increases in the number of students expelled (Demarco, 2001) and suspended (Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2001). Not much research has been conducted on the impact of these policies for school-based arrests or referrals to the justice system. Krezmien and colleagues' (2010) study is the only study located using official data to longitudinally examine whether these policy changes resulted in increases to the number of students referred to the juvenile justice system for school-based incidents. The researchers used data from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive to analyze school-based referrals to the juvenile courts in five states from 1995 to 2004. Results of the analyses provide preliminary evidence that adoption of these increasingly punitive policies contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Specifically, although there was a decrease in the total number of referrals to the juvenile courts, results of the analyses indicated that there was an increase in the proportion of referrals originating from schools in four out of the five states over the 10-year period. Unfortunately, the researchers do not disaggregate referrals by type of offense making interpretation of the results difficult. For example, if the proportion of referrals originating from schools increased due to serious violent offenses, it could be argued that new school safety policies were working to remove dangerous students. The lack of more studies supporting these findings or exploring the issue further may be partially explained

by a lack of available data. The researchers noted that they could only include five states in the study because they were the only states with the requisite data (e.g., variable indicating whether an offense occurred at school) available to answer the research questions.

Zero-tolerance policies provide a mechanism for pushing students from the educational system into the justice system, but it is important to note that such policies have not worked in isolation. The proximity in time of the Columbine shooting in 1999 and the September 11th terrorist attack created an environment that justified costly new security systems, curtailed student privacy, and widened surveillance across the nation's schools (Casella, 2010; Fuentes, 2018). Schools became eligible for "homeland security grants" allowing them to purchase advanced security equipment. Scholars argue that these security and surveillance measures resulted in the "fortification" of our nation's schools (Casella, 2010), leading to many schools resembling correctional institutions (Hirschfield, 2008) and creating a prison-like atmosphere (Brooks et al., 2000; Finn & Servoss, 2015; Gabbard, 2018; Morris, 2016; Nolan, 2011).

Some of the most common practices reported by schools across the country include the use of security cameras, locking or monitoring doors, law enforcement presence at least part-time, establishment of a threat assessment team, enforcement of a strict dress code, random sweeps for contraband, and the presence of security guards (Diliberti et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Much like correctional institutions, several of these practices provide further opportunities for infractions by students, followed by overly punitive responses by school officials and SROs. This is evidenced through ethnographic descriptions of how a trivial school violation stemming from surveillance

practices, such as refusing to present school identification, leads to law enforcement responses (Morris, 2016; Nolan, 2011). Another trend that has emerged is the disciplining of student appearance. Enforcement of a strict dress code means that students, particularly Black students, have been suspended for simply wearing their hair in dreadlocks or afros (Morris, 2016). In more extreme examples from New York City's high schools, student resistance to dress code enforcement has led to arrest by SROs (Mukherjee, 2007).

Hirschfield (2008) argues that the adoption of criminal justice technologies (e.g., security cameras) *and* personnel (e.g., LEOs) contributed to the increased criminalization of student behavior and the resulting pipeline. One important criminal justice tool added to the school environment is police personnel, or SROs, the focus of the current study. Although the nation's first school-based law enforcement program dates to the 1950s, the number of SROs assigned to schools rapidly increased beginning in the 1990s (McKenna & Pollock, 2014). The federal government incentivized the adoption of SROs by local school districts through offering federal grant programs (James & McCallion, 2013; Jonson, 2017). The COPS in Schools program first provided funding for SROs in 1999 in response to the Columbine shooting (James & McCallion, 2013). The program was funded through 2005 with Congress appropriating over \$800 million to subsidize over 7,200 SRO positions. Additionally, between 1994 and 2009, the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act provided state formula grants to local educational agencies. Agencies could elect to use grant monies for the hiring and training of SROs.

With the federal government financing the training and hiring of SROs, and the intuitive appeal of SROs as a deterring presence, many school districts adopted this

practice as their primary response to school shootings (Jonson, 2017). The National Center for Education Statistics commissioned the *Principal/School Disciplinarian Survey on School Violence* (a predecessor to the SSOCS), a nationally representative survey of 1,234 school principals in the summer of 1997 examining school security issues. Results of the survey indicated that during the 1996-97 school year, 10 percent of public schools reported the presence of a LEO on campus at least part-time (Heaviside et al., 1998). In comparison, results from the 2017-18 SSOCS indicate that approximately 58 percent of public schools had a LEO on their campus at least part-time (Diliberti et al., 2019). It is expected that this number continued to increase after the 2017-18 school year. After the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February of 2018, Florida became the first state to pass legislation requiring that armed staff or law enforcement be stationed at every public school (Whitaker et al., 2019).

Further disaggregation of reported law enforcement presence on school campuses indicates that many of these personnel are assigned to high schools. Specifically, 70 percent of public high schools reported the presence of an SRO at least part-time, and 19 percent reported the presence of other sworn law enforcement at least part-time during the 2017-18 school year (Diliberti et al., 2019). Elementary schools are not exempt from this practice, with 34 percent reporting the presence of an SRO at least part-time. This is in stark contrast to the 1996-97 school year when only 3 percent of elementary schools reported having law enforcement on their campus (Heaviside et al., 1998). These data demonstrate that over the last 25 years the patrolling of school campuses by law enforcement, especially at the high school level, has become a regular fixture of our nation's schools.

The presence of SROs on school campuses provides school administrators with an efficient modality for reporting incidents to law enforcement, and thus, criminalizing such incidents. Both teachers and administrators can become reliant upon the SROs for maintaining discipline and relinquish what used to be their duty and responsibility to control student misbehavior (King & Bracy, 2019). The 2015-16 SSOCS inquired as to the activities SROs participated in at least once a week at the respondent's school. Sixty-three percent of secondary schools responded that the SRO maintained school discipline and 79 percent responded that the SRO recorded or reported discipline problems to school authorities (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). A meta-analysis of seven pre-post design studies examining the relationship between SROs and exclusionary discipline found that the presence of SROs is associated with rates of exclusionary discipline that are 21 percent higher than before the implementation of the SRO. Measures of exclusionary discipline included out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the police (Fisher & Hennessey, 2016).

In Kupchik's (2010) ethnographic study of four high schools, interviewed SROs were resolute that they were not involved in school discipline. However, throughout his data collection efforts, Kupchik observed that SROs frequently inserted themselves into school discipline matters and escalated minor situations. In one example, an SRO demanded an out-of-school suspension for a student using profanity. The school administrator in charge of discipline acquiesced to the SRO's demands although he had already decided upon a letter of apology as an appropriate punishment. Other observations also revealed that school administrators could easily target certain behaviors for zero-tolerance policies through collaborations with their assigned SRO. In one of the

studied high schools, the principal mandated that all students caught fighting were to be arrested and the SRO helped to facilitate this policy. This meant that even students who did not instigate the fight and were simply defending themselves became entangled with the juvenile justice system.

There are no national data collection efforts assessing the specific contribution of SROs to the number of students referred to the justice system or arrested at school, but there is some research enlightening us to the possible impacts of police presence at schools. Using the 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection, a report by the ACLU found that schools reporting a police presence had an arrest rate that was 3.5 times higher compared to schools with no reported police presence (Whitaker et al., 2019). Another study combined the Civil Rights Data Collection and Common Core Data from the U.S. Department of Education to further examine this relationship and found that effects persisted regardless of students' race, ethnicity, or gender (Homer & Fisher, 2020). Other national data demonstrates similar results. Analyses of the 2009-10 SSOCS indicated that the presence of an SRO at least once a week was associated with greater odds (OR ranged from 1.35 to 3.54) that students will be referred to law enforcement for 10 separate offenses (Nance, 2016). Similar trends have been identified at the district level. Theriot's (2009) study from one school district in Tennessee indicated that schools with SROs experienced higher arrest rates for the offense of disorderly conduct, while a comparison of the three largest school districts in Massachusetts indicated that the only school district assigning SROs to schools on a full-time basis experienced arrest rates 3 times higher than the other two districts (Dahlberg, 2012).

Other studies relied on longitudinal data sets to examine the relationship between increases in school-based law enforcement and student referrals to the justice system. Results from analyses using national data indicate that as schools were increasingly assigned SROs, there was a corresponding increase in school-based arrests and referrals to law enforcement (Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Owens, 2017). Comparisons of the 2013-14 and 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection indicate a 3 percent increase in reported school arrests, as well as a 17 percent increase in referrals to law enforcement (Whitaker et al., 2019). Limited studies of individual school districts also demonstrated a corresponding increase in juvenile court referrals after the introduction of SROs. For example, after police were assigned to the middle and high schools of Clayton County, Georgia in the mid-1990s, the juvenile court experienced a 1,248 percent increase in referrals by 2004 (Teske, 2011). A report by the Advancement Project (2005) describes a 71 percent increase in Denver and a 300 percent increase in Chicago of student referrals to the justice system after the cities heavily invested in SROs between 2000 and 2004. Therefore, the evidence suggests that the massive expansion of school-based law enforcement over the past 20 years may have contributed to both the indirect, and especially the direct, pathways of the school-to-prison pipeline (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Kupchik, 2010; Nance, 2016).

Overall, the body of research on the school-to-prison pipeline provides evidence that students are encountering harsh responses to misbehavior while at school. Responses may involve out-of-school suspension, referral to the justice system, or both. The increased adoption of several school safety and security measures have made such responses easier, and these trends have been especially detrimental for students of color

and students with a disability. A substantial gap in the research noted throughout the School-to-Prison Pipeline section is data collection and analyses surrounding the specific contribution of SROs. The next section reviews the literature on SROs and their roles, activities, and training to describe what is known surrounding the expectations when assigning LEOs to an SRO position.

School Resource Officers

The first documented instance of a police officer being assigned to a school setting occurred in Flint, Michigan during the 1950s (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016; Weiler & Cray, 2011). By the 1960s, a police chief in Florida had coined the term “school resource officer” (Weiler & Cray, 2011), and school policing programs were created and implemented in the subsequent decades. The objectives of these earlier programs included prevention and early detection of juvenile crime as well as improved relations between juveniles and law enforcement (Scheffer, 1987). By 1991, the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) was founded to provide training to school-based LEOs (NASRO, n.d.a). But it was not until later in the 1990s that school systems rapidly adopted school-based police officers as a result of several highly publicized school shootings and the assistance of federal grant money (McKenna et al., 2016; Theriot & Cuellar, 2016).

There is not a single, agreed-upon definition of an SRO, but federal statutes define SROs as “a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department to a local educational agency to work in collaboration with schools and community-based

organizations” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 1). Although this study utilizes the title “school resource officer,” there are several variants of school-based law enforcement programs and officers. While reviewing both the professional and scholarly literature, several other titles for police officers assigned to schools were uncovered including school-based LEOs, school resource deputies, school liaison officers, school safety officers, and prevention resource officers.

Descriptions of different school-based policing programs appear to fall on a continuum based on the extent of their immersion into the school system. At one end of the continuum are the officers popular in the 1980s and 1990s deployed by local law enforcement agencies for the sole purpose of teaching the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program in elementary and middle/junior high schools. Such officers were not fully immersed in the school since they were usually assigned to multiple schools and would be on each campus for a short period of time for a limited number of weeks. Their purpose was largely educational and public relations; thus, they would not be involved in typical law enforcement or school security (Watts, 2019).

Next along the continuum is the more traditional SRO program model. These officers are employed by the local police department but are specifically assigned to work in the schools. In many collaborations, a contract or memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the school district and the law enforcement agency delineates the services and functions to be provided by the SRO. These services and functions may vary from school district to school district, however, the typical stated purpose of an SRO is safety and order (Coon & Travis, 2012). SROs may be permanently assigned to one school, or their assignment may include a rotation of several schools. Some law

enforcement agencies may employ a single SRO, but as collaborations have created more SRO positions and school safety concerns have risen in prominence, law enforcement agencies are creating separate school policing units or divisions with several SROs. For example, the New York City Police Department created a School Safety Division in 1998 employing thousands of security personnel and armed police officers assigned exclusively to schools (Mukherjee, 2007). Separate units and divisions provide recognition and legitimacy for the collaboration between law enforcement and schools, but the supervisory control over the SROs continues to be within the employing law enforcement agency. This means that whether the SRO program includes a single SRO or an entire division within the law enforcement agency, SROs' direct supervisors are a part of the chain-of-command of the law enforcement agency, not a school principal or district superintendent.

Finally, at the furthest end of the continuum are school district police forces. Instead of relying on local law enforcement agencies, many school districts created their own police department, allowing for a full immersion into the school system. Police officers employed by school district police departments are employees of the school district and are ultimately accountable to a school superintendent or Board of Trustees. This approach is becoming more common, especially in states like Texas where there are at least 180 school district police departments (McKenna et al., 2016). There appears to be a complete lack of empirical research examining whether differences exist between traditional SROs and officers employed by school district police forces. A review of the relevant literature returned only one study, which was limited to investigating differences in bullying intervention training and knowledge (Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012).

No matter the title used, it is unknown how many SROs are currently assigned to the nation's schools. There is no national database collecting information on SROs, and law enforcement agencies are not required to report the number of SROs employed (NASRO, n.d.a). The 2016 version of the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey included a question inquiring about the number of full-time SROs employed by the responding agencies (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). Results show that an estimated 37 percent of local police departments employed 11,900 full-time SROs in 2016 (Hyland & Davis, 2019). In addition, results from the 2016 survey indicate that an estimated 47 percent of sheriff's offices employed 6,900 full-time SROs (Brooks, 2019). With these numbers in mind, the best current estimate available is that there were at least 18,800 full-time SROs employed across the country in 2016.

SRO Roles

An important question receiving attention in the empirical literature is *what do SROs do?* Professional and government organizations provide insight as to the roles SROs are expected to fill. The most frequently cited is NASRO's "Triad Model" of SRO responsibility. The triad model advocates for three roles of the SRO: educator, informal counselor, and law enforcer. Recently, the federal government designated a fourth role of the SRO: emergency manager (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019).

The law enforcer role is generally acknowledged as the SRO's primary duty (Kubena, 2019; NASRO, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). The role includes traditional law enforcement tasks of addressing disorder, investigating criminal conduct, searching and interrogating suspects, writing tickets and citations, and arresting

offenders. Just like patrol officers, SROs are expected to respond to calls for service. The typical administrative tasks involved in law enforcement such as report writing and attending court are also involved, but as an SRO, these tasks will be relegated to a school campus. NASRO (2012) also notes that an important aspect of the law enforcer role of an SRO is their visibility on campus creating a safe school environment by deterring crime and disorder.

The informal counselor role relates to building relationships and rapport with students and their families (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). According to NASRO (2012), the informal counselor role should also include the SRO as a role model and mentor. These duties should include an “open door” policy towards students for informal counseling sessions and referrals to health and social service agencies. NASRO specifies that SROs should be getting involved with the daily lives of students to facilitate rapport and provide an attentive ear for students.

Pertinent to the educator role, NASRO (2012) claims that an SROs’ regular duties should include teaching law-related topics. The U.S. Department of Justice (2019) describes the educator role as “teach[ing] students about crime prevention and safety, drug awareness, conflict resolution, and other topics related to law enforcement and the legal system” (p. 1). Thus, both organizations describe a formal educator role for SROs.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2019), the emergency manager role of SROs includes developing and implementing comprehensive school safety plans and coordinating with other first responders in an emergency. Additionally, membership in the school’s threat assessment team is noted. As part of their emergency management role, SROs should be prepared for events such as natural disasters, terrorist activities, and

school shootings (Reynolds, 2019). Although NASRO does not delineate a separate emergency manager role, related tasks are identified in their descriptions of the law enforcer role.

Therefore, the federal government and the national organization representing SROs do provide some guidance as to the roles expected to be fulfilled. Importantly, neither model is mandated, meaning that locally developed SRO programs may or may not adopt these models. Not much research explores how SROs' roles are established or who determines how much emphasis to devote to the various SRO roles. A national assessment of SRO programs conducted in the early 2000s found that all 19 of the programs selected for study adopted the triad model for their programs, but each program varied in the level of emphasis devoted to the three roles (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005). Most of the programs initially focused on law enforcement because neither the law enforcement agency nor the school provided individual SROs with guidance as to how they should spend their time, and consequently, the SRO would default to enforcing the law. Site visits also revealed that some school administrators preferred that the SROs solely engage in law enforcement activities, so that in 2 of the 19 programs (11%) the SROs spent all their time on law enforcement. In another study, the researchers inquired into role establishment via interviews with SROs in Texas. Participants' responses varied from police and school administration collaboration, their chief of police, or complete SRO discretion (McKenna et al., 2016). This means that across the country SROs could be perceiving their roles quite differently and could be engaging in a multitude of activities.

To explore the roles, activities, and duties of SROs, scholars and professional organizations have frequently utilized surveys (Coon & Travis, 2007, 2012; Cray & Weiler, 2011; Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018; Education Week, 2018; Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Hunt et al., 2019; Kelly & Swezey, 2015; Lynch et al., 2016; May & Higgins, 2011; McKenna & White, 2018; Shuler Ivey, 2012; Trump, 2002). Qualitative studies also explored these issues via interviews (Barnes, 2016; McKenna et al., 2016), observations (Kupchik, 2010; Rhodes, 2019), and case studies (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; Scheffer, 1987; Schlosser, 2014). Only one study was located that actively collected data on the specific activities SROs engaged in for an extended period (six months) (Duxbury & Bennell, 2020). The findings of these studies are discussed in the following subsections.

Law Enforcer

Generally, studies demonstrate that the law enforcer role is the most prominent. When directly asked about their roles on a school campus, 77 percent of interviewed SROs in Texas indicated that law enforcement is their main role (McKenna et al., 2016). National surveys of schools and/or SROs found that the most common and frequent activities SROs engaged in were law enforcement related (Coon & Travis, 2007, 2012; Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Lynch et al., 2016). Regional (Rhodes, 2019) and state specific surveys (Cray & Weiler, 2011; Hunt et al., 2019; May & Higgins, 2011; McKenna & White, 2018), as well as observations of SROs in their schools (Kupchik, 2010; Schlosser, 2014), produced similar results.

Two studies were located where a majority of SRO respondents did not claim law enforcement as their primary role or types of activities. A survey of 53 SROs located in

three school districts found that only 45 percent of the SROs spent most of their time on law enforcement activities (Kelly & Swezey, 2015). In another survey, responses from 399 SROs showed much variation in SROs' perceptions of their primary role (Education Week, 2018). Forty-one percent of respondents reported that enforcing laws was their primary role, 17 percent reported mentoring, 7 percent claimed enforcing school discipline, and 2 percent selected teaching. A rather substantial percentage (33%) of the respondents selected "other". The report indicates that more than half (59%) of the SROs selecting "other" explained that they viewed their primary role as ensuring safety and security. These results can be viewed in two ways. In NASRO's triad model, safety and security are a part of the law enforcement role, and thus, if aggregated with the 41 percent of respondents selecting enforcing laws as their primary role, results would coincide with much of the research. An alternative explanation for the results may be that more SRO programs are adopting the federal government's "emergency manager" role and individual SROs are now perceiving it to be their primary role. Unfortunately, the report does not provide further explanation or detail and the authors do not disclose information regarding the population or sample selection, making it unclear whether these results are in any way generalizable.

The types of law enforcement activities SROs report engaging in include patrolling school grounds, performing traffic control, responding to or investigating crime and disorder on campus, and writing police reports (Coon & Travis, 2007; Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Kelly & Swezey, 2015; Kupchik, 2010). One of the few studies to directly inquire as to the frequency of issuing citations and making arrests indicated that in the previous 30 days, 66 percent of the SROs responding to the survey issued citations

and 82 percent made arrests (Rhodes, 2019). One comprehensive case study of an SRO program in Canada found that although most of the SROs' time was spent on what classified as "law enforcement activities", a substantial percentage (23 percent) of those activities were devoted to administrative work (Duxbury & Bennell, 2020).

Interviews with 12 SROs in North Carolina provide insight as to how the law enforcement role may extend beyond the school campus. The SROs maintained that they can clear crimes in surrounding neighborhoods due to the information obtained from students (Barnes, 2016). The SRO may also assist with crimes occurring off campus by providing their employing law enforcement agency with information gathered from student informants. During interviews, supervising sergeants of an SRO program mentioned that the SROs' ability to access information from students that investigators would not have been able to obtain any other way is a major benefit of the program (Duxbury & Bennell, 2020). SROs have also been observed collecting evidence *against* students for offenses occurring off campus (Kupchik, 2010).

Informal Counselor or Mentor

Many of the SROs across the country appear to be engaging in some form of informal counseling or mentoring activities. Seventy-five percent of school administrators responding to the 2006 SSOCS indicated that the assigned SRO mentored students (Lynch et al., 2016). A national survey of 322 SRO programs found that SROs on average spent 25 percent of their time on counseling or mentoring (Finn & McDevitt, 2005). In contrast, in two other surveys, SROs reported that they spent more time on counseling/mentoring activities than the other two roles making up the triad (Kelly & Swezey, 2015; Trump, 2002).

Although not providing an estimate as to the exact amount of time spent on such activities, interviews with SROs indicate that they spend a great deal of time building relationships with students and school personnel (Barnes, 2016). Such relationship building assists with developing rapport and thus facilitates the SROs' counseling role. SROs engaging in informal counseling or mentoring activities indicate that weekly, extended conversations with students comprise much of those activities (Kelly & Swezey, 2015). Studies examining the counseling role of SROs revealed that informal counseling sessions with students covered a variety of topics outside law-related issues including suicide, pregnancy, and family matters (Barnes, 2016; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005).

Importantly, the reported frequency of these activities seems to vary based on who is responding to the inquiry. In a survey of over 1,400 school principals, 38 percent reported that their SROs never engaged in mentoring or counseling of students, and another 34 percent reported that SROs engaged in such activities infrequently (three or less times per semester) (Coon & Travis, 2007). A survey of principals and SROs in South Carolina indicated statistically significant differences in perceived time spent on counseling activities (Shuler Ivey, 2012). SROs reported that they spent approximately 41 percent of their time on counseling activities, while principals reported that SROs spent 15 percent of their time on such activities. In his observations of a SRO program, Schlosser (2014) noted that the counselor role was more covert compared to the law enforcer role, but it did exist. The SRO was observed "counseling" as part of the follow-up to students caught offending.

Educator

Research inquiring into SRO roles has generally found that in the triad model, educator is the role that SROs generally spend the least amount of time on (Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Kelly & Swezey, 2015; Kupchik, 2010; May & Higgins, 2011). One study of SRO programs found that the average SRO spent 13 percent of their time engaged in teaching (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005). There is also evidence that many SROs do not engage in any teaching (Kelly & Swezey, 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). Case studies of SRO programs revealed that many SROs did not want to teach and that teachers in schools with assigned SROs felt uncomfortable inviting SROs into their classroom or were unaware that the SROs could teach (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005).

There appears to be very little research on *what* SROs teach. Coon and Travis' (2007) survey of school principals inquired as to which types of courses police officers taught. Fifty-one percent of respondents indicated that D.A.R.E. was taught at their school, while other anti-drug (34%) and alcohol awareness or DUI prevention (30%) courses were also taught in many schools. Kelly and Swezey's (2015) survey of SROs showed that those engaging in teaching activities were likely to teach driver's education, anti-drug, or anti-gang courses.

Certification to teach certain courses may explain whether SROs engage in teaching and how much time they devote to such activities. In one comparison of 19 SRO programs served by over 100 SROs, findings showed that the SROs who spent a considerable amount of time teaching were certified D.A.R.E. or G.R.E.A.T. instructors (Finn, Shively et al., 2005). Similarly, in Schlosser's (2014) case study of an SRO

program, the SRO was certified to teach D.A.R.E. and spent more time on teaching activities than counseling activities.

Emergency Manager

Although recognition of this separate role is relatively new, SRO advocates previously argued that SROs are trained to respond to possible threats, so that schools with an SRO are better able to effectively address and neutralize threatening situations (Weiler & Cray, 2011; Umphrey, 2009). It is also acknowledged in the literature that during a critical incident SROs serve as the first responder (James & McCallion, 2013). Studies have inquired as to the school safety planning activities SROs may engage in. In a national survey of school principals, 86 percent said they had an emergency plan agreement with the police and 55 percent worked with law enforcement to develop plans for crisis situations (Coon & Travis, 2007). Finn, Shively, and colleagues' (2005) case studies of 19 SRO programs revealed that several of the SROs assisted school administrators with preparing security assessments and emergency response protocols, as well as practiced safety drills with students and staff.

The research on SROs' roles and activities demonstrates that the law enforcer role and the activities that coincide with it appear to be the most prominent for many SROs across the country. SROs' roles as an informal counselor or educator are not quite as clear. Many different factors may be influencing whether SROs engage in the other roles of the triad model and how frequently. If policymakers are adopting SRO programs with the expectation that the SROs will automatically follow the triad model or the extended model described by the U.S. Department of Justice, it is clear that conflict and

misunderstanding may result. Identified conflicts created by the SRO roles are reviewed in the next section.

Conflicts Created by SRO Roles

In their study of 19 different SRO programs and the 123 SROs assigned to them, Finn, Shively, and colleagues (2005, p. 23) recognized the failure to define the SROs' roles and responsibilities in detail at the outset as "the most frequent and destructive mistakes many SRO programs make." Much tension and frustration may arise if parties are unclear as to the SROs' duties, responsibilities, and legal obligations. A study comparing the perceptions of SROs versus school principals identified many statistically significant differences in the priority assigned to the various SRO roles and responsibilities. Compared to the SROs' responses, principals placed much more importance on the discipline-related responsibilities of the SROs and less importance to the counseling role (Lambert & McGinty, 2002).

The possible ambiguities in SRO roles are not newly identified issues. The problem was documented and discussed in one of the first published studies surrounding SROs in 1987 (Scheffer, 1987). Several scholars and advocates since have noted the critical importance of developing a MOU or contract to delineate responsibilities and minimize conflict (Cray & Weiler, 2011; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; James & McCallion, 2013; Kim & Geronimo, 2010). SROs have also recognized the need for MOUs to be in place and recommended that the SRO take part in their creation (Glenn et al., 2019). Despite 30 years of recognition of the problem, in 2017 only 13 states required a MOU between schools and law enforcement agencies using SROs (Counts et al., 2018). During the 2015-16 school year, only 51 percent of elementary schools and 70 percent of high

schools with an SRO reported having a formalized MOU or contract in place (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018).

A frequent source of tension is the fact that there are two sets of rules operating within a school and SRO programs need to decide from the outset whether SROs will be involved in enforcing both (Clark, 2011). First, there are the criminal codes that an SRO is trained to enforce. Second, is the school's discipline code which addresses a wide array of behaviors, many of which are not violations of the law (e.g., dress codes). Therefore, conflict may arise as to whether the SRO's law enforcer role includes enforcing school discipline rules. NASRO's (2012) position is that SROs should not be involved in enforcing school rules that fall short of criminal conduct. However, many school administrators responding to the 2015-16 SSOCS reported that the SRO *is* involved in school discipline matters (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). For example, 63 percent of respondents in secondary schools with SROs reported that the SRO is responsible for maintaining school discipline. Comparisons of SRO programs indicate that there is a great deal of variation in the latitude provided to SROs to enforce discipline with some programs specifying that the SRO will not be involved in any disciplinary matters, and others requesting frequent involvement in school discipline (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005).

Such variation may result when there are no clear guidelines or MOU in place. Nonetheless, a MOU may not clearly define disciplinary involvement. In one study of two school districts, although a MOU was in place explicitly stating that SROs were not to be involved in school discipline, results of interviews with the SROs revealed that they were regularly participating in school discipline responses in more nuanced ways (Curran et al., 2019). For example, when describing activities they engaged in, SROs disclosed

that they report misbehavior to school administrators, verbally reprimand students, and assist administrators by investigating misbehavior. Another study examining the impact of the increased use of SROs in California reviewed the MOUs in place between the SROs' law enforcement agency and the assigned schools (Gottfredson et al., 2020). Only 13 percent of the MOUs addressed the controversial topic of arresting students. Importantly, discussions surrounding the need for MOUs assume that SROs or school administration will refer to the document for assistance. Interviews with SROs in Massachusetts revealed that most had very little knowledge of the MOU in place and did not seek it out for guidance (Thurau & Wald, 2010).

Studies confirm that SROs' involvement in school discipline matters is a major source of friction between many school administrators and SROs (Barnes, 2016; Coon & Travis, 2007; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; Glenn et al., 2019). During Barnes' (2016) interviews with 12 SROs in North Carolina, the respondents believed that school officials utilized their position inappropriately by frequently requesting that they assist with discipline issues. The SROs reported that teachers expected them to intervene in discipline matters as well. Although the interviewed SROs were not authorized to handle school discipline issues, they expressed that such matters took up much of their time and efforts. In another study, researchers conducted a content analysis of SROs' responses to an open-ended survey question inquiring as to SROs' recommendations for improving SRO program implementation (Glenn et al., 2019). One of the major themes identified was the need for teachers and administrators to receive additional training on the roles and responsibilities of SROs. SROs specifically commented on teachers not understanding the requirement of reasonable suspicion and principals involving the SRO

in discipline matters. Similarly, a theme identified from interviews with SROs in Massachusetts was teachers' inability to adequately manage their classrooms resulting in the overuse of SROs to respond to student misbehavior (Thurau & Wald, 2010).

There is also the issue of how the SRO should respond to the numerous gray areas where the criminal and school discipline codes intersect. Finn, Shively, and colleagues (2005) provide the example of a student shoving another individual. In such a circumstance, the SRO could technically arrest or petition the student for battery, but a school official can instead choose to handle the violation as a disciplinary matter and administer a school sanction. There is a lack of studies examining the SRO decision-making process in such situations.

Another source of conflict is the supervision over the SRO. SROs are hired and supervised by a law enforcement agency and not the school, unless they work for a school district police department. The SRO's direct supervisor may spend very little time, if any, on the SROs' assigned campus (Clark, 2011; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; Thurau & Wald, 2010). A study of SRO programs revealed that the direct supervisor of many SROs had never worked in a school setting and lacked an understanding of the SRO position (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005). On a school campus the principal is the supervisor over all faculty, staff, and students. Thus, problems may emerge when a principal is dissatisfied with the performance of an SRO but lacks the authority to redirect their behavior, sanction, or fire them. This issue can be exacerbated if the school principal was not responsible for the decision to assign an SRO to their campus and/or did not want an SRO. For example, in a national survey, elementary school principals generally indicated that they did not want an SRO on their campus on a daily basis (Coon & Travis, 2007).

A study of 19 SRO programs and the over 100 SROs assigned to the programs found that collaboration between school principals and the SROs was a troublesome area for many of the programs with the underlying problem being a difference in police culture and the school culture (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005). For example, many of the SROs were formerly in patrol positions where they selected their vacation days based on seniority and were allowed freedom of movement. Once SROs were assigned to a school, a source of contention included the expectation of administrators that SROs be on campus at all times during school hours. Also, training as a police officer means learning to assert authority and not backing down. Such a mentality is not productive for dealing with a student's problematic behavior (Kupchik, 2010) and may conflict with the more nurturing philosophies of many educators.

Another source of problems discovered in Finn, Shively, and colleagues' (2005) study was disagreement over who makes the decision to arrest. Many school administrators wanted to be the only person who decides whether a student is arrested. Administrators also expected differential treatment for students whom they perceived as "good kids" not deserving of arrest. Special education students were also a source of disagreement in a number of the sites studied. Generally, school administrators preferred that the SRO be lenient with special education students, while the SROs valued consistency in their arrest practices regardless of the student's classification. Another study examining SRO programs in Massachusetts also found that SROs were pressured by school administrators to not arrest athletes or academically superior students (Thurau & Wald, 2010). Finn, Shively, and colleagues (2005) also found that conflict arose at some sites because school administrators requested an arrest in circumstances where the

SRO lacked the legal authority to make an arrest (e.g., students carrying pagers). In several of the sites, these conflicts were substantial and ultimately led to the replacement of the SRO.

Additionally, SROs may experience role conflict in balancing their law enforcer role with their informal counselor role. In Finn, Shively, and colleagues' (2005, p. 86) study both SROs and school administrators recognized that SROs "walk a fine line" of maintaining a friendly demeanor with students while never knowing whether they may have to arrest those students. Critics of school-based policing have voiced concern regarding the confusion the informal counselor role may create for naïve students who confide in an SRO and end up incriminating themselves or family members (Fisher & Hennessey, 2016; Kupchik, 2010; Mills, 2016; Petteruti, 2011). There is nothing preventing an SRO from using information gathered during an informal counseling session against a student during a later criminal proceeding. Currently, there are a lack of empirical studies assessing this problem to know whether, and how frequently, it may occur. Only one study could be located probing students on their awareness of the SRO's primary role as a law enforcer. In Kupchik's (2010) qualitative study, students at one high school with a large population of Mexican immigrants indicated they would not talk to the SRO about their problems due to the fear that the SRO would call immigration authorities.

Despite these identified issues with SROs' roles and the possible conflicts they may create, one study comparing the perceptions of SROs to patrol officers in the Midwest found that SROs reported greater personal satisfaction with their job (Rhodes, 2015). Additionally, results of the survey showed that SROs perceived the expectations

of their role to be *less* ambiguous and conflicting compared to the patrol officers. Other surveys examining morale and job satisfaction demonstrate high levels of job satisfaction related to the SROs' role as an informal counselor or mentor (Kelly & Swezey, 2015), as well as high morale generally (Education Week, 2018).

Overall, the research indicates that the differing roles for SROs and the varying expectations of how SROs will execute these roles may be a source of substantial conflict for the SROs, their supervisors, and school personnel. Although some of these issues could be easily addressed by delineating an SROs' job responsibilities in an MOU, many SRO programs do not have such agreements in place, and when they do, there is no guarantee that the SROs will reference them for guidance. Additionally, there appears to be a lack of research into how widespread many of these problems are and how frequently they occur. Notwithstanding the reported frustration of SROs, the few studies examining morale and job satisfaction indicate that SROs may be satisfied with their job and the roles that encompass it. However, other important factors seem to be overlooked in much of the research examining SRO roles and the possible conflicts and ambiguity they may include, specifically SRO recruitment and training.

Recruitment and Training

Few empirical studies examine the recruitment and training of SROs and there is a complete dearth of research evaluating SRO training programs. In 2004, the National Institute of Justice funded a national assessment of school resource officer programs which included case studies, surveys, interviews, and site visits of SRO programs across the country. As part of the assessment, project staff learned of seven areas of programming that frequently caused problems for SRO program coordinators and

supervisors. Recruitment, screening, and training of SROs were three of the areas². Based on their findings, project staff wrote *A Guide to Developing, Maintaining, and Succeeding with Your School Resource Officer Program (SRO Program Guide)* for the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services at the U.S. Department of Justice (Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005). To date, the national assessment is the most comprehensive study to examine these topics, but it is surprising that in the 17 years since publication more research has not been produced surrounding these identified problematic areas.

The relevant literature demonstrates a consensus that officers should not be assigned to SRO positions involuntarily (Clark, 2011; Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005). SRO programs forcing LEOs into the position found that many do a poor job (Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005). Relatedly, best practices guidelines indicate that transfer to an SRO position should not be used as punishment or as a way of “hiding” subpar or injured officers (Clark, 2011). Both professional and scholarly resources note that the SRO selection process should be rigorous and competitive to secure individuals who have the right demeanor and people skills, have experience as a patrol officer, are able to work independently, and are willing to work with young people (Clark, 2011; Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005). However, none of the 34 programs included in the study producing the *SRO Program Guide* had written criteria for SRO qualifications, and no research has been produced on the practices or guidelines followed by SRO programs when making selection decisions.

² The other areas SRO programs experienced difficulty addressing included retention, supervision, identifying sources of program funding, and maintaining program funding.

Once an officer is selected for the SRO position, there is no nationally approved model or standards for training. A review of state statutes in 2019 revealed that 26 states did not have laws in place addressing SRO training requirements (Strategies for Youth, 2019). This means that across the U.S., it may be up to individual law enforcement agencies or school districts to require specialized training. Assessments of SRO programs found that many school districts and/or law enforcement agencies do not require special training for SRO positions (Dahlberg, 2012; Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005; Martinez-Prather et al., 2016; Scheffer, 1987). The national assessment of SRO programs occurring between 2001-2002 found that SROs, SRO supervisors, and school administrators generally reported that untrained SROs completed their job poorly or would avoid completing important tasks because they had not been trained (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005). Despite this acknowledgement, few of the SRO programs included in the assessment trained SROs before they commenced their new position.

There is also the important consideration that law enforcement in a school setting is substantially different from patrolling the streets, and before commencing their position, new SROs may require an appropriate introduction to the roles they are expected to adopt and the issues they will confront in schools. Finn and McDevitt (2005) noted that many of the SROs in their study engaged in counseling and teaching but had not received training in these activities. The authors discuss the problematic nature of this situation since effective counseling and mentoring requires training in child psychology and development. It is also critical that SROs know when to refer students for professional mental health assistance. In 2019, only seven states required SROs to be trained in mental health issues, and only nine states and D.C. required training in

adolescent development (Strategies for Youth, 2019). Bullying is another issue SROs will frequently encounter in the schools, but not as patrol officers. Nonetheless, one study published in 2012 of 184 SROs in Texas indicated that many SROs had limited training and knowledge regarding bullying interventions (Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012). SROs should also be well-versed in the complex legal issues associated with the educational setting. Federal statutes such as the IDEA and FERPA provide many policies and procedures that must be abided by in a school setting. There is also distinct case law surrounding searches and interrogations of students. The national assessment of SRO programs found that SROs were not provided with training on these matters before commencing their position (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005). As of 2019, only seven states and D.C. required SRO training in school laws (Strategies for Youth, 2019).

Some research directly inquired as to the training SROs *believe* they should receive. SROs, supervisors, and school administrators participating in the national assessment of SRO programs indicated that pre-service training opportunities should address teaching, mentoring, counseling, working collaboratively with school administrators, time management, and applying juvenile laws and case law in the school setting (Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005). In another study consisting of in-depth interviews with SROs in Texas, 62 percent indicated that specialized training was needed for the position (Martinez-Prather et al., 2016). The SROs specifically mentioned the need for formal training covering dealing with students and parents, juvenile law, and school district policies. Results from a survey of 456 SROs in North Carolina indicated that the respondents believed that specialized training is needed *prior* to starting their position (Glenn et al., 2019). The respondents noted several areas that should be covered in

training opportunities including active shooter, gangs, mental health/exceptional children, mentoring, and adolescent psychology. Interviews from a case study of the Boise SRO program revealed that the SROs perceived suicide and sexual abuse as priority subjects requiring training (Scheffer, 1987).

Some SROs believe that on-the-job training is the most effective way for learning the duties and responsibilities of the SRO position (Martinez-Prather et al., 2016). The interviewed SROs mentioned the need for such training due to each school being different in their expectations and practices. In the national assessment of SRO programs, researchers found that due to basic SRO training not being regularly offered, several programs' training requirements included "shadowing" an experienced SRO before commencing their position (Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005). SROs participating in the study reported that this offered them indispensable knowledge that formal training would have never been able to provide them. Some of the SRO programs went further and created formal field training officer (FTO) programs for SRO positions. These were similar to traditional law enforcement agency FTO programs for patrol positions and included documentation and official evaluations. In a separate study, SROs in Texas recognized the need for a FTO program specific to SRO positions (Martinez-Prather et al., 2016). The empirical literature is lacking any further studies documenting such practices or assessing differences in outcomes based on having shadowed or participated in field training.

The *SRO Program Guide* mentions several organizations providing training for SROs. In a footnote, the authors mention that inclusion of the organizations in the *SRO Program Guide* does not provide an endorsement regarding the quality of the training, as

training courses had not been evaluated by the researchers. However, one organization is frequently mentioned in both the professional and scholarly literature: NASRO. A review of NASRO's website indicates that the organization offers six different training courses for SROs and their supervisors year-round across the country (NASRO, n.d.b). Offerings include the 40-hour Basic SRO Course costing \$495 per person and covering the triad model, ethics, teaching, understanding special needs students, informal counseling, social media, adolescent development, trauma, sex trafficking, school law, bias, drugs, responses to threats, emergency operations plans, and crime prevention (NASRO, n.d.c). Unfortunately, how many SROs have participated in NASRO's training offerings is not publicly available.

State agencies and organizations may also provide training for SROs. For example, the North Carolina Justice Academy, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, California School Resource Officer Association, and the State of New York Police Juvenile Officers Association all offer training courses to SROs in their state. In 1985, the Florida Attorney General's office developed the first 40-hour basic training course adopted by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to train SROs. The stated purpose of the course was to provide SROs "with the basic knowledge and skills necessary to implement crime prevention programming in a school setting" (Florida Crime Prevention Training Institute, n.d.). The Florida Crime Prevention and Training Institute's website claims that they have presented over 260 SRO classes to over 12,000 participants. There are no publicly available descriptions of the current SRO Basic Training course, but in an email from the Florida Crime Prevention and Training Institute the following description was provided:

The five-day SRO Basic Training course provides the participant with the history, philosophy and basic skills to serve as an SRO. Participants will receive instruction in juvenile law, communication skills, development of a referral network, identification and ways to handle exceptional students, and building rapport. In addition, participants will learn about current trends in SRO programs, security related issues on campuses, and emergency management (personal communication, December 22, 2020).

The training is typically only offered in the summer months and is also available during the Florida Association of School Resource Officer's (FASRO) yearly conference.

Advocacy organizations have voiced concerns about training courses that are offered. Specifically, the lack of training in child and adolescent development, youth behavior management, and student disabilities and mental health issues have been identified (Dahlberg, 2012; Strategies for Youth, 2019). However, it appears that some training organizations do address these topics. For example, both the North Carolina Justice Academy's and Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services' descriptions of their introductory SRO training courses mention student disabilities and mental health issues (North Carolina Justice Academy, n.d.; Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, n.d.). In conjunction with the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice, NASRO offers a separate 12-hour Adolescent Mental Health Training for SROs (NASRO, n.d.b). It is unknown whether SROs are required to participate in such specialized training or how many have successfully completed specialized courses. Many of the previous studies examining SRO training do not specifically inquire as to whether SROs received specialized training in mental health or special education issues (e.g., Gottfredson et al., 2020; Hunt et al., 2019; Martinez-Prather et al., 2016; May & Higgins, 2011). In one of the few studies to do so, May and colleagues' (2012) survey of SROs found that over half had not received any training on special education issues.

Importantly, a review of both the professional and scholarly literature did not provide any studies evaluating the effectiveness of specific training courses completed by SROs. NASRO's website does not provide any information regarding the development of their training courses or whether their courses have been evaluated. Similarly, state agencies and organizations do not provide such details. In a survey of over 600 SROs attending NASRO's annual conference, respondents indicated that trainings provided by private companies and local organizations were the least useful, but specifics are not provided (Trump, 2002). At a time when evidence-based practices, policies, and programs are growing in relevance and prominence, it is noteworthy that law enforcement agencies may be spending \$400 - \$500 per officer to complete a basic SRO training course without evidence of its usefulness or effectiveness.

In sum, the research regarding SROs' roles, activities, recruitment, and training demonstrates that we are currently unable to provide a picture of the "typical" SRO. Studies appear to support the prominence of the law enforcer role of SROs, while at the same time indicating that even this seemingly clear-cut role may entail various types of activities for different SROs. Additionally, the informal counselor and educator roles continue to be murky. Although not specifically discussed, many of the studies reviewed in this section *assume* the adoption of NASRO's triad model on the part of the SRO programs studied. Importantly, this model is solely recommended, and its existence does not seem to be grounded in any sort of evidence base. The research examining SRO training is similarly obscure. As of 2019, review of state laws showed that specialized training for SROs is not required in most states, however, the need for specialized training has been identified by SROs themselves. Yet, no evaluations of SRO training

programs could be located to better inform schools, law enforcement agencies, or policymakers. Further, the information gleaned from this section does not address an important question surrounding SROs: How does their presence impact the schools and students? This issue is examined in the following section.

Consequences of SRO Utilization

With so many resources dedicated to SRO programs over the last two decades, policymakers and the public should know whether benefits accrue from having an SRO on a school campus, but also whether there may be unintended negative consequences related to their adoption. The two most frequently cited benefits of SROs are a reduction in violence and improved school safety (Burke, 2001; Hutchinson, 2013; NASRO, 2012). Surveys of school administrators, police executives, and students regularly demonstrate support for the perception that SROs improve school safety (Chrusciel et al., 2015; Duxbury & Bennell, 2020; May et al., 2004; McDevitt & Panniello, 2005; Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018). However, the literature reviewed above indicates great variation in how SROs approach their roles and their training for the position. Consequently, there may also be discrepancies in observed outcomes when SROs are placed in schools. This section reviews the literature assessing the impact of SROs on two of the possible negative collateral consequences addressed in this dissertation: the criminalization of school misconduct and Baker Act apprehensions.

Criminalization of School Misconduct

Importantly, scholars and education advocates argue that in most of the nation's schools, serious criminal incidents are typically not a problem (James & McCallion,

2013; Kupchik, 2010; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Snell et al., 2002; Whitaker et al., 2019). National data collection efforts support that serious crime occurring at school is rare. For example, very few school administrators responding to the 2017-18 SSOCS reported an attack with a weapon (3%) or the existence of gang activities (0.4%) at their schools (Diliberti et al., 2019). Possession of a firearm, which was the central focus of federal legislation in the early 1990s, is also not a prevalent problem with only 3 percent of school administrators reporting such incidents. Therefore, many schools do not have serious crime problems that could be reduced by the introduction of an SRO.

Stakeholders' perspectives demonstrate this as well. In surveys of school principals and the law enforcement agencies providing SROs to their schools, only 4 percent of respondents indicated that they started an SRO program because of the level of violence at their school (Travis & Coon, 2005). In fact, the most common reason for the presence of an SRO was the national media attention surrounding school violence. Most of the principals reporting no SRO presence at their school indicated that they did not have one because there was no need.

Serious, violent acts or those posing a threat to safety may unquestionably warrant the arrest of a student at school. As discussed in previous sections, the federal government and states have zero-tolerance legislation in place requiring the referral of students to law enforcement for many serious offenses, such as possessing a firearm while on campus. However, since the early 2000s, student advocates and scholars recognized that many student arrests do not originate from serious, violent crimes. Instead, students are frequently arrested or referred to the justice system for minor misbehavior that in decades past would have been addressed by school administrators.

This phenomenon is referred to as the *criminalization of school misconduct* and is one method for directly feeding the school-to-prison pipeline (Hirschfield, 2008; Theriot & Cuellar, 2016).

Student and education advocates have presented preliminary evidence from specific school districts to demonstrate the criminalization of minor misbehavior. For example, the Advancement Project's (2005) analyses found that in 2002, the Houston Independent School District Police made 4,002 arrests of students. A close examination of these arrests demonstrated that 17 percent were for disruption and 26 percent were for disorderly conduct. In a comparison of the three largest school districts in Massachusetts, analyses indicated that the only district using full-time SROs in schools had arrest rates 3 times higher than the other two districts, and much of these arrests could be attributed to misdemeanor public order offenses (Dahlberg, 2012). In another study out of Massachusetts, SROs reported that "disturbing a school in session," a criminal charge similar to disorderly conduct, was their top reason for arresting students (Thurau & Wald, 2010). Data from the juvenile court of Clayton County, Georgia reflected that after SROs were implemented in middle and high schools in the mid-1990s, juvenile court referrals increased 1,248% by 2004 (Teske, 2011). The increase in referrals could be attributed to school fights and disorderly conduct. There was no corresponding increase in serious felony offenses occurring at school during the same time period. In an ACLU investigation, interviews with students, families, and educators in New York City uncovered that public school students were being arrested for minor infractions that would have previously not involved police intervention, such as talking back to security

personnel (Mukherjee, 2007). Regrettably, quantitative analyses were not possible since the NYPD refused to disclose the number of arrests taking place in schools.

Scholars have also produced empirical studies suggesting that student misbehavior is being criminalized by SROs. Research indicates that for every offense type, both serious and minor with the exception of possession of a firearm, the presence of an SRO on a school campus results in greater odds of the student being referred to law enforcement (Nance, 2016). This effect was present even after the researcher controlled for zero-tolerance statutes, the level of crime and disorder at the school, and the level of crime in the school's surrounding neighborhood. In Na and Gottfredson's (2013) longitudinal study, the presence of an SRO more than doubled the likelihood that students would be referred to law enforcement for the most common incident reported by schools: simple assaults. Results from Owens' (2017) research also supported the criminalization of simple assaults. Analyses indicated that the addition of an SRO was associated with a 21 percent increase in the arrest of students under the age of 15 for minor "violent" offenses. The author clarified that many of the incidents leading to arrest were better characterized as "scuffling" rather than serious felonies or life-threatening incidents. Theriot's (2009) comparison of schools with an SRO versus those without indicated that the presence of an SRO predicted more arrests for disorderly conduct. In fact, the most common charge in schools with SROs was disorderly conduct. In comparison, the most common charge in non-SRO schools was drug possession.

Directly applicable to the current study, two related research reports funded by the ACLU were released in 2020 specifically examining the impact of the MSD Act's (2018) requirements that every school have either SROs, armed private security, or armed staff

on campus. In one of the reports (Curran, 2020), data was compiled from the Florida Department of Education, FDJJ, local school districts, and local law enforcement agencies from the 2014-15 through 2018-19 school years. Analyses examined the presence of SROs in schools and school districts across the state and the effect on student outcomes. Comparisons of the 2017-18 school year versus the 2018-19 school year (when the MSD Act went into effect) indicate that there was an almost doubling in the number of SROs across the state from 1,844 to 3,638. The assignment of SROs on a full-time basis for the first time in many elementary schools was largely responsible for this substantial increase. In the 2014-15 school year, there were only 272 SROs assigned to elementary schools in Florida. By the 2018-19 school year the number had increased to 1,830.

Descriptive statistics from Curran's (2020) study show that the increase in SROs coincided with increases in the number of behavioral incidents, number of incidents reported to law enforcement, and the number of arrests at school. From the 2017-18 to 2018-19 school year, there was a 19 percent increase in the number of behavioral incidents. Closely matching the increase in behavioral incidents, there was a 25 percent increase in the number of incidents reported to law enforcement from the 2017-18 to 2018-19 school year. These increases were driven mostly by misdemeanor-level incidents (e.g., drug possession, tobacco, threats, and physical attacks). Providing evidence of criminalization, analyses showed that although the number of physical attacks decreased from the 2017-18 to 2018-19 school year, the number of such incidents reported to the police *increased* by 63 percent. Results of multivariate analyses provides additional support for the criminalization of student misbehavior. Specifically, the effects of having

an SRO on the number of behavioral incidents reported to law enforcement was most pronounced for the least serious offenses reported to the state. Curran (2020) argues that the presence of an SRO “may be resulting in more frequent reporting of offenses that may otherwise have been handled by school staff without involving law enforcement.” (p. 17).

The study’s examination of student arrests is also telling. After a decline from the 2014-15 to 2016-17 school years, student arrests began to increase in the 2017-18 school year through 2018-19 (Curran, 2020). Multivariate analyses demonstrated that the presence of an SRO at a school predicted 40 to 82 percent more arrests on average. This finding was consistent across grade levels. At the school-district level, these results equate to approximately 55 to 110 fewer arrests per school year in the averaged sized school district in Florida if there were no SROs. Results of an exploratory analysis examining the relationship between the presence of an SRO and school arrests by offense type revealed positive and significant relationships with assault/battery, disorderly conduct, petit larceny, weapons offenses, and felony drug offenses.

Only one empirical study was located suggesting a lack of support for the criminalization hypothesis. May and colleagues (2018) compared the source of juvenile justice system referrals for all juvenile offenses in a southeastern state from 2009 to 2011. There were 168 different types of offenses and over 57,000 individual referrals included in the analyses. The 168 offenses were categorized according to the seriousness of the offense into four separate groups of status, minor, moderate, or serious offenses. The researchers used cross-tabular analyses to compare differences in the number of referrals from each seriousness category by the referral source. Results showed that SROs made

1,776 referrals to the juvenile justice system. A majority of their referrals were for moderate (55%) or serious (32%) offenses. Only 7 percent of SRO referrals were for status offenses and 5 percent were for minor offenses. In comparison, 45 percent of the 8,720 referrals made by schools were for status offenses. Law enforcement in the community made the most referrals (31,797), and larger percentages were for status (10%) and minor (21%) offenses when compared to SRO referrals. Consequently, the authors argue that SROs did not increase the school-to-prison pipeline because they were responsible for the smallest percentage (3%) of overall referrals and were significantly less likely to refer juveniles for minor and status offenses compared to schools, other LEOs, the Department of Human Services, alleged victims, and family members.

However, there are some serious limitations to May and colleagues' (2018) study. For example, the number of SROs employed in the state during the time period, nor the number of SROs making referrals is provided. This means that we do not know how many SROs contributed to the 1,776 referrals made. Additionally, the authors' categorization of offenses is problematic. Disorderly conduct-type offenses were included in the "moderate" offenses category and consisted of three out of the top five most frequent offenses in the category. Previous studies have considered these types of offenses minor or low-level violations (e.g., Nolan, 2011; Theriot, 2009). Simple assaults were also included as a moderate offense. Other scholars have discussed that frequently, when originating from a school, these offenses were better classified as "scuffles" (Owens, 2017), and considered them relatively minor in analyses and resulting discussions (Na & Gottfredson, 2013). If these offenses were reclassified as minor for purposes of May and associates' (2018) analyses, findings would substantially change.

When reviewing the relevant research, the ultimate question is whether students would have been referred to the justice system if the SRO had not been present. Such a question is difficult to answer when studies do not use an experimental design and lack a counterfactual. However, all but one of the studies reviewed in this section provide support for the argument that the addition of SROs onto school campuses may criminalize student misbehavior. Accordingly, the cautious or preliminary conclusion that can be drawn at this time is that some SROs may directly contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline by criminalizing typical student misbehavior (Curran, 2020; Nance, 2016; Theriot, 2009).

Baker Act Apprehensions

Studies examining the prevalence rates of mental disorders among children and adolescents suggest that SROs are very likely to encounter students with a mental disorder. A national study of children aged 8 to 15-years-old found that in a 12-month period, 13 percent of the sample met the criteria for one or more mental disorders (Merikangas et al., 2010a). These prevalence estimates substantially increase as young people enter adolescence. One study of over 10,000 U.S. adolescents aged 13-18 found that approximately 14 percent met the criteria for a mood disorder, 20 percent for a behavior disorder, and 32 percent for an anxiety disorder (Merikangas et al., 2010b). Twenty-two percent of the sample met the criteria for a mental disorder with severe impairment and/or distress. This means that the adolescent's mental disorder "has a drastic impact on [their] ability to function socially, academically, and emotionally" (Merikangas et al., 2010b, p. 987).

Results from the latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicate that suicidal ideation and behaviors are also prevalent among students and have been increasing in prevalence in just the last decade. In 2019, 18.8 percent of the nationally representative sample of high school students responding to the survey reported having seriously considered suicide in the previous 12 months, while 8.9 percent of students made an attempt (Ivey-Stephenson et al., 2020). These percentages are greater for certain groups of youth, with 46.8 percent of homosexual and bisexual students considering suicide in the previous 12 months. Longitudinal analyses of data collected from 2009 through 2018 show that suicide among high school students has increased by 61.7 percent, making suicide the second leading cause of death for youth aged 14-18. These findings demonstrate that substantial numbers of K-12 students are encountering mental health problems.

Many of the young people with mental health issues do not receive treatment. A national study of adolescents aged 13-17 found that of those with a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder, only 45 percent had received treatment for their disorder in the previous 12 months (Costello et al., 2014). Consequently, the combination of young people spending so much time at school, mental disorder prevalence rates, and the lack of treatment, results in the inevitability of students encountering a mental health crisis while at school. Results from a survey of SROs in the Midwest suggest that such a scenario is a recurring problem. Sixty-six percent of the SROs indicated that they responded to a report of suicidal threats in the previous 30 days (Rhodes, 2019).

Florida's Mental Health Act (2017), more commonly known as the Baker Act, allows a LEO to apprehend and transport a person to a designated receiving facility for an

involuntary mental health examination if the officer believes that the person has a mental illness and due to that mental illness “there is a substantial likelihood that without care or treatment the person will cause serious bodily harm to himself or others in the near future, as evidenced by recent behavior.” (Florida Mental Health Act, 394.463(1)(b)(2)). Individuals may be involuntarily held at the facility for a period up to 72 hours. For purposes of this study, this formal action undertaken by LEOs in Florida is labeled as a “Baker Act apprehension,” and as will be encountered in Chapter 5, is commonly referred to by LEOs and mental health personnel in Florida as “Baker Acting” the person or a “Baker Act” of an individual. The term “involuntary commitment apprehension” is also used when discussing such actions nationally or in general research.

Relevant to the dissertation, the statute is applicable to minors. LEOs are not required to obtain the consent, or provide notice to, the parent/guardian of a minor when initiating a Baker Act apprehension. The statute solely requires that the receiving facility give notice to a parent or guardian by telephone or electronic communication “immediately after the minor’s arrival at the facility.” This means that SROs can involuntarily apprehend and transport students encountering mental health problems while at school, without the need for consent from school administrators or guardians.

The Florida Mental Health Act (2017) also includes data collection and distribution requirements. An annual report is publicly released online by the Baker Act Reporting Center providing information on the number and characteristics of involuntary examinations under the Act, meaning we do know how frequently they occur across Florida. According to the most recent report, there were 210,992 involuntary examinations in the 2018-19 fiscal year (Christy et al., 2020). Half of all examinations

were initiated by law enforcement. Approximately 18 percent (37,882) of the examinations were of children under the age of 18. Of the involuntary examinations of children, 58 percent were aged 14-17, 29 percent aged 11-13, and 12 percent were 10 and younger. Additionally, in the 2016-17 fiscal year (the last year to report this data), 22 percent of the involuntary examinations of children were initiated at school (Christy et al., 2018). Of importance to the current study, the data does not report by whom the school-based examinations were initiated. The latest report provides impactful evidence that involuntarily examinations in Florida have dramatically increased, especially for young people. Since 2001, involuntary examinations of children in the state increased by 153 percent (Christy et al., 2020). These substantial increases cannot be attributed to a population increase.

Since mental disorders are common in child and adolescent populations it is crucial that school personnel, such as SROs, receive appropriate training in youth mental health problems and disorders. Studies of general law enforcement populations indicate that many officers hold stigmatizing views of individuals with mental illness (Pinfold et al., 2003; Watson et al., 2004a), patrol officers may criminalize mental illness (Teplin, 1984a), and that mental health training is needed (Wells & Schafer, 2006). A review of police academy training curriculum in 2013 showed that only nine states included adolescent mental health issues (Strategies for Youth, 2013). Many states allow LEOs to attend Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training on an elective basis, but as noted by the researchers conducting the survey, it is unclear whether agencies' CIT curriculums include youth mental health issues, or whether they offer the separate youth version of the training.

It is also unclear how many SROs participate in mental health training opportunities. As of 2019, only seven states required SROs to complete training covering mental health issues and only nine states required training on special education students' needs and protections (Strategies for Youth, 2019). A survey of SROs in Kentucky revealed that over half had not received any training on special education issues and that a majority held stigmatizing views of special education students (May et al., 2012). However, the study did not disaggregate the various categories of special education students in their examination to specifically inquire as to perceptions of students with mental illnesses. Additionally, there is a lack of research on whether various training offerings are effective. For example, there are currently no publicly available evaluations of NASRO's Adolescent Mental Health Training (K. Keator, personal communication, January 4, 2021). It is also unclear whether qualified individuals contributed to curriculum development. Only one state (Illinois) requires that education specialists, psychologists, and/or adolescent development experts be involved in the development of SRO training curriculum (Strategies for Youth, 2019).

In Florida, the fact that SROs may be called upon to make on-the-spot mental health assessments of students means that training is especially needed. SROs may be assigned to a school with no mental health staff able to assist during a student's mental health crisis. A recent report by the ACLU analyzed U.S. Department of Education data regarding the number of mental health professionals employed by the nation's public schools (Whitaker et al., 2019). Results of the analyses indicated that 14 million students were in schools with police officers, but no social worker, nurse, counselor, or psychologist. Importantly, these numbers do not include Florida schools. The authors of

the report had to exclude Florida's data due to the state's failure to report accurate staffing data to the Department of Education. A separate, and more recent report was able to analyze Florida Department of Education data from the 2018-19 school year to determine that no school district in the state of Florida met the various industry standards for the ratio of students served by counselors, nurses, school psychologists, or social workers (ACLU of Florida, 2020).

The lack of available mental health professionals in schools is also reflected in the results of the 2017-18 SSOCS. The survey examined whether schools provide mental health treatment to students and found that 51 percent of schools provided diagnostic mental health assessments, and only 31 percent provided treatment to students (Diliberti et al., 2019). Therefore, it is extremely likely that SROs respond to student mental health crises without the assistance or guidance of a mental health professional.

A review of law enforcement academy curriculum from 2013 revealed that Florida did not include childhood development and psychology or adolescent mental health issues (Strategies for Youth, 2013). However, since the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, SROs are now mandated under Florida state law to complete mental health crisis intervention training. The only stated requirements for the training are that it use a curriculum developed by a national organization with expertise in mental health, and that it improves SROs' knowledge and skills as first responders to incidents involving mental illness, including de-escalation techniques (Fla. Stat. 1006.12(2)(c)). Interestingly, LEOs in Florida are still not required to complete any type of basic SRO training or certification requirements before commencing an SRO position.

Only two studies were located discussing SRO responses to student mental health crises. One study examined the role and experiences of SROs, school administrators, and school mental health professionals on school safety and crisis response teams (Eklund et al., 2018). Analyses indicated that the most common crisis events for all three personnel involved student assaults, drug offenses, and child abuse reporting. One of the few significant differences was responding to suicides. School mental health professionals and administrators reported more experience responding to this type of crisis compared to SROs. The study does not examine other types of possible mental health crises.

Duxbury and Bennell's (2020) evaluation of an SRO program in Canada examined the different activities SROs engaged in over a six-month period. Twenty different activities were identified and tracked, with one being responding to critical mental health incidents at the schools. Analyses indicated that the SROs spent approximately 2 percent of their time over the six-month period engaging in this activity. Unfortunately, no additional details are provided. In another section of the study results, the researchers discuss the ethnographic component which included 10 full-day ride-alongs with SROs. The researchers note two separate incidents related to SROs responding to student mental health problems. In one of the incidents, an SRO stopped a suicide attempt. However, due to confidentiality, the researchers chose not to disclose details regarding the incident. In the second incident, the SROs, who were assigned to a high school, received a call from the superintendent to respond to an ongoing crisis at a nearby elementary school. A student tried to harm herself by running out of the school and into oncoming traffic, and when stopped by teachers, the student became aggressive and destructive. The SROs were able to deescalate the situation and transport the student

home. The school contacted the relevant social services authority to follow-up on the matter.

Importantly, there are no studies directly studying the contribution of SROs to Baker Act apprehensions of students. Both MSD Commission reports are silent as to the possible ripple effect SRO expansion could have on Baker Act apprehensions and related involuntary examinations. Overall, the research is extremely limited regarding SROs responses to students with mental illness, but the data reviewed in this section makes it clear that at some point SROs will encounter students experiencing a mental health crisis.

Limitations of Previous Research

The review of the literature in this chapter reveals several limitations to the current body of research surrounding SROs. One critical gap is the lack of research surrounding SROs assigned to elementary schools and their impact. At times, this exclusion is straightforward, as some of the studies of SRO programs did not have SROs assigned to elementary schools (Duxbury & Bennell, 2020; Johnson, 1999). In other instances, researchers purposely excluded this population from their assessment (Barnes, 2016; Broll & Lafferty, 2018; Gottfredson et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2011; Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018; Pigott et al., 2018; Zhang, 2019). The most recent SSOCS indicates that 21 percent of elementary schools are assigned a part-time SRO and an additional 14 percent are assigned a full-time SRO (Diliberti et al., 2019). In the state of Florida alone there were 1,830 SROs assigned to elementary schools in the 2018-19 school year (Curran, 2020). Other important factors to consider is that there is no minimum age of

arrest or of Baker Act apprehensions in Florida. Taken together, these considerations suggest that SRO research can no longer ignore this population.

Another limitation of the previous research on SROs is a heavy reliance on cross-sectional surveys, especially the SSOCS. Many of the studies examining the topic of SROs use data from a single school year of the SSOCS (Benitez et al., 2021; Broll & Lafferty, 2018; Crawford & Burns, 2016; Jennings et al., 2011; Kupchik & Ward, 2014; Lynch et al., 2016; Maskaly et al., 2011; Nance, 2016; Pigott et al., 2018; Swartz et al., 2016). Although the national data collection effort is informative, there are several limitations. One issue discussed by researchers using the data is that any identified relationships may be spurious. Especially when comparing schools with an SRO to those without, researchers are unable to determine if schools that were experiencing high rates of crime or violence decided to employ an SRO to combat the problem. The cross-sectional nature of the survey also makes determinations of SRO impact over time impossible and may mask an SRO's true effect. As demonstrated in Zhang's (2019) study, expected benefits, such as a deterrent effect, may not materialize until a few years after an SRO's initial introduction to the school.

Additionally, the SSOCS is a self-report survey completed by a single school administrator. This means that the variables measuring SRO activities are based on the perceptions of a school administrator, and not collected from the SROs themselves. Other studies have also utilized surveys that rely solely on the perceptions of individuals besides the SRO to examine SRO roles and activities (e.g., Coon & Travis, 2007, 2012). In one of these studies, surveys were completed by school principals and the corresponding law enforcement executives employing the SRO (Coon & Travis, 2012).

The survey inquired as to whether SROs engaged in 66 different activities. Results demonstrated significant differences between the perceptions of principals and the law enforcement executives responding to the survey. Generally, the law enforcement executives reported greater involvement by the SRO in the various activities compared to the principals. However, this study and others examining SRO activities via the perceptions of others, does not provide us with information on what SROs *actually* do or the frequency of such activities.

Of critical importance to the current study, the SSOCS does not measure student arrests. Instead, the SSOCS inquires as to the number of incidents “reported to police or other law enforcement” (Diliberti et al., 2019, p. D-16). Nance (2016) specifically discusses the ambiguous nature of this survey question. The respondents could be recording only those students that *school personnel* referred to an SRO or law enforcement, excluding school-based arrests made by the SRO on their own volition. If the respondent is interpreting the question in this manner, results could be substantially underreporting law enforcement involvement in school matters. The distinction between arrest and referrals to law enforcement are important. Nothing could come from an administrator’s referral of a student to law enforcement, while arrest results in an official record and direct entry into the school-to-prison pipeline.

The lack of analyses regarding student arrests is not isolated to studies using SSOCS data. Several SRO studies do not examine this important student outcome (e.g., Duxbury & Bennell, 2020; Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Gottfredson et al., 2020; Johnson, 1999; Zhang, 2019). Advocates and scholars have documented the difficulty in obtaining student arrest data directly from individual jurisdictions (Dahlberg, 2012; Mukherjee,

2007; Thureau & Wald, 2010). The limited number of studies directly assessing student arrests is partially explained by the lack of data available for analyses. There are no national datasets tracking arrests or justice system referrals made by SROs. Arrest data available via national data collection efforts such as the UCR do not provide information on the location of the arrest. State data that do make distinctions between school and community arrests, such as those provided by FDJJ, do not distinguish whether the arrest was made by an SRO.

An additional limitation to SSOCS data is that the survey does not collect the number of referrals to law enforcement for every possible offense, which means it is likely underreporting the number of incidents referred to law enforcement. The SSOCS asks the respondent to report the number of 13 mostly serious incident types including shootings, rape, sexual assault, physical attacks or fights, theft, possession of weapons, drug offenses, and vandalism. In comparison, May and colleagues' (2018) data set of all juvenile court referrals in one state reflected 168 separate types of offenses. One especially critical omission in SSOCS data collection efforts is disorderly conduct, which previous research has shown is a common charge used by SROs when arresting students (Nolan, 2011; Theriot, 2009).

Another methodological issue is that much of the research does not provide a comparison between schools with an SRO versus those without. For example, several of the studies utilizing surveys to examine stakeholders' perceptions of SROs did not include stakeholders from comparison schools with no SROs present (B. Brown, 2005; Brown & Benedict, 2005; Chrusciel et al., 2015). Relatedly, several assessments of SRO programs were unable to make pre-post comparisons due to the studied SRO programs

being in existence for quite some time (Duxbury & Bennell, 2020; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; May et al., 2004; Scheffer, 1987).

Two of the most informative and frequently cited qualitative studies in the school-to-prison pipeline literature do not focus on SROs (Kupchik, 2010; Nolan, 2011). Both studies provide discussions of SROs and include data collected from observations and interviews with SROs, but they were included as part of a holistic exploration of the disciplinary regime in the high schools included in their ethnographic research. This means important topics such as SRO training experiences and qualifications, perceptions of their roles, and decision-making are left unexamined. Although, some qualitative studies since have been undertaken with SROs (Curran et al., 2019; Martinez-Prather et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2016) the body of qualitative research examining these crucial areas continues to be quite limited.

This dissertation will address many of these gaps and limitations. First, this study uses a mixed methods research design that includes analyses of both qualitative and quantitative data to comprehensively investigate the roles, preparedness, and impact of SROs. Over 100 hours of observations of the SROs' training requirements and in-depth interviews with the SROs provide the data for the qualitative component of this study addressing the perceptions of SROs regarding their roles, duties, and training they received. This is the first study known to the researcher providing descriptions and assessments of SRO training requirements. Additionally, the quantitative component of this study will address two critical gaps in the research assessing SRO impact by longitudinally examining the important student outcomes of school-based arrests and Baker Act apprehensions before and after the expansion of a Florida county's SRO

program. The next chapter reviews the theoretical framework informing the quantitative strand of the proposed dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Black's General Theory of Arrest

This chapter reviews the theory and research informing the quantitative research questions and their associated hypotheses. The qualitative strand of the dissertation adopts an inductive approach using exploratory research questions, and thus, there are no a priori expectations. In contrast, the quantitative strand of this mixed methods study undertakes longitudinal analyses of the number of arrests and Baker Act apprehensions occurring at schools before and after the expansion of a county's SRO program. Since the SRO literature indicates that many SROs are selected from patrol positions (Clark, 2011; Finn, Shively et al., 2005), previous research and theoretical developments exploring patrol officer arrest decision-making is informative due to the likelihood the SROs will import their patrol behaviors into the school. Specifically, the quantitative strand of the current study is guided by Black's (1971) general theory of arrest, discussed in his seminal article "The Social Organization of Arrest."

The purpose of Black's (1971) inquiry was to determine how situational factors affected the probability of arrest. Data for the study were collected in three cities (Boston, Chicago, and Washington D.C.) via systematic social observation (SSO) in 1966 and are commonly known as the "Black-Reiss" data. Observers accompanied patrol officers during their shifts and recorded the details of police-citizen encounters in structured incident booklets.

A total of 5,713 incidents were recorded during data collection but analyses only included a small percentage (a little more than 5%) of the data due to patrol officers

infrequently encountering opportunities for arrest. Previous studies (Goldstein, 1960) as well as those coming after Black's (Bayley, 1986; Liederbach, 2005; Whitaker, 1982), generally support the finding that arrest is a rare occurrence in the daily work of the patrol officer. In the Black-Reiss data, less than half of citizens' calls were crime-related, and even if the call was crime-related, a suspect was not present during a majority of the police-citizen encounters for an arrest to be possible.

Major findings from Black's (1971) study were provided in the form of eight empirical generalizations to assist in the development of a general theory of arrest. These identified patterns in arrest behavior have continued to be supported in policing research and inform the current study. The first generalization surrounds how the patrol officers were mobilized in encounters ending in arrest. Specifically, Black states that "most arrest situations arise through citizen rather than police initiative." (p. 1104). The study indicated that only 13 percent of the observed encounters were proactively initiated by the patrol officers. This finding has major implications for the criminal justice system (CJS) as a whole, as it suggests that criminal activities initially pass through citizens' moral filters. Although some may believe in the myth of a proactive, neighborhood police officer seeking out and controlling crime (Crank, 1994), results from the study provide evidence that much of the responsibility for law enforcement is left in the hands of private citizens and their willingness to alert the proper authorities. Subsequent research using SSO of police-citizen encounters support the reactive nature of patrol officers' responses to crime (Lundman, 1974; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010; Smith & Visher, 1981).

In many of the police-citizen encounters involving a criminal incident where a suspect is present a complainant is also present, meaning it is critical to consider the

complainant's role in the interaction and how the complainant may influence an LEO's behavior (Black, 1971). In his second generalization, Black asserts that "arrest practices sharply reflect the preferences of citizen complainants." (p. 1105). Results from the analyses demonstrated that in both felony and misdemeanor situations, the patrol officer frequently adopted the complainant's preference for either leniency or arrest. In Black's study and the research conducted since, complainant preference is considered a legal factor since the cooperation of the complainant means there is evidence supporting the charges that are filed against the suspect, while in the opposite situation a complainant requesting leniency may not be interested in appearing in court to support the charges. A great deal of evidence has been compiled that a complainant's preference for arrest makes arrest much more likely (Friedrich, 1977; Mastrofski et al., 1995; Smith, 1987; Smith & Klein, 1983; Visher, 1983), or that there is an increased probability of arrest when the complainant indicates a willingness to sign a complaint and/or prosecute the suspect (Berk & Loseke, 1980-1981; Kerstetter, 1990; Lafree, 1981; Worden & Pollitz, 1984). Conversely, a complainant's preference for an informal resolution significantly decreases the likelihood of arrest (Mastrofski et al., 2000; Riksheim & Chermak, 1993).

Black's (1971, p. 1106) third proposition declares that "the police are lenient in their routine arrest practice." Specifically, arrest occurred in 58 percent of the felony encounters and 44 percent of encounters involving a misdemeanor. This means that although a suspect may be present during police-citizen encounters involving criminal incidents, officers routinely terminate these interactions without resorting to arrest, a finding replicated in subsequent research (Fyfe et al., 1997; Novak et al., 2002; Smith & Klein, 1984; Terrill & Paoline, 2007).

The next generalization involves the legal factor of evidence. Black (1971, p. 1106) states, “[e]vidence is an important factor in arrest. The stronger the evidence in the field situation, the more likely is an arrest.” It is further argued that criminal offenses witnessed by the LEO are more likely to result in arrest, which is often a legal requirement for many misdemeanors. Additionally, the only evidence available in many cases is citizen testimony. More recent studies include indices measuring the strength of the evidence in their analyses, and generally find that the stronger the evidence, the greater the likelihood of arrest (Mastrofski et al., 1995; Novak et al., 2002; Novak et al., 2011; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010). However, it is important to note that both Black and later scholars (Terrill & Paoline, 2007) discuss research findings indicating that even in situations with a great deal of evidence, officers frequently exercise their discretion to *not* arrest. For example, in Black’s study, officers arrested only 66 percent of the suspects the officers personally witnessed committing the criminal offense. Similarly, in Terrill and Paoline’s (2007) study, only 24 percent of the suspects with the greatest evidence index scores were arrested by officers.

Another critical legal factor is offense seriousness. Black (1971, p. 1107) theorized that “[t]he probability of arrest is higher in legally serious crime situations than in those of a relatively minor nature.” Research examining arrest behavior generally shows that the likelihood of arrest increases as the seriousness of the offense increases (Brown & Frank, 2006; Friedrich, 1977; Mastrofski et al., 1995; Novak et al., 2011; Smith & Klein, 1983; Smith & Visser, 1981; Sykes et al., 1976). Studies have also included variables representing the use of a weapon in their analyses as a further indicator

of offense seriousness finding that it is a significant predictor of arrest (Fyfe et al., 1997; Kerstetter, 1990; Lafree, 1981; Smith, 1987).

The sixth proposition relates to the “intimacy” between the complainant and the suspect. Black (1971, p. 1007) states, “[t]he greater the relational distance between a complainant and a suspect, the greater is the likelihood of arrest.” When examining the encounters involving felony offenses by complainant-suspect relationship, results from the analyses showed that 45 percent of suspects were arrested when the complainant was a family member, 77 percent when the complainant was a friend, neighbor, or acquaintance, and 88 percent when the complainant was a stranger. Therefore, arrest is more likely in situations where the complainant and suspect are strangers, and least likely when they are family members. When excluding studies specifically investigating police arrest behavior in domestic disputes, subsequent research supports these findings (Engel et al., 2000; Fyfe et al., 1997; Sherman, 1980; Smith & Visher, 1981).

Black’s seventh generalization involves the suspect’s demeanor and states, “[t]he probability of arrest increases when a suspect is disrespectful toward the police.” (p. 1108). Empirical observations of police patrol activities collected as early as the 1950s recognized the importance officers place on respect, proper deference, and citizens’ attitudes (Brown, 1981; Muir, 1977; Van Maanen, 1978; Westley, 1970). In Black’s (1971) analyses, the arrest rate for very deferential suspects was 40 percent, compared to an arrest rate of 70 percent for disrespectful suspects. Antagonistic behavior on the part of the suspect may be interpreted by the officer as a symbolic rejection of their authority requiring more formal means of control (Smith & Visher, 1981). In the decades following Black’s study, a variable measuring suspect disrespect has regularly been collected in

SSO studies of police-citizen encounters. Results of analyses from these studies confirm Black's original findings that suspects who are disrespectful, antagonistic, or uncooperative are more likely to be arrested (Brown & Frank, 2006; Engel et al., 2000; Lundman, 1994; Moyer, 1981; Novak et al., 2002; Smith, 1986, 1987; Smith & Klein, 1983, 1984; Smith & Visher, 1981; Terrill & Paoline, 2007; Visher, 1983; Worden, 1989; Worden & Pollitz, 1984; Worden & Shepard, 1996).

The final proposition is the most controversial, and unlike the previous propositions, research in the decades following Black's study provides mixed support. Specifically, Black asserts, "[n]o evidence exists to show that the police discriminate on the basis of race." He further clarifies that his analyses reflected a higher arrest rate for Black suspects, however, the difference in arrest rates between Black and White suspects could be attributed to Black suspects more frequently displaying disrespect towards the police during encounters.

Concern regarding whether police distribute coercion differentially based on a citizen's race has produced a great deal of research since the 1970s (National Research Council, 2004). Many of these studies indicate that a suspect's race does not influence arrest (Berk & Loseke, 1980-1981; Fyfe et al., 1997; Hollinger, 1984; Mastrofski et al., 1995; Moyer, 1981; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010; Smith, 1984; Smith & Klein, 1983, 1984; Worden & Pollitz, 1984). However, there is also research suggesting that Black suspects are more likely to be arrested compared to White suspects even when controlling for other, offense-related variables in multivariate analyses (Brown & Frank, 2006; Engel et al., 2000; Kochel et al., 2011; Lundman, 1998; Novak et al., 2011; Smith, 1986; Smith & Visher, 1981). Adding to the confusion, analyses of NIBRS data indicate that for certain

offenses (robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault) White suspects experience greater odds of arrest (D'Alessio & Stolzenberg, 2003).

In sum, Black's (1971) initial attempt to identify and describe the situational factors influencing patrol officer arrest behavior provided eight empirical generalizations that continue to endure decades later. First, police responses to criminal incidents typically arise from citizen complaints, rather than police initiative. During the police-citizen encounter, the preferences of the complainant, relational distance between complainant and suspect, suspect demeanor, and the legal factors of evidence and offense seriousness, all influence arrest decision-making. However, debate continues regarding the influence of a suspect's race. Finally, the police routinely do *not* arrest, although in many encounters an arrest is legally possible. Although studies have also explored the individual characteristics of the officer (Novak et al., 2011; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010), the police organization (Mastrofski et al., 1987; Wilson, 1968), and community characteristics (Liska & Chamlin, 1984; Riksheim & Chermak, 1993) as explanations of police arrest behavior, the situational factors identified by Black (1971) continue to be the most consistent predictors of arrest (National Research Council, 2004; Worden, 1989). Imperative to the current dissertation is a critical exclusion in Black's analyses: encounters involving juveniles were not included in the study. The next section reviews the applicability of Black's propositions to police arrest behavior in encounters involving juvenile suspects.

Arrest Decision-Making in Cases Involving Juveniles

While the criminal justice system has historically been guided by a crime control philosophy, the creation and administration of the juvenile justice system (JJS) was originally designed with a rehabilitation or treatment philosophy in mind (Sanborn & Salerno, 2005). Importantly, juveniles are not seen as fully responsible “criminals,” but rather as delinquents in need of care and assistance (Worden & Myers, 2000). A different vocabulary is used in case processing (e.g., “taken into custody” versus “arrest”), and jurisdictions vary a great deal as to the options available to law enforcement when initiating official action against suspected juvenile delinquents and status offenders (Sanborn & Salerno, 2005). Furthermore, in encounters with juveniles, LEOs may have the option of using the traditional notion of arrest, but they also may not. For example, in order for a LEO to initiate an official action against a juvenile, jurisdictions may require the LEO to file a petition, refer the juvenile to an intake officer, issue a citation, and/or issue a summons. LEOs may also have a variety of diversion programs to choose from which preclude the need to appear in court, but still create an official record and exert formal control over the juvenile (e.g., civil citation programs).

If the differing philosophy and expansion of options in the JJS guides police decision-making, differences may arise in police behavior when they encounter juveniles compared to adults. For example, age may be perceived as a mitigating factor when considering how to respond to juvenile suspects (Brunson & Pegram, 2018). These differences may have informed Black’s decision to exclude encounters involving juveniles from his seminal study. However, he did not completely ignore them. Instead, Black and Reiss (1970) examined the subset of juvenile encounters from their data in a

separate publication. Accordingly, we can make cautious³ comparisons between the results from the two studies and evaluate whether Black's general theory of arrest is applicable in police encounters with juvenile suspects.

Out of the 5,713 observations included in the Black-Reiss data, 281 involved alleged incidents with one or more juvenile suspects. Seventy-two percent of the encounters were citizen initiated, supporting Black's first proposition. One substantial difference between the adult and juvenile encounters was the overwhelming predominance of minor incidents when juveniles are involved. In Black's (1971) study over one-third of encounters involved felonies. In comparison, only 5 percent of the encounters with juveniles involved felonies. In fact, 60 percent of the encounters with juveniles were related to rowdiness or mischievous behavior, which the authors describe as the juvenile equivalent of disorderly conduct or breach of the peace (Black & Reiss, 1970). In support of Black's proposition regarding police leniency, only 15 percent of the encounters involving juveniles resulted in an arrest. Furthermore, Black's generalizations surrounding complainant preferences, evidence, and seriousness of the offense are all supported in the juvenile data. The relational distance between the suspect and complainant is not discussed or provided in the Black and Reiss study to address whether Black's proposition is supported in police encounters with juveniles.

Black and Reiss' (1970) findings regarding the suspect's demeanor and discrimination on the part of the police are more muddled. The study describes juvenile suspects' demeanor towards the police along a continuum ranging from very deferential

³ Inclusion criteria in the Black and Reiss (1970) study differed from Black (1971). For example, traffic encounters were included in Black and Reiss' study, but not in the other.

at one end to disrespectful on the other end. The observations revealed that most juveniles (57%) could be described as “civil,” while 11 percent were very deferential, and 16 percent were antagonistic. Results from analyses examining the relationship between juvenile suspects’ demeanor and arrest were more complex than expected. The arrest rate for civil juvenile suspects was 16 percent. Expectedly, the arrest rate for antagonistic juvenile suspects was higher (22%). However, inexplicably, the arrest rate for very deferential juvenile suspects was also 22 percent, which the authors were unable to explain.

Much like Black’s (1971) study, results from Black and Reiss’ (1970) analyses indicated that the arrest rate for Black juveniles was greater than for White juveniles. However, this finding is once again accounted for by another variable. In encounters with no citizen complainant, the disparity in arrest rates between Black and White juvenile suspects was small (14% versus 10%). When a complainant was present for the encounter the disparity grew to 21 percent versus 8 percent. Importantly, all encounters included in the analyses were racially homogenous, meaning that complainants and juvenile suspects were of the same race. In the data, Black juveniles were more likely to be suspects in encounters involving a complainant. Additionally, Black complainants were more likely to request arrest. Accordingly, since LEOs are likely to comply with the request of complainants, Black juveniles were more likely to be arrested.

In sum, Black and Reiss (1970) provided support for six of Black’s (1971) propositions, do not address relational distance, and reveal a more complicated picture for the proposition related to suspect demeanor. Additionally, results from the study provide another proposition: “The great bulk of police encounters with juveniles pertain to

matters of minor legal significance.” (Black & Reiss, 1970, p. 76). Since the publication of the two studies in the early 1970s, limited coverage has been devoted to policing juveniles in both the juvenile justice and policing literature (Bishop & Leiber, 2012; Liederbach, 2007; National Research Council, 2004). Some of the studies cited in the section above included the suspect’s age as an independent variable in their multivariate analyses. Results from these studies tend to show that the odds of arrest are greater for juvenile suspects (R. Brown, 2005; Brown & Frank, 2006; Mastrofski et al., 1995; Novak et al., 2002; Smith & Klein, 1983). Results from Black and Reiss’ analyses indicated a lower arrest rate for juveniles. Thus, the results from the more recent research appear to contradict both the Black and Reiss study, as well as the foundational premise of the JJS. This means it is important to review whether other research specifically examining police-citizen encounters involving juveniles continues to find Black’s propositions applicable.

Beyond Black and Reiss’ (1970) study, only a few scholars endeavored to investigate the factors influencing LEO arrest behavior by analyzing samples of police-citizen encounters involving solely juvenile suspects. Generally, these studies confirm that encounters with juveniles typically involve less serious matters (Lundman et al., 1978; Worden & Myers, 2000), and are completed without the LEO resorting to arrest (Brown et al., 2009; Liederbach, 2007; Terry, 1967). The legal factors identified in Black’s propositions continue to be influential. The seriousness of the offense, evidence, and complainant preference are all associated with the likelihood of arrest in cases involving juveniles (Brown et al., 2009; Liederbach, 2007; Lundman et al., 1978; Terry, 1967; Vaughan et al., 2015). Although the Black-Reiss data revealed some confusion

surrounding the influence of a suspect's demeanor, later research has shown that demeanor is an important factor influencing arrest, with results of both qualitative and quantitative inquiries suggesting that a juvenile's disrespectful, hostile, or uncooperative demeanor increases the probability of arrest (Allen, 2005; Liederbach, 2007; Lundman et al., 1978; Worden & Myers, 2000). Interestingly, studies have continued to ignore relational distance when solely investigating encounters with juveniles.

The proposition regarding how LEOs are mobilized is not supported in later studies of police-citizen encounters involving juveniles. In the Black and Reiss (1970) study, 28 percent of encounters with juveniles were initiated by the patrol officer. Lundman and colleagues (1978) replicated the Black and Reiss study using data collected via SSO in 1970 in a Midwestern city. Results of their analyses demonstrated that 52 percent of encounters with juveniles were initiated by the patrol officers, a substantial increase from the Black-Reiss data. Two studies using SSO methods in the decades following have continued to support the findings proffered by Lundman and colleagues, indicating that the police initiate about half of encounters with juveniles (Liederbach, 2007; Worden & Myers, 2000). Two of the three studies discuss these particular findings. The authors speculate that specific policies of departments included in their studies called for a more proactive approach (Lundman et al., 1978; Worden & Myers, 2000). For example, the data used in the Worden and Myers (2000) study was collected after a department had adopted community policing which was interpreted by officers as a "directed, aggressive patrol" (p. 16), and thus, officers regularly initiated stops against juveniles for offenses such as a violation of the curfew ordinance.

In the studies stemming from the Black-Reiss data, Black suspects experienced higher rates of arrest compared to White suspects. However, the authors attributed this finding to an increased likelihood of Black suspects being disrespectful towards the police (Black, 1971), or complainants being more likely to request arrest (Black & Reiss, 1970). Accordingly, the empirical generalization drawn from these findings is that there is no evidence that the police discriminate on the basis of race. However, since the 1970s, initiatives at the federal, state, and local levels have brought to the forefront the problem of disproportionate minority contact in the JJS. In 2018, although only 16 percent of the total juvenile population was composed of Black youth, they comprised half of all juvenile arrests for violent crimes and 42 percent of arrests for property crimes (Puzzanchera, 2020). Decades of research has not provided definitive answers as to how and why minority youths are disproportionately represented in the JJS (Bishop & Leiber, 2012), but the more recent studies using multivariate analyses to examine police-citizen encounters with juveniles overwhelmingly demonstrate that the probability of arrest is greater for Black juveniles (Brown et al., 2009; Liederbach, 2007; Worden & Myers, 2000), suggesting that in their position as gatekeepers to the JJS, LEOs are contributing to disproportionate minority contact.

Unlike adult suspects, a juvenile's family situation appears to influence officers' dispositional decisions (Bonner, 2015), and is another extra-legal factor that can be race related. Bonner's (2015) qualitative content analyses of POPN data revealed that in non-serious cases, police officers typically deferred to the parents of the juvenile, and if an arrest was made it was because the parent or guardian requested one. Another study exploring Canadian LEOs' discretion in juvenile encounters found that over 90 percent of

the LEOs made assessments regarding the juvenile's parents as a part of their decision-making process (Schulenberg, 2010). Specifically, LEOs considered the degree of parental involvement and support for the LEO in order to determine whether the parents will mete out sufficient punishment in the home. If parents were very supportive, the officer was much more likely to informally dispose of the case. In Wordes and Bynum's (1995) qualitative investigation of the factors influencing officer decision-making in juvenile encounters, almost all of the interviewed LEOs reported that "family issues" were critical to their decision of whether to handle a case formally. Family issues were identified by the officers as including the extent of cooperation from parents, parental supervision (or lack of), perceived control over the youth by family members, and the attitude of parents. Importantly, this focus on family circumstances prejudiced juveniles with single mothers. Many of the LEOs interviewed by Wordes and Bynum (1995) believed that boys needed a male influence to keep them out of trouble, and single mothers were incapable of adequately controlling delinquent behavior. With 47 percent of Black children living with a single mother, compared to 13 percent of White children (Livingston, 2018), such considerations disproportionately impact Black juveniles. Further, there is some research suggesting that these officers' perceptions are inaccurate, as results from studies examining family structure show that juveniles from single-parent homes are not more likely to engage in delinquency when compared to juveniles from intact or stepparent households (Jacobsen & Zaatut, 2020; Mack et al., 2007; Schroeder et al., 2010).

The research discussed in this section demonstrates that with a few modifications, Black's general theory of arrest may be extended to police-citizen encounters involving

juveniles. First, incidents involving juvenile suspects come to the attention of police officers due to *both* citizen complaints as well as officer initiative. A majority of these incidents involve minor offenses and do not end in an arrest. Complainants' preferences, evidence, and the seriousness of the offense are influential factors in arrest decision-making. In addition, the juvenile suspect's demeanor is important, with the probability of arrest increasing if they are antagonistic, disrespectful, or uncooperative. The juvenile suspect's family appears to be an additional influential extra-legal factor in arrest decision-making, a variable not accounted for in many of the earlier SSO studies. Lastly, it is clear from the research that minority youth, especially Black youths, are more likely to be arrested compared to White youths, although the reasons for this continue to be debated. The next section discusses the other form of police behavior assessed in the quantitative strand of this dissertation: responding to individuals with a mental illness.

Police Responses to Individuals with a Mental Illness

A critical activity related to LEOs' order maintenance and service functions is responding to calls regarding persons experiencing a mental health crisis or mental illness. The police routinely encounter persons with a mental illness (Bittner, 1967; Borum et al., 1998; Dew & Badger, 1999; Finn & Sullivan, 1989; Gillig et al., 1990; Teplin, 1984b), and LEOs must exercise discretion in how they handle such encounters (Borum et al., 1997). The discretion exercised by LEOs in cases involving individuals with a mental illness is more complex than those in typical cases involving a criminal suspect, because the officer is forced to assume a "quasi-psychiatric function" and render judgements about the mental condition of an individual and the optimal strategy for

controlling them (Menzies, 1987). LEOs with solely academy training may be ill-equipped to handle such functions. Additionally, the decision may be further complicated due to a LEO having more options available to them as to how they may dispose of the case (Cooper et al., 2004), especially since many law enforcement agencies do not use a specialized response for dealing with individuals with a mental illness (Deane et al., 1999). Options may include diversionary programs, emergency apprehension of the individual for transport and involuntary commitment to a mental health facility, trying to persuade a voluntary commitment, referral to outpatient mental health services, releasing the individual to friends or family members, doing nothing, or arrest. However, in some law enforcement agencies, specialized responses have been adopted such as CIT officers, civilian mental health consultants, and mobile crisis teams, which allow for patrol officers to request assistance and pass off the burden for decision-making to others (Deane et al., 1999).

A critical omission in the research exploring police behavior in response to individuals with a mental illness is the exclusion of juveniles. Most studies examining LEO decisions to initiate involuntary examinations exclude juveniles from data collection and/or analyses. Accordingly, the literature discussed in this section largely considers adult populations. Although this is a limitation, the section above suggests that several of the factors influencing decision-making may be similar whether an LEO encounters an adult or a juvenile.

The research on LEO decision-making tends to focus on three categories of responses and the situational factors that may influence their selection. These categories include informal responses, involuntary commitment apprehensions, and arrest. Informal

responses are typically conceptualized as any response other than involuntary commitment apprehensions and arrests, and accordingly, may involve a range of options from doing nothing to referrals to outpatient mental health services. Wood and colleagues' (2017) observational study of officers in Chicago describes how many of the mental health-related calls LEOs respond to fall into a "gray zone," where an incident cannot be resolved through formal actions because the citizen did not commit a crime *and* does not meet the criteria for an involuntary commitment apprehension. Accordingly, officers frequently must resolve such calls using informal methods. Studies indicate that informal responses are a regular occurrence when LEOs are dealing with individuals with a mental illness, and are oftentimes the most common response (Bittner, 1967; Green, 1997; Pogrebin, 1986-1987; Teplin, 1984b).

Regarding involuntary commitments, every state has laws in place allowing for the emergency apprehension of individuals experiencing a mental health crisis and their conveyance to facilities for psychiatric observation. Several studies from across the country indicate that in cases involving such individuals, LEOs regularly resort to emergency apprehensions (LaGrange, 2003; Teplin & Pruett, 1992; Watson & Wood, 2017), however, percentages vary a great deal. For example, in Teplin and Pruett's (1992) analyses of police-citizen encounters in Chicago, hospitalization was initiated by LEOs in only 13% of encounters involving persons with a mental illness, while in LaGrange's (2003) analyses in Cleveland the use of such placements was the most frequent response (61%).

Finally, LEOs may resolve cases involving individuals with a mental illness via arrest. Although studies exploring LEO decision-making in these cases indicate that

arrest is an infrequent occurrence (Pogrebin, 1986-1987; Teplin, 1984b; Watson & Wood, 2017), the percentages of cases disposed of in this manner are substantial enough to warrant investigations of why some individuals are transported to jail instead of treatment. Importantly, if the dispatch the LEO is responding to involves a crime, the suspect appearing mentally ill is an additional situational factor that may be crucial to arrest decision-making, but this factor is rarely investigated in LEO arrest behavior research (Kochel et al., 2011) and was not considered by Black (1971) in his theoretical development. In fact, in almost all studies included in the previous sections of this chapter, a suspect appearing mentally ill is not included as a variable in analyses, revealing a major limitation in criminal justice research.

The police have been criticized for unjustifiably arresting persons with a mental illness (National Research Council, 2004). Although it is well recognized that persons with a mental illness are overrepresented in jail populations, there continues to be a question of whether this overrepresentation can be credited to LEOs abusing their arrest powers (Engel & Silver, 2001). Abramson (1972) introduced the hypothesis that LEOs criminalize mental illness, arguing that since the deinstitutionalization movement in the mental health system, the criminal justice system has taken over the social control of individuals with a mental illness.

Teplin (1984a) was one of the first scholars to empirically assess the hypothesis. Results from her analyses of police-citizen encounters in Chicago indicated that suspects with a mental illness were significantly more likely to be arrested compared to suspects not displaying signs of mental illness. Engel and Silver (2001) critiqued the findings provided by Teplin (1984a), noting that the analyses failed to control for many legal

factors and conducted their own analyses using data from the Police Services Study (PSS) and the Project on Policing Neighborhoods (POPEN). The POPEN data revealed that suspects with a mental illness were three times *less* likely to be arrested, while no differences were found in the PSS data. Novak and Engel (2005) encountered similar findings using data collected from observations of the Cincinnati Police Department. Results from their analyses indicated that although mentally disordered suspects were significantly more likely to be disrespectful and resistant towards officers, they were significantly less likely to be arrested compared to non-mentally disordered suspects. However, a more recent study of police-citizen encounters in Canada provides further support for the criminalization hypothesis, finding that the citizen's mental health status significantly predicted the issuing of citations for minor offenses (Schulenberg, 2016). Contradicting all of these previous findings, results from a vignette experiment with a sample of 382 police officers suggested that information of an assault suspect's mental illness was not significantly related to the officers' responses as to how they would resolve the case (Watson et al., 2004b).

Although the number of studies is scant, and there is currently an inability to draw any firm conclusions, there have been some inquiries into the relationship between mental disorders and entry into the JJS. Results from one study exploring the psychiatric morbidity rates of juvenile detainees showed significantly greater prevalence rates in the sample of detainees when compared to the general youth population (Teplin et al., 2002). Sixty-six percent of boys and 74 percent of the girls in the sample of detainees met diagnostic criteria for one or more psychiatric disorders. Another inquiry investigated how mental health disorders affected the odds of arrest among the boys participating in

the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Hirschfield et al., 2006). Results provided partial support for the criminalization hypothesis. Oppositional Defiance Disorder increased the risk of arrest, but the presence of anxiety and affective disorder significantly lowered the risk of arrest. Importantly, these studies do not specifically examine the arrest decision, so there is no evidence that the signs and/or symptoms of these mental illnesses were manifesting at the time of arrest and influenced police behavior. However, this limited research does provide support for the existence of a relationship between mental health problems and JJS involvement and the need for future studies to consider a suspect's mental illness as a situational factor in LEO decision-making.

Some scholars have explored more than the possibility of arrest when the police respond to individuals appearing mentally ill. The seminal work in this arena is Bittner's (1967) study involving observations of patrol officers and secondary analyses of the psychiatric records of the hospital receiving the department's referrals for emergency involuntary commitments. Overall, Bittner (1967) found that the LEOs generally sought to avoid involuntary commitment apprehensions, identifying attitudinal and structural factors explaining their reluctance. First, the LEOs were very aware that they were not mental health experts and were concerned they may incorrectly identify an individual as mentally ill. There was also a recognition that initiating such procedures was the equivalent of "locking up" someone just for being ill. Additionally, there were LEOs who did not believe that dealing with citizens with a mental illness is a proper task for the police. Structural factors were also influential in that LEOs found the procedures to be tedious and cumbersome and were regularly uncertain whether the individual met the

admission criteria of the hospital. Thus, many times not employing an emergency apprehension was a matter of expediency.

Bittner (1967) also identified situational factors increasing the probability of an involuntary commitment apprehension including the citizen attempted suicide, signs of a serious psychological disorder accompanied by either violence or abnormal physical appearance, the person is seriously disoriented and creating a nuisance in a public place, or a request is made by those in an instrumental relationship with the individual (e.g., doctor, employer, landlord). Results from the study indicated that LEOs would try to find a competent person to whom they could relinquish custody of the individual experiencing a mental illness, and thus, the existence of stable family members willing to care for the individual was an important factor that decreased the likelihood of an emergency apprehension. Although not specifically discussed by Bittner, this factor may be especially relevant to the unique situation of juveniles, where parental involvement or cooperation may be sought by the responding LEO.

Studies since have continued to find that structural obstacles surrounding involuntary commitment procedures and admission criteria are influential in LEO decision-making and are frequently identified by LEOs as a source of frustration (Abramson, 1972; Cooper et al., 2004; Dew & Badger, 1999; Dupont & Cochran, 2000; Green, 1997; Matthews, 1970; Pogrebin, 1986-1987; Rock et al., 1968; Schulenberg, 2016; Teplin, 1984b). The studies thoroughly discussing these issues provide descriptions of admission criteria not allowing for pending criminal charges, addiction issues, intoxication, or individuals identified as “dangerous” by staff (Teplin & Pruett, 1992). Rock and colleagues’ (1968) comparisons of involuntary commitment procedures in

Illinois, Pennsylvania, and California demonstrated that the more procedural steps there were between an incident on the street and the receiving mental health facility, the less likely it was that the police would initiate such procedures.

Additionally, the studies calculating the average length of time spent on the different options overwhelmingly find that involuntary commitment procedures take much longer than arrest or informal responses (Green, 1997; Pogrebin, 1986-1987). This means that in many cases, although the individual may be exhibiting signs of mental illness, LEOs will choose more certain, expeditious resolutions to the case (Dupont & Cochran, 2000; Schulenberg, 2016). In Green's (1997) study of the Honolulu Police Department, transport to and evaluation at the hospital emergency room for persons with a mental illness took an average of 145 minutes. In comparison, the average amount of time for an arrest was 64 minutes and 23 minutes for informal options. This finding was used to explain why 72 percent of responses to citizens with a mental illness resulted in informal resolutions or no action taken at all.

In contrast, a study comparing three cities using different models of specialized mental health responses by police (e.g., CIT, mobile crisis) found that in the city with the greatest percentage of cases resolved via involuntary commitment apprehensions, the police department and mental health system had an agreement in place for a "no-refusal" policy (Steadman et al., 2000). This meant that the facility could not refuse admission to the citizens brought in via LEOs. Only two percent of individuals were arrested in this city, while over 70 percent were brought to the facility for treatment. When a facility makes admission difficult, the opposite may result. The inaccessibility of hospitalization in Chicago helped to explain why officers arrested 47 percent of suspects with a mental

illness, while only initiating emergency hospitalization for 13 percent (Teplin & Pruett, 1992). During observations of police-citizen encounters, the officers indicated they were very aware of the strict admission criteria and believed they had no option but to arrest in cases where the individuals were not sufficiently mentally disordered to be accepted by the hospital, but they needed to “manage” the individual engaging in public deviance. A related situation was identified in Toronto, where LEOs preferred to arrest individuals they perceived as mentally ill because the jail had a new forensic unit allowing for an immediate psychiatric examination and control over the citizen, while involuntary commitment procedures were much more complex and did not guarantee confinement of the individual (Menzies, 1987). Accordingly, LEOs may book individuals with a mental illness in jail when they believe there is no appropriate alternative, a practice known as “mercy booking” (Lamb & Weinberger, 1998).

Along with structural obstacles, Bittner’s (1967) finding regarding the importance of family members in police responses to citizens experiencing a mental illness is demonstrated elsewhere. The accessibility of stable family members may act as a viable alternative to an involuntary commitment apprehension or arrest. For example, one study of police responses to individuals with a mental illness found that 23 percent of incidents were resolved by leaving the individual with a family member (Pogrebin, 1986-1987). Furthermore, family members are a critical resource when gathering information on the individual’s mental health, medication, and hospitalization history when making determinations of how to dispose of the case (Ruiz, 1993; Schulenberg, 2016).

However, family members may also act as the initial source of police calls for assistance. Results from a study analyzing mental health-related calls to police in

Chicago indicated that 34 percent of such calls came from private residences and that family members were the most frequent requesters of assistance from the police (Watson & Wood, 2017). Family members of individuals with a mental illness are an important source of support for the person, but they frequently encounter the same structural obstacles as the police when attempting to obtain involuntary treatment for their loved one (McFarland et al., 1989).

Additionally, if an individual experiencing a mental health crisis becomes destructive or violent, a family member is frequently the victim (Monahan et al., 1979; Pogrebin, 1986-1987). This means family members may resort to contacting the police when overwhelmed by their loved one's mental illness (Lamb & Weinberger, 2020). In his exploratory study of police practices in response to persons with a mental illness, Matthews (1970) found that family members would call the police not because they wanted their relative to be arrested, but because they could no longer handle their relative's behavior on their own. However, the police were reluctant to take official action in such cases, believing that it was the responsibility of the family member to petition for civil hospitalization. Bonovitz and Bonovitz' (1981) analyses of a Pennsylvania police department's responses to mental illness-related incidents indicated that the source for 25 percent of calls was a family member. Although the incidents reported by family members to the police involved displays of distressing emotional problems and/or disruptive behaviors, the individual with mental illness regularly did not meet the criteria for an involuntary commitment. This meant that LEOs would typically visit the home but could only respond by giving advice to family members or making a referral for psychiatric assistance.

In mental health-related calls involving juveniles, not only are family circumstances potentially influential to LEO decision-making, but the juvenile's school may be as well (Wood et al., 2021). In one of the few studies to examine LEOs' responses to juveniles with mental health problems, findings from observations of and interviews with patrol officers in Chicago suggested that both the schools and family members were frequently unable to manage the mental health issues of juveniles in their care and would resort to calling the police for assistance. Another common theme identified in interviews was LEOs' belief that many of their mental health-related calls involved "preventable family issues" or "incapable parents", such as situations arising from a juvenile's noncompliance with medication (Wood et al., 2021, p. 34).

Another important consideration in how LEOs respond to citizens with a mental illness is the adoption of specialized programs or training by the police organization. Specialized responses include the use of CIT officers, mental health liaisons or civilian mental health personnel, and mobile crisis units (Deane et al., 1999). In the current dissertation, SROs completed CIT training which was observed by the researcher. Since the 1980s, CIT training has become an increasingly popular training program with law enforcement agencies across the country (Compton et al., 2008). If LEOs receive specialized training in mental health issues, they may be more adept at recognizing signs of mental illness and choose to initiate commitment procedures or informal options, rather than arrest. Results from pre-post survey evaluations demonstrate that LEOs completing the 40-hour CIT training show statistically significant improvements in recognizing signs of mental illness, increases in knowledge pertaining to local mental health resources and services, enhancement of LEOs' ability to respond to mental health

crises, and reductions in stigmatizing attitudes towards mental illness (Bahora et al., 2008; Compton et al., 2014a; Demir et al., 2009; Ellis, 2014; Helfgott et al., 2020; Wells & Schafer, 2006).

Although rarer than pre-post evaluations, some research has attempted to make the connection between training outcomes and changes to LEOs' behavior. Using a sample of police encounters with citizens thought to have a mental disorder from six different law enforcement agencies in Georgia, Compton and associates (2014b) compared the use of force and the resolution of incidents involving citizens with a mental illness between CIT-trained LEOs and LEOs never having completed the training. CIT trained officers were significantly more likely to report using verbal engagement or negotiation as the highest level of force used during encounters. Further, CIT trained LEOs were significantly more likely to resolve encounters through referral or transport to mental health services, and less likely to arrest when compared to non-trained LEOs.

Other research has examined changes in behavior at the aggregate level. Lord and colleagues' (2011) longitudinal analyses indicated that as a CIT program expanded in a southern county, involuntary commitments decreased, while voluntary commitments increased. In another study, police dispatch data was analyzed before and after the implementation of a CIT program in Akron, Ohio (Teller et al., 2006). Results showed that after CIT was implemented there was a statistically significant increase in the involuntary transport of persons experiencing a mental health crisis to treatment facilities, as well as an increase in transport on a voluntary basis. Interestingly, analyses from both of the previous studies indicated that there were no significant changes to arrest rates (Lord et al., 2011; Teller et al., 2006). Accordingly, it is likely that CIT training has some

influence on LEOs' decisions to initiate commitment proceedings, but not necessarily on arrest decisions.

Lastly, if the individual is alleged to have committed a serious offense, no matter how mentally ill they may appear, it is likely they will be processed via the CJS (Lamb & Weinberger, 1998). Watson and Wood's (2017) analysis of mental health-related calls in Chicago indicated that of the calls in which an arrest was not made, a chargeable offense was present in 32 percent of the calls, meaning arrest is frequently a feasible option for LEOs seeking a resolution. The studies specifically examining this issue find that the more serious the offense, the greater the likelihood that a suspect with a mental illness will be arrested rather than hospitalized (Bonovitz & Bonovitz, 1981; Green, 1997; Markowitz & Watson, 2015; Pogrebin, 1986-1987; Teplin, 1984b). This has also been found for LEOs' perceptions of the "dangerousness" of the individual, with results from research suggesting that if an LEO believes an individual with a mental illness is a danger to others, they are significantly more likely to resolve the case with an arrest (LaGrange, 2003).

Since involuntary examinations are not tracked nationally, commentary on the frequency of such encounters for LEOs nationwide is unavailable. However, the state of Florida does release annual numbers. In the 2018-19 fiscal year, LEOs initiated approximately half (51%) of the over 210,000 involuntary Baker Act examinations in Florida (Christy et al., 2020). This means that LEOs across the state are regularly making decisions regarding how to resolve encounters with citizens appearing mentally ill. Yet this section demonstrates that this critical decision has not received as much attention as

would be expected in policing research, especially when considering responses to juveniles.

Since Bittner's (1967) foundational work, three factors have repeatedly been supported in the research reviewed in this section as influencing LEO behavior when encountering individuals with a mental illness: the seriousness of the offense if there is a co-occurring criminal incident (Green, 1997; Markowitz & Watson, 2015; Pogrebin, 1986-1987; Teplin, 1984b), the difficulty of the admitting process for involuntary commitments (Cooper et al., 2004; Dew & Badger, 1999; Dupont & Cochran, 2000; Rock et al., 1968; Schulenberg, 2016), and the presence or availability of family members (Bonovitz & Bonovitz, 1981; Mathews, 1970; Wood et al., 2021). In recent years, studies have also demonstrated that specialized mental health training may influence responses to incidents involving citizens experiencing a mental illness (Lord et al., 2011; Teller et al., 2006). The next section discusses SRO decision-making.

Explanations of SRO Behavior

When examining theoretical explanations for the impact of SROs on student disciplinary outcomes, scholars have noted that much discussion surrounds two contradictory theories (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020). One viewpoint adopts routine activities theory, arguing that SROs will act as a capable guardian, preventing and discouraging misbehavior and thus a reduction in exclusionary discipline and referrals to the JJS are expected. The other position is informed by criminalization theories, proposing that once SROs are introduced into the school environment, school discipline functions will be delegated to them, and in turn, the SRO

will treat typical child and adolescent misbehavior as crimes, meaning an increase in exclusionary discipline and referrals to the JJS will result. Importantly, these limited theoretical discussions generally do not consider the greater body of research regarding LEO behavior in encounters with citizens, and how these previous findings compare to SROs' responses to student misbehavior. This may be partially attributed to a substantial limitation in the school-to-prison pipeline literature generally: a lack of SRO data for analyses.

Although the body of research is minimal and underdeveloped, one work was located empirically investigating SRO arrest decision-making. Informed by Black's (1971) scholarship, Wolf (2014) sought to examine whether the same factors generally identified as influencing patrol officer behavior also influenced SROs. An online survey was distributed to SROs in Delaware specifically inquiring as to the importance of various factors in arrest decisions, as well as investigating the respondents' previous arrest behaviors and their beliefs surrounding arrest as a response to student misbehavior. Findings indicated that like patrol officers, SROs exercise a great deal of discretion, as most of the respondents regularly did not make an arrest every time probable cause was present during a school-based incident. Furthermore, legal factors such as the availability of evidence, seriousness of the offense, injury to the victim, and wishes of the victim's parent/guardian were rated as "extremely important" or "important" factors by at least 80 percent of the officers when contemplating arresting a student.

The results from Wolf's (2014) research suggest that SROs may follow the patterns of patrol officers, however, the survey also included a question inquiring as to whether the SROs believed that arrest decision-making in schools differs from those

made on the streets. A majority of respondents (71%) affirmed that it is different. Influential factors unique to the school setting were also identified as part of the survey and will be discussed further below, but due to the small sample size (n = 31) results are preliminary and should be interpreted with caution.

Although the findings may not be conclusive, Wolf's (2014) study and the work of other scholars provide a foundational body of evidence that SRO behavior is influenced by some of the same factors established in the general policing research (e.g., offense seriousness), but also by different and unique factors not considered in studies of patrol officer behavior. The influence of such factors likely results in differences in decision-making between SROs and patrol officers. First, the general context (i.e., the school setting) in which decisions are made by SROs is very different from the street. Further, in this differing context, SROs find themselves in situations where they must share authority, and at times defer to, other important decision-makers outside of the legal system (e.g., school administrators). Third, the clientele SROs are regularly interacting with are dissimilar from the typical clientele of the patrol officer, as encounters will be mostly comprised of juvenile citizens, and for SROs assigned to elementary schools, *very young* juveniles. Finally, the roles and responsibilities of SROs are more diverse than a patrol officer and may carry differing expectations. Each of these elements is discussed below.

Context

When hypothesizing about how SRO decision-making may differ from patrol officers, the overarching context must be considered because such decision-making takes place within a school setting which is quite different from the street (Rhodes &

Clinkinbeard, 2020; Wolf, 2014). First, schools provide a more predictable and less dangerous environment. Unlike in patrol positions, many SROs are assigned to one permanent location allowing them to become knowledgeable about their school and develop relationships with staff and students. This assignment also means that the SRO is more removed from other LEOs, resulting in fewer opportunities to interact with other LEOs and the possibility that an SRO may not be as influenced by police culture. The SRO may also face an adjustment to their language, attitudes, and actions since the school environment and interactions with young people prohibit obscenities, impatience, and aggressive tactics.

In one of the few studies to consider the broader policing literature, Rhodes and Clinkinbeard (2020) conducted interviews and observations of 20 SROs in four Midwestern states. The general purpose of the study was to explore the SROs' adaptations from patrol officer to SRO. Results from the analyses support that LEOs transitioning from a patrol to SRO position endure a "resocialization" process to adapt to their new context. Specifically, three themes were identified in the data regarding the SROs' resocialization including changes to their approaches, attitudes, and self-concepts. Changes in the SROs' approaches entailed developing rapport with staff and students, actively communicating with students, and maintenance of an open and friendly demeanor. SROs also discussed how their work-related attitudes changed. Participants noted that as patrol officers they avoided the handling of juvenile calls, because such calls were cumbersome and a waste of time since they felt juveniles were never actually punished by the juvenile courts. The participants contrasted this previous attitude with their current SRO position where a majority of issues involve juveniles, and they must

work to resolve ongoing problems instead of trying to avoid them. The change in attitude also involved a shift in their unfavorable perceptions of youth, with participants reporting mostly positive interactions with students throughout their workday. According to the SROs, this is a dramatic shift from patrol positions where most, if not all, citizen interactions are negative. Lastly, the SROs reported changes to their self-concept, believing that they had changed from a typical “asshole cop” to a less hardened and cynical SRO who found meaning in their work (Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020, p. 272). Lastly, participants noted that patrol officers seek to control situations and behavior, while as SROs they now sought to help the students.

Wolf’s (2014) survey exploring SRO arrest decision-making provided an open-ended question allowing for SROs to explain how the school and street contexts are different. Responses recognized that Delaware has laws in place specifically addressing crimes occurring on school campuses. These laws require police investigations of certain offenses and mandate arrest for specific crimes (i.e., zero-tolerance policies). As discussed in the previous chapter, zero-tolerance laws and policies are prolific across the U.S., with the specific offenses requiring arrest varying state to state. Accordingly, any analysis of SRO arrest behavior must consider the lack of discretion involved if the state or locality has zero-tolerance offenses mandating arrest. A similar situation may also arise when SROs respond to student mental health crises if the relevant legal code provides strict requirements mandating LEO initiation of an involuntary commitment.

It is also important to consider the grade levels of the school the SRO is assigned to when theorizing about SRO behavior. In general, data demonstrate that both arrests (Puzzanchera, 2020) and involuntary commitment (Christy et al., 2020) are a less

frequent (but growing) occurrence for youth under the age of 15, encompassing students in elementary and junior/middle schools. Consequently, arrest and involuntary commitment apprehensions are less likely to occur in schools serving younger students. Results from McKenna and White's (2018) survey of SROs in Texas provide preliminary support for this argument when considering arrest decision-making, finding that when responding to student misbehavior, younger students were more likely to receive a counseling response, while older students were more likely to receive a legal response.

Another theme identified in Wolf's (2014) study of SRO decision-making concerns the availability of school discipline options as an alternative to arrest. The SROs noted that when a school administrator doles out punishment such as detention or suspension, they regularly do not feel the need to initiate a justice system response. Such alternatives to arrest are not available when patrol officers encounter juveniles on the street. Similarly, the presence of certified mental health personnel on a school campus may provide alternative options to involuntary commitment apprehensions when SROs encounter students enduring a mental health crisis.

There is some precursory evidence that an SRO's behavior may change over time as the SRO is "resocialized" and adapts to the new context. Interview data indicate that some SROs enter the school setting with a negative attitude towards juveniles, and immediately try to establish authority by purposely avoiding an approachable demeanor and being standoffish (Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020). SROs also discussed the difficulty in unlearning the aggressive techniques they become accustomed to as a patrol officer. However, the interviews suggested that these issues may erode over time. The SROs assigned to a school for several years indicated that they become emotionally invested in

the school's and students' success. Zhang's (2019) longitudinal analysis demonstrated that the presence of an SRO increased reported drug crimes, however, after three years of SRO presence, the schools reported lower rates of violent crime and disorder, suggesting an eventual deterrent effect. Thus, when an SRO first enters the position, an initial increase in arrests may be expected followed by a gradual decrease until arrest numbers stabilize. Although there is a lack of research, such a finding may also be applicable to decisions surrounding involuntary commitment apprehensions.

Shared Authority

A substantial difference between decision-making at a school and on the street is that SROs must work closely and share their authority with school administrators, a transition that may be difficult for some. As discussed in the previous chapter, the lack of MOUs to provide guidance, an absence of training before initiating the SRO role, and SROs transitioning from patrol positions all mean that it is likely the SRO will default to a traditional authoritarian law enforcer role, resulting in more punitive responses to student misbehavior. This situation may also result in clashes with the school administrators and teachers responsible for disciplining students. Accordingly, it is crucial to consider the possible influence exerted by school personnel on decisions surrounding arrest and Baker Act apprehensions.

Although the school principal may not be the direct supervisor of the SRO, they are responsible for school operations and oversee faculty, staff, and students. Therefore, the principal sets the tone for discipline and punishment within their school, with a continuum of possible punishment philosophies they may abide by. This continuum

ranges from punishment-oriented at one extreme to support-oriented at the other (Collier et al., 2019).

Brown and colleagues (2020) argue that the police and schools are two separate organizational silos, with the trend in adopting SROs resulting in one organizational silo (police) being placed within another (schools). Both organizations can be viewed as advancing the interests of youth, while also playing a role in discipline or punishment. However, their primary responsibility is divergent, with the police focusing on responding to delinquency and schools focusing on education. This means that from the outset the punishment philosophies of SROs and school administrators may not align. The scholars propose that whether punishment philosophies align has consequences for student discipline outcomes. A significant increase in exclusionary discipline, arrests, citations, or referrals to juvenile court (i.e., amplification of the school-to-prison pipeline) would be expected in situations where *both* the school and the SRO adopt punishment-oriented philosophies for responding to school misbehavior. In the reverse situation, both parties may use a support-oriented approach which makes use of rehabilitative interventions to misbehavior such as counseling, restorative justice, and bullying prevention programs, ultimately allowing the student to remain in school. In this situation, punishment may become too lax, hurting school safety when students are not held properly accountable for serious offenses (Mears et al., 2018). Between these two extremes is a “balanced” approach which provides an equal emphasis on supportive and punitive efforts to respond to school misbehavior. In scenarios where there is only partial alignment or misalignment of philosophies, student discipline outcomes may be inconsistent as conflicting approaches counteract each other, continually compete for

precedence, or one approach frequently gives in to the other. Either way, conflict between school administrators and the SRO may impede the ability of either the school or the SRO to fully achieve their discipline goals.

Brown and associates (2020) critique the school-to-prison pipeline literature for assuming that the implementation of an SRO will automatically result in a shift to a more punitive punishment philosophy within the school. In their research project evaluating a delinquency prevention program within four schools, interviews and focus groups with 41 school administrators, SROs, school probation officers, and support staff indicated that the overwhelming majority of participants believed that school personnel were more punishment-oriented than the SROs. Descriptions were provided by SROs of the pressure they experienced from teachers to arrest students for minor misbehavior. Additionally, school administrators voiced frustration because the most punitive punishment they could give without added administrative hurdles was an out-of-school suspension, meaning that they relied on school probation officers and SROs to be more punitive, yet officers were regularly unwilling to dole out further punishment.

Importantly, school administrators and the punishment philosophy they adopt are going to vary by school setting. Additionally, there is no typical SRO, and each school will have different needs of its SRO (Kupchik, 2010). The differing personnel and their varying punishment philosophies provide a partial explanation for why disparate student arrest outcomes would be expected between schools even if they are located within the same district. In Kupchik's (2010) study, a comparison of the punishment policies and student outcomes at four high schools demonstrated that although all the schools had full-time SROs assigned, how they utilized them varied a great deal. For example, the

principal in one of the high schools collaborated with the SRO to institute a mandatory arrest policy for students caught fighting. In another example, the level of involvement in non-criminal disciplinary matters varied between the high schools with one SRO being so involved that the author described his approach as “cast[ing] him in the role of a school administrator” (Kupchik, 2010, p. 83). This SRO was regularly observed monitoring the hallways and interacting with students. In comparison, the SRO at another high school was frequently located behind the closed door of his office. This means that one SRO was far more likely to observe misbehavior, and in turn respond to such behavior. Unfortunately, the study did not include a comparison of arrests among the SROs to further explore arrest behavior.

Another important element to consider is that police arrest behavior research supports that citizen preferences for arrest or leniency are an influential situational factor in police decision-making (Black, 1971; Black & Reiss, 1970; Liederbach, 2007; Mastrofski et al., 1995). In a school setting, citizen preferences may carry even more weight since the SRO’s colleagues (administrators and teachers) may be the citizens requesting arrest or leniency. Responses to Wolf’s (2014) survey of SROs indicated that 73 percent of respondents had sought guidance from school administrators when making an arrest decision, and 55 percent indicated that they had arrested students for minor offenses because it had been requested by a teacher. Teachers may also be influential to student disciplinary outcomes by their initial decision of whether or not to refer a misbehaving student to the SRO. This issue has been studied empirically in the context of school administrators issuing suspensions (e.g., Skiba, 2001; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba et

al., 2006), but no research has investigated this dynamic in the context of SRO decision-making.

The school setting also differs substantially from the street for those SROs assigned to a school with a licensed mental health professional on staff. In mental health crisis scenarios, SROs may be influenced by these individuals with expertise when deciding whether emergency apprehension of a student is necessary under involuntary commitment laws. Furthermore, in the same ways that school administrators and/or teachers exert an influence in the arrest decision, they may also be influential in involuntary commitment decisions. Such individuals may provide background knowledge surrounding the student's behaviors and mental illness diagnoses but can also serve as a source of either cooperation or resistance to the SRO. Although the research is not as plentiful, some studies have provided evidence that LEOs may resolve encounters with citizens experiencing a mental illness informally when other individuals, such as family members, are willing to take responsibility for the citizen (Bittner, 1967; Bonovitz & Bonovitz, 1981; Pogrebin, 1986-1987). Accordingly, it is likely that SROs will defer to the expertise of school licensed mental health professionals or seek guidance from other school personnel during a student's mental health crisis.

Clientele

The SRO position requires that most of the officer's time be spent working with juveniles. The previous studies discussed in this chapter examining patrol officer behavior show that a majority of citizen encounters do *not* involve juveniles (Novak et al., 2002; Smith & Visser, 1981; Worden & Myers, 2000), resulting in a major difference from working on the street. An understanding of childhood and adolescent development,

education laws, and the legal standards that apply to juveniles within educational settings are all items that the typical patrol officer does not receive thorough training in (Strategies for Youth, 2013). Further, the school culture emphasizes that responses to misbehavior consider long-term impacts on the student's educational attainment, a factor that may not even cross the mind of patrol officers confronting juveniles on the street (Brown, 2006). Finally, studies exploring police arrest behavior in incidents involving juveniles and police responses to mental health crises indicate that family members are an extra-legal factor influencing decision-making, a finding that is critical to consider in school contexts.

Although some may assume that the policing of schools full of adolescents and children involves a "softer" approach than would be expected on the streets, Nolan's (2011) ethnographic research in an urban high school suggests that the increased use of SROs, security personnel, and surveillance techniques resulted in "the systematic use of order-maintenance-style policing" within the school (p. 53). The aggressive policing of students had several consequences with one being the criminalization of student misbehavior. Nolan found that criminalization occurred via two mechanisms. First, SROs involved themselves in minor school infractions. The researcher accessed and reviewed 221 school incident reports from the previous school year to examine what types of actions and behaviors incurred the intervention of the SROs. She found that 52 percent of the incidents resulting in students being referred to the justice system were based on charges of disorderly conduct. A deeper review of incident descriptions revealed that what constituted "disorderly conduct" in many situations was students' insubordination during an exchange with school security or SROs. The researcher found that in 65 of the

incidents labeled as disorderly conduct, the incident stemmed from students being in the hallway after the bell has rung, security staff or SROs stopping the student, and then the student refusing to show ID. Several of the reports also mentioned the students' use of profanity or claimed that the student was "verbally abusive" during the exchange with the SRO. Importantly, being tardy to class, refusing to display a school ID, and disrespect are not criminal offenses. These are all school disciplinary matters.

What was also critical to these incidents were the details *not* included in some of the official incident reports. Nolan's observations and interviews with students suggested that in many of these interactions, SROs were physically aggressive with students (e.g., forcefully grabbing them, removing hats and do-rags from their head). Nolan (2011) argues that this would be the inciting moment that would result in profanity and disrespect on the part of the accosted students, and that in many of the incidents leading to a student's referral to the justice system, the SRO's intervention is what "triggered the behavior that was ultimately considered criminal." (p. 53). It also meant that SROs were equating the criminal offense of disorderly conduct with disrespect, insubordination, and irate behavior.

Nolan (2011) described a second mechanism for criminalization. Disciplinary incidents that could also be considered criminal violations, but at one time were handled by school administrators, were redefined by SROs as serious criminal incidents requiring summonses or arrests. This was especially apparent in situations involving physical or verbal altercations between students. The researcher notes the subjective nature of such altercations, with the result being several incidents leading to justice system intervention, while many others did not. When distinguishing incidents based on their outcome, the

researcher notes that the students' behavior *after* the altercation appeared to put them at risk of an arrest or summons. Displaying anger and emotion after an altercation, with the addition of objecting to perceived harsh treatment by SROs and school officials, would frequently lead to summonses for disorderly conduct. Thus, although physical altercations may technically amount to delinquent or criminal behavior, it was not the altercation itself resulting in the referral to the justice system. Instead, it appeared to be the interaction between the student and SROs determining the outcome.

Both mechanisms for criminalization described by Nolan (2011) are related to students' demeanor when interacting with the SRO, which Black's (1971) general theory predicts is related to arrest. The primary clientele SROs will be interacting with in the schools are juveniles. This means that if SROs are not properly trained or advised and continue to behave as they would on the street, the typical disrespectful, moody, and antagonistic demeanors of many adolescents will be problematic, and may ultimately result in an increased probability of a formal justice system response than if the school did not have an assigned SRO. Relatedly, students experiencing a mental health problem or crisis may become agitated or react negatively to the SRO, which may also influence the SRO's response.

It is also crucial to recognize that the typical clients SROs encounter are not only juveniles, but students with educational records and a possible accumulated history within the school. This means that SROs will have more information at their disposal to advise decision-making compared to a patrol officer on the street. Wolf's (2014) study supports this, indicating that students' past behavior is considered in arrest decision-making, yet that information is only available to SROs due to their unique position within

the student's school. Additionally, teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors may be a source of additional information which could sway SRO decision-making, much like the parents in police-juvenile encounters. Further, the expansion of surveillance and monitoring efforts within schools discussed in Chapter 2 provide a greater pool of information for SROs to review. The common presence of security cameras in the nation's schools (Wang et al., 2020), allows SROs to immediately review allegations and inform decision-making. Further, the adoption of threat assessment teams, means that SROs may have access to confidential student data that patrol officers would never be legally allowed to access without a warrant.

A permanent assignment to a school also means that compared to patrol officers, SROs should have developed relationships with the citizens they encounter, and these relationships may influence their behavior. Wolf's (2014) survey revealed that respondents' relationships with students is influential to arrest, however, the effect of these relationships resulted in contradictory outcomes for the SROs. Some indicated that being in the school every day meant that they constantly encountered the students who chronically misbehaved, resulting in a greater likelihood of arrest in the school context. Other SROs mentioned that the rapport established with students meant that they were more willing to give a student a second chance, leading to a decreased likelihood of arrest in the school setting.

Left unexplored by Wolf (2014) is how a student's parents or guardians may influence SRO decision-making. If a student is chronically misbehaving, or frequently experiences mental health problems, both school administrators and the SRO may have developed relationships with the parents of the students which could also influence

decision-making. As noted above, parents' willingness to accept responsibility for their child, parental support for the officer, and perceptions regarding single mothers' parenting abilities influence officer's decision-making (Bonner, 2015; Schulenberg, 2010; Wordes & Bynum, 1995). In the school setting, SROs may be better informed regarding some of these factors and have access to the school personnel with more thorough knowledge regarding students' family situations. This means that in situations where parents have previously been unsupportive or uncooperative, the SRO may default to penal responses, whereas supportive parents and/or a well-respected, intact family may result in leniency towards the student.

Roles and Responsibilities

If a triad-type model has been adopted, SROs may also encounter a wide-range of additional duties and responsibilities that would never be expected of a patrol officer, for example, security-related activities, teaching, and mentoring. SRO programs, MOUs, school district policies and procedures, and/or informal agreements may all provide guidelines or specify the activities and responsibilities SROs are expected to undertake. These various guidelines may also emphasize certain roles and activities over others. For example, SRO research has found that SROs' supervisors (Kupchik et al., 2020; Thureau & Wald, 2010) and school administrators (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005) can either endorse or reject specific roles and/or activities. Such agreements and guidelines should influence the behavior of SROs, for example by specifying that SROs are not to be involved in school discipline or by requiring student mentoring.

Limited research has examined whether the roles of the triad model adopted by SROs influence reported school crime or referrals to law enforcement, and no studies

have connected SROs to involuntary commitment apprehensions. If little formal guidance is provided by the SRO's supervisor, administrator, or a MOU, how much emphasis is given to the various roles and responsibilities will be at the discretion of the individual SRO. Using longitudinal SSOCS data, one study examined differences in outcomes between schools served by SROs only engaging in law enforcement activities versus schools served by SROs using the triad model (engaging in law enforcement, counseling, and teaching) (Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018). The researchers hypothesized that schools served by an SRO engaging solely in law enforcement activities would have the highest reported rates of criminal incidents and referrals to law enforcement. Contrary to the hypotheses, results of the analyses suggested that schools with an SRO engaging in the triad model roles reported *more* non-serious crimes to law enforcement. McKenna and White's (2018) study collected surveys of SROs in Texas to examine whether the primary role an SRO identifies with influences how the SRO responds to vignettes describing student misconduct. Results of the analyses demonstrated that as SROs took on more of a law enforcer role, the use of legal, punitive responses (arrest or citation) increased. However, the use of counseling and school-based disciplinary responses also increased, suggesting that an SRO's role identification does not clearly predict responses to student misbehavior.

The training SROs completed (or did not complete) for their position is another factor that may affect behavior. Unfortunately, there is currently a lack of evaluations of SRO training courses, which means it is unclear how the courses are expected to change behavior, and whether they effectively do so. Scholars have attempted to assess whether training may influence SRO disciplinary behavior using interviews and survey vignettes.

One of these studies found that SROs in Texas who had not received specialized training for their position reported they were more likely to resort to legal interventions (e.g., citations, arrest) when responding to student infractions compared to SROs receiving specialized training (Martinez-Prather et al., 2016). However, another study found the opposite. A survey comparing SRO responses to vignettes describing student misbehavior found that NASRO trained SROs were 4 times more likely to use formal disciplinary actions (e.g., referral to juvenile justice system, suspension) when responding to student noncompliance versus SROs who had not completed NASRO training (Bolger et al., 2019).

Training may also be critical to how SROs respond to student mental health problems. School administrators and guidance counselors have voiced concerns regarding the possibility that SROs could provide poor advice to students or be exposed to civil liability for practicing counseling without an appropriate license (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005). In a different study, an interview with an SRO echoed these sentiments, indicating that he avoided counseling and mentoring students because he did not feel qualified to engage in such an activity (Kupchik, 2010). SROs without mental health training may be unaware of the signs of mental illness in youth populations, meaning they may misinterpret manifestations of a mental illness as misbehavior. Such misinterpretations could result in punitive responses, rather than a supportive response. Unfortunately, there is no research available systematically examining SROs' responses to student mental health problems, and no publicly available evaluations on the effectiveness of mental health trainings (e.g., CIT, CIT-Y, Youth Mental Health First Aid) for changing SRO behavior.

Although there is a lack of rigorous quantitative research analyzing the factors influencing the arrest and involuntary commitment behavior of SROs, one qualitative study of discipline practices in four high schools (Kupchik, 2010) provides examples of how an overzealous commitment to a law enforcement role can result in student misbehavior being criminalized by SROs. The research team conducted over 100 hours of observations at each school and a total of 105 semi-structured interviews. These observations and interviews included four SROs. Although the sample is small, Kupchik's study is one of the few to provide context surrounding the actions of SROs. One of his major findings was that the SROs would frequently "look for ways to redefine misbehavior as criminal, even when the label [did not] apply" (p. 85). For example, the study provides much detail surrounding an observed incident where a student drank two bottles of Robitussin DM and some unidentified pills and was exhibiting signs of an overdose. EMTs responded to the school and transported the student who was treated and then checked into a mental health facility. Before being transported, the SRO was provided with the bag of pills the student was purported to have ingested. The researcher observed the SRO as he attempted to identify what they were. However, the SRO's investigation was not for the purposes of informing the hospital or parents of the type of pills. Instead, the researcher was surprised to learn that the SRO was planning on arresting the student and was attempting to identify the pills so he could figure out how to charge the student. A few days later, when it is learned that the pills were simply cold medicine, the SRO voiced frustration to the researcher because he did not know what he could charge the student with and was actively trying "to think of something" (Kupchik,

2010, p. 87). Kupchik argues that the incident illustrates how the presence of an SRO redefined a medical emergency or mental health crisis into a criminal problem.

Another finding described by Kupchik was that student misbehavior was being criminalized due to SROs' responses being "excessive relative to the actual offense" (p. 85), a finding also supported by Nolan's (2011) observations regarding disorderly conduct incidents discussed above. Kupchik found that serious criminal offenses were extremely rare on the campuses he visited. Many of the criminal offenses that SROs responded to included misdemeanor thefts, fights, or drug and alcohol possession. Although these incidents may technically amount to delinquent behavior, there is the question of whether offenses required a justice system response. In one example, two female students had a history of disagreements. An administrator was responding to a recent incident where one of the students reportedly threw a can of soda at the other student while on the school bus. The administrator discussed with the student that they had contacted their guardian to come pick them up and that a referral for an alternative school was going to be made due to the ongoing incidents. The SRO, on his own initiative, inserted himself into the meeting to threaten harassment charges against the student. Thus, although the situation was already being handled by school officials, the SRO escalated it by threatening to "lock her up for harassment" (p. 111).

There is also the possibility that individual SROs will emphasize mentoring/counseling and/or teaching over traditional law enforcement activities, which may result in responses to student misbehavior that are more supportive, rather than punitive. Furthermore, although the research accumulated thus far on SRO activities and role adoption overwhelmingly demonstrates that SROs tend to adopt a law enforcer

stance (Barnes, 2016; Duxbury & Bennell, 2020; Hunt et al., 2019; Lambert & McGinty, 2002; Lynch et al., 2016; May & Higgins, 2011; McKenna et al., 2016; Rhodes, 2019) this does not automatically equate into the SRO acting as an overly punitive presence in the school. As discussed above, unlike patrol officers on the street, SROs are likely to develop relationships with the school personnel, students, and families. This means that SROs may not immediately default to arrest or involuntary commitment apprehensions when encountering student misbehavior or mental health crises. Having background knowledge on individual students and their families may result in the SRO feeling more comfortable using informal actions. Additionally, since the SROs will typically be assigned to the school for the duration of the school year, SROs can follow-up with students, families, and school personnel to ensure a student's engagement in intervention services.

In sum, although the research into SRO behavior is much less developed compared to examinations of patrol officer behavior, the scholarship explored in this section allows for limited preliminary inferences. First, some of the generalizations initially identified by Black (1971) and Black and Reiss (1970) regarding patrol officer arrest behavior continue to be influential. Many of the incidents encountered by SROs involve minor misbehavior, which means SROs exercise a great deal of discretion in how to resolve incidents. Legal factors such as evidence, offense seriousness, and complainant preference are influential, as well as the extra-legal factor of a student's demeanor. Second, the fact that decision-making occurs within a school setting results in several implications for SRO behavior. The grade levels of the school, working closely with administrators and teachers, encounters generally consisting of juvenile citizens, and the

diverse roles and activities the SRO may be expected to undertake are all factors that could affect both arrest and Baker Act apprehensions.

Applying Policing Research to SRO Behavior

The body of research exploring SROs is greatly hindered by the unavailability of data. As discussed in the previous chapter, most SRO studies do not examine arrests at schools. Even if a study is at a minimum able to account for student referrals to the JJS, analyses have been unable to distinguish those referrals made by SROs versus other personnel. Additionally, the researcher was unable to locate any studies analyzing data collected via SSO of SRO-student encounters, meaning the possible factors influencing decision-making have not been thoroughly explored in research, or compared to the findings generated by observations of patrol officers. Further, studies have yet to investigate SRO responses to students experiencing a mental health crisis, meaning no evidence has been generated regarding the possible impact of SROs on involuntary commitment apprehensions of students.

Therefore, the quantitative strand of this study seeks to analyze the impact of the creation and expansion of a comprehensive SRO program in a Florida county. Specifically, this dissertation will compare student arrests and Baker Act apprehensions before and after the implementation of the program to examine whether the new program resulted in changes to formal social control practices within the schools. The theory and research discussed thus far inform the hypotheses of the quantitative research questions in this dissertation, which are reviewed below.

School-based Arrests

Regarding school-based arrests, it is expected that after the creation and expansion of the SRO program arrests increased. It is hypothesized that the increase in arrests will be mostly attributable to minor offenses where SROs have the greatest discretion in how they respond. Since the expansion of the program resulted in SROs being assigned to elementary schools on a full-time basis, it is also expected that younger students will now experience arrest, contributing to the increase in total arrests after the implementation and expansion of the program.

There are several reasons for these hypotheses. First, officers do not typically begin their law enforcement careers as SROs, and instead often come from patrol positions (Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020), meaning they are likely to import some of the same behaviors into the school setting and adopt a prominently law enforcer role. In addition, a default to typical patrol officer responses is hypothesized because during observations and interviews, the researcher learned that due to the rush to get the new division up and running, the newly assigned SROs did not receive any specialized training before entering the schools in August 2016. Accordingly, arrest during an SROs' daily shift should continue to be an infrequent occurrence, but the presence of a full-time LEO means that there is a greater opportunity for incidents to escalate to an arrest, resulting in an overall increase in student arrests. Further, unlike a patrol officer driving around in their patrol vehicle, the SRO is embedded within the school providing greater opportunities to monitor and proactively address incidents.

It is also likely that when first assigned to an SRO position, the same factors considered on the street are considered in encounters with students. The legal factor of

offense seriousness will be influential in arrest decision-making, but due to zero-tolerance policies instituted in most schools since the 1990s (Heaviside et al., 1998; Kafka, 2011), arrests for felony offenses occurring on school grounds were already resorting in arrests whether or not an SRO was present at the school. As a result, it is expected that the increase in arrests will be due to SROs arresting students for minor, misdemeanor offenses such as school fights and disorderly conduct, a hypothesis supported by previous SRO research (Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Nance, 2016; Theriot, 2009).

Nolan's (2011) descriptions of SRO-student interactions demonstrate how student's negative attitudes and disrespectful demeanor will most likely result in an increase in arrests for low-level offenses. After an incident such as a scuffle between students, students' inability to control their emotions, as well as their tendency to challenge authority, will mostly likely be interpreted by SROs as disrespect and antagonism. The arrest behavior research predicts that this negative demeanor increases the likelihood of arrest.

Certain features of the school context will also amplify some of the factors shown to affect arrest decision-making in encounters with juveniles. Both the presence of evidence and a juvenile's family have been shown to guide officer decision-making, and in a school setting an SRO will have improved access to both. The surveillance technologies used by many schools allows for immediate access to video recordings captured by security cameras (Casella, 2010; Diliberti et al., 2019). This means that after receiving an allegation, the SRO can review the video and see what occurred and who was involved. The SRO will immediately be able to track down the students and staff witnessing the incident firsthand to obtain witness statements. Accordingly, in low-level

offenses that may have never resulted in an arrest due to the officer not witnessing the incident, the SRO is now easily able to create a package of evidence to support the arrest decision and forward to the prosecutor's office. Relatedly, unlike patrol officers on the street, the SRO has access to educational records and school staff familiar with students and their families and will be able to garner information regarding a student's home life in making arrest determinations.

The arrest behavior research demonstrates that the complainant's preference is persuasive whether it be for arrest or leniency. In a school context, the complainant is regularly a school administrator or teacher referring students to the SRO. This means that the complainant is no longer a random citizen that the officer may never encounter in the future, but rather a colleague with whom the SRO will regularly come across. Arguably, complainant preference in such situations carries even more weight.

The initial spike in arrests is predicted to eventually decrease and stabilize. As described by Rhodes and Clinkinbeard (2020) there is a resocialization period endured by SROs as they transition from patrol to the school setting. An eventual acclimation to the new role and expectations of both the command staff and school administrators is expected to occur during the first year (2016-17) of the expanded SRO program leading to the decrease and stabilization of student arrest rates. During this time, SROs who are not a good fit for the position were likely to have been identified and replaced, meaning that overzealous officers contributing to increased arrest rates were removed from the school setting. Additionally, in the summer of 2017 SROs participated in the specialized training sessions observed by the researcher, meaning that they received more guidance

from both command staff and experts regarding appropriate responses to student misbehavior which should have gone into effect for the 2017-18 school year and beyond.

School-based Baker Act Apprehensions

Regarding Baker Act apprehensions of students, it is expected that there will be an increase after the implementation of the program. It is predicted that this increase will be especially experienced by younger students, since SROs were previously not present on a full-time basis in elementary schools to respond to perceived mental health crises. As noted in the section above, the newly assigned SROs did not receive specialized training regarding mental health issues until Summer 2017 and are likely to have imported the decision-making criteria and behaviors they established in their patrol position into the school setting. Before SROs were permanently assigned, school personnel would have needed to call 911 to request assistance during a mental health crisis. It is proposed that in many such situations, school personnel handled such situations on their own or called a parent to retrieve the student. The immediate presence of a LEO at the school means if a student indicates they want to cause harm to themselves or others, under the Baker Act criteria, the SRO will feel obligated to initiate an emergency apprehension whether or not school personnel are cooperative. Accordingly, an increase in Baker Act apprehensions is expected to occur after the expansion of the SRO program in August 2016.

However, it is important to consider the research reviewed in this chapter regarding police responses to citizens experiencing a mental health crisis. Both the Baker Act criteria, and structural features of the mental health system in the county restrict SROs' discretion when students encounter mental health problems and crises. First, the

Baker Act criteria require that the SRO believe that the student is mentally ill and that they are a threat to themselves or others. Although students may frequently be experiencing a mental health or severe emotional problem, many times they will not meet the threshold for an emergency apprehension. Further, much like the structural obstacles described in previous research, there are only two mental health facilities in or near the county accepting Baker Act apprehensions of juveniles. This means that many of the SROs are required to drive over an hour to transport a student to a receiving facility, which is predicted to be a major consideration in whether to initiate a Baker Act apprehension. These two factors mean that although it is expected that SROs are generally unprepared for dealing with the emotional and behavioral issues experienced by many students, there should be an increase, but not a dramatic skyrocketing, of school-based Baker Act apprehensions.

Unfortunately, the lack of research into police responses to juvenile mental health crises means we are not well-informed regarding the other factors influencing decision-making. The context of the school setting should contribute to decision-making and also contribute to an increase in Baker Act apprehensions. For example, school personnel may come to rely on and overuse the legal powers of the SRO in order to remove problematic students. Additionally, most schools do not have certified mental health professionals on staff (Whitaker et al., 2019) to act as an initial resource for students in a mental health crisis, or to guide SROs in their responses to such students. Furthermore, similar to school-based arrest decision-making, SROs have more information at their disposal than a typical patrol officer. The availability of educational records, verbal recollections of school personnel, and contact information for parents means SROs can easily investigate

the mental health history of students when making determinations. The following chapter reviews the research methodology adopted for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since the 1990s, the number of SROs assigned to the nation's schools rapidly increased (Diliberti et al., 2019; Heaviside et al., 1998; McKenna & Pollock, 2014). This is especially true in the state of Florida, where the law now mandates the assignment of SROs or other qualified security personnel to every public school (Whitaker et al., 2019). The previous chapters of this dissertation demonstrate that policymakers are developing and expanding SRO programs with very little knowledge surrounding SRO training, roles, and duties, as well as the potential impact of SROs on student outcomes such as arrest and Baker Act apprehensions. This chapter presents a description and rationale for the research design. The research questions, research objectives, and hypotheses driving the study are presented. The participants and site are then discussed, followed by a description of the data used in this study. Finally, the analytic plans and procedures are addressed.

Research Design

This study uses a convergent parallel mixed methods design to answer the research questions. Mixed methods research requires the collection and analyses of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In a convergent parallel design, the collection and analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data occur concurrently and independently with both strands given equal priority throughout the study. Specifically, the study includes a qualitative strand consisting of participant observations of SRO trainings, as well as interviews with the SROs. The concurrent

quantitative strand consists of secondary data analysis of student arrest and Baker Act apprehension data. A “mixing” of the strands occurred after the separate data analyses, allowing for further analyses and interpretation. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the design.

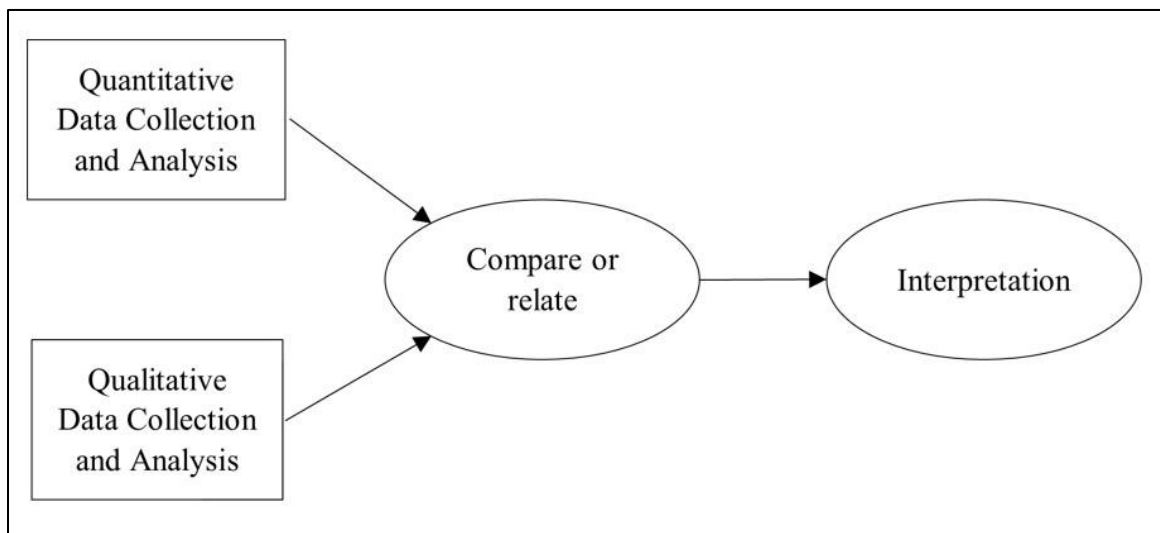


Figure 1: Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design

Source: Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2011).

There are several rationales for adopting the design. First, the design aligns with the researcher’s philosophy for inquiry: pragmatism. Pragmatism is concerned with seeking practical and useful answers that attempt to solve real-world, concrete problems (Patton, 2015). This philosophy has been influential in the development of mixed methods research and as a justification for the use of mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Patton, 2015). The dissertation aims to produce insights that can be immediately utilized by the participants under study, while also informing policy in the

area of school policing. Additionally, a pragmatic approach allows for methodological decisions to be made based on the situation at hand and the opportunities that may emerge during the study, rather than requiring a strict adherence to a fixed design. Such flexibility is beneficial when conducting research in the field with agencies and/or practitioners, where the unexpected may frequently occur.

Second, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 demonstrates that many scholars have adopted either a quantitative *or* qualitative approach when examining SROs. By continuing to choose only one method, a complete understanding of SROs and how their introduction to a school environment may impact students continues to be underdeveloped. For example, quantitative studies such as Na and Gottfredson's (2013) comparisons of student referrals to the police from schools with an SRO versus those without provides evidence that schools with SROs are more likely to refer students to the police, but it does not provide an explanation as to why. In contrast, Kupchik's (2010) foundational qualitative study is a source of rich descriptions for how SROs transform student misbehavior into criminal offenses, but without quantitative data on students' referrals to the justice system, it is unknown whether the addition of the SROs to the four high schools examined in the study significantly affected arrest or citation rates. The current study addresses this gap in the literature by using both qualitative (observations and interviews) and quantitative (interrupted time series analysis) methods to examine SROs and their impact. By adopting a mixed methods approach, this study "obtain[s] different but complementary data on the same topic" (Morse, 1991, p. 122), allowing for a direct comparison of quantitative results with qualitative findings for the purpose of corroboration and validation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This results in a more

detailed understanding of SROs' roles, responsibilities, and impact than could be achieved using a single research method.

Furthermore, both qualitative and quantitative methods have individual strengths and weaknesses (Patton, 2015), and the mixing of methods allows for the strengths of one method to offset the weaknesses of the other form (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A strength of quantitative methods is the use of large samples and random sampling techniques that allow the researcher to generalize findings to a larger group than those included in the study. Results from studies using quantitative methods may also provide strong causal explanations for phenomena. In contrast, qualitative approaches are criticized for their use of small samples that do not allow for generalizations, and their exploratory purpose is not concerned with making strong causal claims. However, the use of small samples allows the qualitative researcher to collect rich descriptions and detailed understanding of the research problem and the context or setting of the study. Additionally, in-depth interviews give participants a voice in the research. These features of qualitative methods offset quantitative methods' inability to provide a thorough understanding of the research problem, and their lack of participants' voices. Qualitative approaches are also criticized for analyses that are subjective and rely on the personal interpretations of the researcher. This means that the possibility of a researcher's bias being introduced during data collection and analyses is great. In contrast, a purported strength of quantitative research is objectivity, in that statistical techniques are less susceptible to researcher bias.

In the current study, the rich descriptions provided by the smaller sample of SROs participating in the qualitative strand provide a more detailed understanding of the

problem and gives a voice to the SROs but does not allow for findings to be generalized or conclusions regarding causality to be drawn. The quantitative strand of this study offsets these weaknesses by analyzing data collected on the larger population of SROs in the county under study. However, without observing SRO training or interviewing the SROs, the quantitative component of this study would be unable to provide the context surrounding statistical results. Accordingly, this study mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods to offset the weaknesses of both types of methods, while also drawing from their strengths.

Research Questions

As mentioned above, the study uses a convergent parallel mixed methods design. The study is separated into the following components, which include the research questions (RQ), research objectives (RO), and hypotheses (H).

Qualitative research questions:

- RQ1: What are the responsibilities, duties, and/or roles of the SROs?
 - RO₁: To investigate activities SROs engage in as part of their job.
 - RO₂: To examine SROs' perceptions of their roles and duties.
 - RO₃: To explore whether, and how, SROs respond to student misbehavior.
 - RO₄: To explore whether, and how, SROs respond to student mental health problems.
- RQ2: How are SROs prepared for undertaking these responsibilities?
 - RO₅: To explore the personal and professional backgrounds of the SROs.

- RO₆: To investigate the types of training SROs complete as part of their job.
- RO₇: To examine SROs' perceptions of the training they received (or did not receive).

Quantitative research questions:

- RQ3: Does the expansion of SROs affect the number of school-based arrests?
 - H₁: The expansion of SROs significantly increased the number of school-based arrests.
 - H₂: The significant increase in school-based arrests is attributable to misdemeanor offenses.
 - H₃: The significant increase in school-based arrests is attributable to an increase in the number of younger students arrested.
- RQ4: Does the expansion of SROs affect the number of school-based Baker Act apprehensions?
 - H₄: The expansion of SROs significantly increased the number of school-based Baker Act apprehensions.
 - H₅: The significant increase in school-based Baker Act apprehensions is attributable to an increase in the number of younger students apprehended.

Results from the separate analyses of the qualitative and quantitative strands are integrated and synthesized so that each separate strand informs the other strand. Results from the qualitative strand exploring SRO responsibilities, roles, duties, and training experiences are used to inform the findings from the quantitative analyses examining the

impact of the intervention on school-based arrests and Baker Act apprehensions. Conversely, results from statistical analyses are used to supplement findings from the qualitative strand and assess whether findings from both strands converge or diverge.

Site and Access

This study focuses on SROs in one county in the state of Florida. The county is a part of the greater metropolitan area of a mid-sized city and is mostly suburban with some rural areas. U.S. Census estimates for 2019 indicate that the county has over 470,000 residents and a median household income (\$66,768) above Florida's average (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The county's racial and ethnic composition is somewhat diverse with White, non-Latino residents comprising 58.9 percent of the population, and Black (13.1%), Hispanic (22.5%), and Asian (5%) residents comprising substantial minorities. The single school district in the county is one of the largest in Florida with over 67,000 students attending 37 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, 9 high schools, 6 specialty/alternative schools, 4 charter schools, and a virtual school in the 2021-22 school year.

Prior to the 2016-17 school year, the county's schools were served by a hodgepodge of SRO programs facilitated by multiple law enforcement agencies including the county sheriff and seven municipal police departments. The sheriff's department is the largest law enforcement agency within the county (over 1250 employees) and provided a substantial proportion of the SROs. Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, a "School Safety Unit" (SSU) was created within the sheriff's department to provide one chain-of-command over SROs, including a Captain, Lieutenant, and three Sergeants. The

school district appointed the SSU to lead the safety and security initiatives for all public schools, as well as standardize training, policies, and requirements for all SROs in the county regardless of jurisdiction. Both the Captain and Lieutenant of the new SSU were provided with offices in the school district headquarters.

Critical to the proposed study, a new mandate (integrated into the contract between the sheriff/police departments and the school board) required 100 percent law enforcement coverage of every public school in the county during school hours. This meant that there was at least one assigned SRO on each campus at all times. Although SROs had previously been assigned to high school and middle school campuses, elementary schools now had a full-time SRO assigned for the first time. Additionally, the law enforcement agencies were now contractually obligated to provide a police presence during school hours. Previous informal arrangements meant that many schools did not have a permanently assigned SRO, may only have a police presence for special programming such as D.A.R.E., or may have shared an SRO with other nearby schools. Further, before the mandate, SROs were not expected to be on a campus at all times and could leave for lunch or appointments, to transport arrested or apprehended individuals, or to fill in where needed (e.g., if patrol is understaffed). The creation of the SSU and the new mandate was problematic for some of the municipal agencies experiencing staffing shortages, thus, any school that could no longer be covered by a municipal police department SRO was assigned an SRO from the SSU, greatly increasing the number of SROs employed by the sheriff.

During Fall 2016, as part of another research project, the researcher was introduced to the Chief in the sheriff's department with oversight of the SSU. The

researcher was co-facilitating a focus group where the Chief discussed the new SSU and the context for its creation. After the completion of the focus group, the researcher introduced herself to the Chief and initiated a discussion regarding the new SSU and her interest in researching SROs. The Chief responded positively, and business cards were exchanged, with the researcher promising to contact the Chief in the near future.

The establishment of this relationship resulted in the researcher emailing the Chief in February 2017 requesting a meeting to further discuss the possibility of a research project involving the SSU. The Chief responded promptly and an in-person meeting at the school board office was scheduled for the following week between the Chief, the Captain of the SSU, and the researcher. During the meeting, the researcher discussed her personal and professional background. Some of these background factors and researcher-specific attributes may have contributed to gaining access to the site and obtaining approval for the overall study. The Chief is a graduate of the researcher's university and the Sheriff's department collaborated with the researcher's department on several occasions for research purposes. Accordingly, the Chief was very familiar with the researcher's institution and departmental affiliation, providing credibility to the researcher's request. Further, the researcher and several of her family members are current or former students of the school district, and continue to reside in the county. Thus, the researcher was able to assure the Chief and Captain that she was not a random "outsider," but rather a resident with deep ties to the community. Discussions during the meeting centered around several topics including the researcher's objectives, research ideas and initiatives the Chief and Captain were interested in, background information on the creation, hierarchy, and composition of the SSU, the need for an MOU, and SRO

training. The meeting concluded with the Chief and Captain both providing permission to conduct participant observations of SRO training and interviews with the SROs, and the researcher promising to follow-up with next steps to execute the study. After several rounds of revisions via email between the researcher and attorneys for the sheriff's office, an MOU was agreed upon and signed by the researcher and the Sheriff in April 2017. The researcher also obtained a letter of support from the Captain which was submitted to the institutional review board (IRB) as a part of the protocol.

During an email exchange, the Captain introduced the researcher to the Lieutenant of the SSU who they appointed as the researcher's main contact for obtaining the training information and scheduling interviews. The researcher met with the Lieutenant in May 2017 at their school board office. The research project was discussed generally, but the Lieutenant and researcher also discussed the upcoming SRO training sessions and plans for distributing consent forms. The researcher constantly communicated with the Lieutenant throughout the data collection period, as the Lieutenant was responsible for the training schedule and also assisted in the scheduling of SRO interviews. These communications with the Lieutenant ensured that the researcher maintained access and was able to collect the initial qualitative data (Fitz-Gibbon, 2017; Trulson et al., 2004).

In order to conduct interviews at SROs' assigned schools, the researcher submitted to a background check through the school district, which ultimately allowed the researcher to register with the school district as a visitor. The researcher signed in as a verified visitor with school staff each time an interview occurred on school grounds. While on school grounds, the researcher was typically escorted by the SRO at all times.

In sum, gaining access was not a solitary event and the researcher had to negotiate access with four gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are the individuals in the field or organization of interest in a research endeavor “from whom access to research participants must be requested” (Dwyer & Hayes, 2011, p. 109). First, the Chief had to be amenable to the study, but so did the Captain. For the day-to-day research activities, the cooperation of the Lieutenant was crucial as they kept the researcher informed regarding the training sessions, acted as an administrator of study materials (e.g., consent forms), and provided access to the SROs. Finally, passing the school district’s background check allowed the researcher to conduct the interviews at the SROs’ assigned schools which facilitated observations of the SRO in their typical environment, but also made the scheduling of interviews easier.

Participant Selection

The population of interest for this study is all SROs in a Florida county. Since the intervention occurred in August 2016 (i.e., the beginning of the 2016-17 school year), the quantitative strand analyzes the arrest and Baker Act apprehension behavior of the entire population of SROs in the county from the 2013-14 school year through the 2018-19 school year. The 2019-20 school year was excluded from consideration due to the implementation of a new mobile crisis team in two regions of the county in August 2019 and February 2020, as well as COVID-19 forcing the county to shift to remote learning beginning in March 2020.

The qualitative strand of the study consists of both participant observations and interviews. The researcher attended and observed all SRO-specific training sessions she

was invited to by the SSU in 2017 and 2018. This included 6 different trainings over 18 separate days, totaling approximately 124 hours of observations. Attendance by the SROs and their command staff at the observed training sessions varied a great deal, as some SROs were not required to attend certain trainings, had already completed trainings, or were split among two groups in differing locations. Additionally, SSU command staff facilitated some of the training sessions or were frequently in and out of the training sessions. Thus, the number of SROs and the SSU command staff in attendance during observations varied training-to-training and ranged from approximately 24 to 66 individuals.

Purposeful sampling is the approach used in much qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The strategy “consists of strategically selecting information rich cases to study...that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Within a purposeful sampling approach, 40 possible techniques have been identified for selecting cases to be studied. The current research used a multistep sampling approach combining key informant sampling and maximum variation sampling techniques for selecting interview participants. The key informant sampling strategy selects participants based on their identification as individuals with knowledge, experience, and/or expertise surrounding the research topic and a willingness to share their knowledge (Patton, 2015). In maximum variation sampling, participants are selected based on diverse characteristics or criteria of a group. The strategy is valued for generating findings that document both the uniqueness and diversity of cases, but also provides the ability to demonstrate shared patterns or experiences of a setting or phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

Unfortunately, the SSU did not systematically collect demographic and/or background information on the population of SROs in order to use such variables for sampling purposes, or to know whether the eventual sample of SROs participating in interviews is representative of the population. However, after the Summer 2017 observations were completed, the researcher requested and was granted access to an Excel spreadsheet listing the names of all 67 SROs at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year, their assigned school, law enforcement agency affiliation, their chain-of-command, and their email address. This document served as the sampling frame for selecting interview participants, allowing for school type and employing agency to be used as selection criteria.

The 2017-18 school year began almost immediately after the completion of the observed SRO training in Summer 2017; thus, the researcher waited a month before commencing interviews to allow time for a “settling in” and to make scheduling interviews easier. The Lieutenant of the SSU acted as a critical gatekeeper for scheduling interviews. Since interviews mostly occurred with SROs while they were on duty on school property, the researcher was accessing a limited-entry social situation (Spradley, 1980) requiring the permission of a gatekeeper such as the Lieutenant. Further, in field work involving the police, chain-of-command buy-in and cooperation (such as that provided by the Captain and Lieutenant in this dissertation), as well as clear communication to street-level officers regarding the project, are necessary to successfully implement and execute such research (LaMontagne et al., 2021; MacQueen & Bradford, 2017; Mastrofski et al., 1998). For SROs employed by the sheriff, the researcher would inform the Lieutenant of who she wished to interview, and the Lieutenant would notify

the SRO and schedule the interview at the SROs' assigned school. For SROs employed by the municipal law enforcement agencies, the Lieutenant facilitated an introduction to SROs' direct supervisors within their agency (typically a sergeant) and the forwarding of research documents (e.g., consent form with study description) in order to assist in the request to schedule an interview. The SRO supervisors at the municipal law enforcement agencies were all receptive to the research and accommodating in scheduling interviews, with some scheduling the interviews on the researcher's behalf, while others forwarded the researcher's request directly to the SROs for scheduling purposes.

Since the use of a gatekeeper was necessary for accessing the population of interest, the Lieutenant of the SSU and the sergeants of SROs employed at the municipal police departments were aware of who was selected for interviews. The researcher made great efforts to discuss the voluntary nature of the interviews with each SRO to ameliorate any concerns regarding coercion. Additionally, the researcher did not reveal to command staff if/when selected SROs did *not* participate in an interview. Pseudonyms were created for each participant, schools in the district, geographic areas, and county specific programming to protect the confidentiality of interview participants.

Completing a majority of the observations prior to conducting interviews was both a practical and strategic decision influencing participant selection for interviews. First, IRB approval was not received until a few days prior to the commencement of observations, prohibiting interviews from occurring before the observations. Second, it was clear from communication with the Lieutenant that scheduling interviews would be difficult due to the SROs' various and changing assignments when school is not in session. Third, the researcher had never met or been in the presence of the SROs,

meaning that any interviews conducted prior to the observations taking place would have been between strangers and lack the benefit of established rapport, or at a minimum, knowledge of the researcher and the study. There was also the possibility noted in previous qualitative studies of the police that the researcher could be perceived as a “management spy” (Jones, 2016; Loftus, 2009; Reiner, 1991), which the researcher was hoping to diminish. Accordingly, the observations assisted in developing relationships and rapport with many of the SROs prior to the in-depth interviews, a strategy recognized by some qualitative researchers as advantageous for eliciting discussions exploring interview participants’ perceptions (Kleinman et al. 1994; Pogrebin, 2003). During the observations, the researcher made an effort to engage in informal conversations with SROs, partake in lunch excursions, and participate in training activities. The researcher hoped that these constant interactions with SROs would not only curb the possibility of reactivity, but also establish a pre-existing relationship so that SROs would feel comfortable participating in interviews later. The researcher also made sure to introduce herself to SROs with a limited presence at observed training sessions, so that although there may not have been ample time to establish rapport with the individuals, an email requesting to schedule an interview would not come as a surprise and they would be more willing to participate.

The criteria that the researcher used to eventually select SROs for interviews emerged from both the observations and practical considerations. First, some of the SROs attended all four of the training courses in Summer 2017. After spending almost four weeks with these SROs, the researcher developed better relationships with these individuals compared to other SROs who were not present for all training sessions. The

researcher identified some of these SROs as key informants for purposes of interview selection. Additionally, some of the SROs were new to the position or were reassigned to a different school for the upcoming school year, meaning answering some of the interview questions would be more difficult or may not produce as fruitful of information. Furthermore, having the full support of the SSU chain-of-command meant that, initially, it was much easier to schedule interviews with SROs employed by the sheriff. Accordingly, for the first four interviews, the researcher used a key informant sampling technique to select SROs with whom she had developed friendly relationships, had expressed a willingness to participate in interviews, would be helpful in soliciting feedback regarding the interview questions, were employed by the sheriff, *and* had been at their assigned school the previous school year.

Preliminary findings from the observations suggested that the concerns and activities of SROs varied based on the type of school they served. Accordingly, it was important to select interview participants serving all three school levels (elementary, middle, and high schools) as well as both traditional and alternative schools. The researcher also decided to continue delaying interviews with new SROs and SROs assigned to a new school to allow more time to acclimate to the new school or position. Hence, after the four initial interviews with key informants, the next stage in the sampling process included SROs employed by the sheriff selected based on the grade level of their assigned, traditional school and whether they had been assigned to the school during the previous school year. These interviews were collected during Fall 2017.

At this point in the study (December 2017/January 2018), both the observations and interviews completed thus far indicated some conflict between the SROs employed

by the sheriff and their direct supervisors in the SSU, the three sergeants. Qualitative methodologists suggest that in order to enhance the credibility of qualitative findings, this type of information should be subjected to triangulation by scrutinizing the consistency of SROs perceptions with those of the sergeants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). Since it was an inconvenient time in the school year (the SROs were on vacation due to the school district's holiday break), the sergeants were selected by the researcher for interviews. Once the school schedule returned to normal, the researcher continued to select SROs based on their employment by the sheriff and grade level of the school but expanded selection to individuals who were new to the SRO position in the 2017-18 school year or had been assigned to a different school the previous year. For the next stage of sample selection, the researcher selected participants based on their employment with a municipal law enforcement agency, ensuring that the experiences and perspectives of SROs employed by the six municipal agencies were represented in the data. Lastly, since some of the charter and alternative schools associated with the school district are served by SROs, the researcher's final selections included SROs assigned to these non-traditional schools.

In total, 57 individuals were asked to participate in interviews, and ultimately 43 agreed and consented to participate for a response rate of 75 percent. These interviews provided over 40 hours of data. This included 25 interviews with SROs employed by the sheriff, 3 interviews with their sergeants, and 15 interviews with SROs employed by the other municipal law enforcement agencies. A single participant was assigned to a VPK, 20 to elementary schools, 7 to middle schools, 8 to high schools, and 4 to non-traditional alternative schools. A majority are male, and identify as White, non-Hispanic. Their ages

ranged from 26 to 64 years old. Most were married and had children of their own, with a few of the SROs having young grandchildren.

Almost all the SROs described employment in other sectors prior to joining law enforcement. Retail, sales, hospitality, banking, and the military were mentioned by multiple SROs. Several also indicated previous experience in other criminal justice-related positions including serving as a corrections officer, dispatcher, court clerk, and victim advocate. Only four SROs (and none of the sergeants) indicated any formal previous employment related to working with children and/or adolescents. The two most common positions prior to becoming an SRO were patrol officer and/or courthouse deputy. Years of experience in law enforcement was wide ranging, from 1 year to over 30 years.

As already mentioned, the county had some SRO programming preceding the creation and implementation of the SSU in August 2016, meaning some of the SROs in this study did have prior SRO experience. Specifically, about half of the interview participants (n = 21) had SRO experience ranging from 2 to 19 years. Further, two of the veteran SROs had previously served as SROs in other Florida counties. Three reasons were generally provided for becoming an SRO. First, a substantial number of SROs indicated that they wanted the better schedule the SRO position offered. Second, some SROs discussed how they were recruited by chain-of-command or convinced by other SROs to make the switch. Lastly, but importantly, 25 of the SROs and one of the sergeants provided the altruistic reasons of wanting to work with kids and/or the opportunity to make a difference in kids' lives.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analyses

Participant Observations

The qualitative strand of the study involves data collected via participant observations of SRO training and interviews with SROs and command staff collected over a year beginning in Summer 2017 and ending Summer 2018. The researcher included participant observations in the research design because the method allows for the researcher to share in the training experiences of the SROs and see the training as the SROs see it. Furthermore, observations maximized the researcher's "ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 193). They also allowed the researcher to witness the reactions of the SROs during the training sessions. With such little research exploring SRO training requirements, observations were necessary to thoroughly explore the content of SRO training sessions, rather than assuming an understanding of the content and how it is presented or relying on the selective perceptions of the SROs during interviews. Additionally, observations permitted the researcher to probe participants as to their perceptions of the training while it was occurring.

A majority (15 out of 18 training sessions) of the observations occurred in July and August 2017. The researcher also attended and observed a single training session in November 2017, followed by two training sessions in August 2018. The observations took place in school classrooms and auditoriums, as well as classrooms located in the sheriff's training facility. Additional observations occurred in vehicles and restaurants when the researcher joined SROs for lunch.

Observations were overt, with the Lieutenant emailing instructors and the SROs prior to each training course informing them of the researcher's presence. A passive informed consent document approved by the IRB was attached to the email. This means that the consent forms did not need to be signed by the participants and/or returned to the researcher, rather participants needed to indicate to the researcher that they were opting out of the study, or else they would be included in observations. Additionally, on the first day of each training course the researcher introduced herself, described the study, and had physical copies of the consent form on hand in case one was requested.

A researcher's degree of involvement with the people and activities subject to the observations falls along a continuum of involvement from no participation to complete participation (Spradley, 1980). The researcher's level of involvement could be classified as falling in the middle of the continuum, consisting of either active or moderate participation depending on the activity or training taking place. When appropriate, the researcher was an active participant and engaged in group training activities, discussions, and informal lunch outings. However, certain training sessions or activities (e.g., active shooter discussions) required that the researcher scale down their participation and adopt a moderate participation role due to her outsider status (not being a sworn LEO).

The recording of observation data was ongoing via handwritten field notes in composition notebooks. The classroom setting of the observations was conducive to the researcher regularly taking handwritten notes without drawing attention to herself. Many of these notes consisted of a condensed account (Spradley, 1980) of the observations using shorthand and abbreviations. Books, documents, pamphlets, and other materials distributed at the training sessions were also collected by the researcher. The researcher

did not engage in active notetaking when joining SROs for lunch or while traveling to lunch destinations. Instead, the researcher brought a small notepad and pen in either her purse or pocket, in case a critical quote, idea, or concept needed to be recorded. Once the researcher returned to her home from the field after each training, an expanded account was typed up allowing the researcher to fill in details and recall items that were not recorded immediately. By creating an expanded account immediately after each training session, the researcher was able to elaborate on important observations and details that she was not able to capture while in the field and limit recall error. The researcher also engaged in preliminary analysis while expanding on the field notes and reflected on her own experiences and personal feelings from the day. Typing up the field notes into word processing software also prepared the data for qualitative data analyses in NVivo.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews with the SROs and sergeants are also used to collect data for the qualitative strand of the study. Interview questions obtain participants' constructions of activities, feelings, motivations, and concerns regarding their day-to-day responsibilities and their roles. The interviews are also complementary to the observations in that they were used to extract additional information missed during the observations of SRO training requirements and to verify the accuracy of the researcher's observations. Using different qualitative data collection methods was also necessary for triangulation purposes, as the researcher used the data collected from both methods as a check on one another and to assist in supporting the validity of conclusions (Maxwell, 2013).

Interviews occurred at locations that were convenient for the participants, including the SROs' assigned school, office space made available by the sheriff, or local

eateries. Interviews were overt (participants were completely aware that they were being interviewed) and semi-structured. Interviews began with consent procedures. A physical copy of an IRB approved passive consent document was provided to each interview participant. The researcher provided participants with time to review the document and ask questions. Once participants indicated their consent to participate, the researcher asked permission to use a digital recording device to audio record the interview. Of the 43 interview participants, only two refused recording. In these instances, the researcher handwrote detailed notes into a composition notebook during the interview.

The researcher's approach was a pragmatic interview (Patton, 2015). Interviews consisted of straight-forward, open-ended questions seeking answers that yield practical and useful insights. An interview guide was created and used by the researcher. Appendix A includes the interview guide used during interviews with SROs, while Appendix B consists of the interview guide used during interviews with the sergeants of the SSU. The interview guide ensured that the researcher remained on topic and best used the limited time available with the participants. Additionally, the interview guide increased the comprehensiveness of the data and made data collection systematic. However, the researcher attempted to maintain a conversational style, and was free to explore interesting and emerging concepts introduced by the participant.

Although a digital recorder was used in most interviews, the researcher handwrote strategic and focused notes during all interviews. These were not verbatim notes, but instead consisted of a system of shorthand and abbreviations identifying key phrases and ideas. These jottings reminded the researcher of follow-up questions and probes, but also served as a "backup" in the circumstance of a recorder malfunction. These notes were

also referenced during the transcription and analytic process. The digital audio recording files were used by the researcher to manually transcribe some of the initial interviews in word processing software, with the remainder uploaded to Trint transcription services. Transcripts resulting from Trint were reviewed, formatted, and corrected by the researcher using word processing software.

Qualitative Analysis Plan and Procedures

Qualitative scholars have noted that there is no precise formula or single correct way for completing qualitative data analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Without fixed rules, each qualitative study is reliant on the analyst to fairly represent and discuss the data. Additionally, there is a lack of consensus regarding the terminology applied in qualitative analysis (e.g., the meaning of *content analysis*) (Patton, 2015). Accordingly, several sources (Bernard et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, 2018; Jackson & Bazeley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2021; Sandelowski, 2000) informed the analytic approach in the current study.

The analytic approaches adopted for the qualitative strand of this dissertation were qualitative description and thematic analysis. In qualitative description, the researcher presents “the facts of the case in everyday language” and conveys an “accurate accounting of events that most people (including researchers and participants) observing the same event would agree is accurate” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336). This approach aligns with the pragmatic philosophy of the researcher and the mixed methods design, as qualitative description is useful for providing straightforward answers to research questions of relevance to policymakers and practitioners (Sandelowski, 2000). For

example, the qualitative research questions in this dissertation require that answers be at least partially direct and do not need extensive interpretation, such as providing the types of training SROs completed and descriptions of what the training entailed. Accordingly, qualitative description was used for analyzing the field notes and documents collected via participant observations and providing a comprehensive summary of what occurred.

The qualitative data in this study also consists of interviews with the SROs and sergeants, and research objectives include exploring the perceptions of these individuals. This means the study aims to provide more than just description, seeking to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes in the data, which describes thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher was guided by the six-phase approach for reflexive thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2022). These six phases consist of: familiarization; coding; generating initial themes; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining, and naming themes; and writing up the findings. Importantly, these phases are not strictly linear, and analyses were recursive with the researcher moving back and forth between phases when needed.

In the first phase, the researcher familiarized herself with the data, including repeated reviewing of the observation field notes, interview transcripts, and other documents collected during observations and interviews. Typing up field notes and listening to the audio recordings of the interviews while correcting transcripts are all considered part of the analytic process (Patton, 2015). During this initial phase, memos were written by the researcher examining what was being seen or heard in the data, and tentative codes or categories developed, including the identification of patterns and possible themes. Indeed, in the current study, the researcher reviewed the observational

field notes prior to commencing interviews which necessitated an editing of the interview guide to include a question regarding Baker Act apprehensions of students.

A major challenge in qualitative analysis is the massive amount of data the researcher is left with once data collection is complete (Patton, 2015). Thus, inventory and organization of the data is crucial for beginning the formal and focused analysis. The researcher created and modified an Excel spreadsheet tracking the data collected, completed critical tasks, and important events for the study, and their associated dates. This spreadsheet was updated as the study progressed.

For the second phase of thematic analysis, the researcher imported the memos, field notes, interview transcripts, and other documents (e.g., training PowerPoint slides, contract) into NVivo software to assist in analyses. The researcher then engaged in coding all the collected data. A code consists of “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of” the text being analyzed (Saldaña, 2021, p. 5). Coding involves the fragmenting of the data contained in the observation field notes, interview transcripts, and other documents into conceptual components or codes (Bernard et al., 2017). The process of coding assists in organizing the data into meaningful categories or groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005). The identified concepts are named by the researcher and then the process is repeated with the researcher coding for as many potential themes as possible during this initial coding stage.

A major threat to qualitative conclusions is researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013). Researchers may select data that fit the researcher’s theories or preconceptions. Additionally, researchers may select data during analyses that “stand out” to them,

resulting in contradictory or disconfirming data not being explored, or worse, ignored. Both scenarios involve the subjectivity of the researcher, however, it is impossible to fully eliminate a researcher's beliefs. The researcher in this study fully recognized that her interest in SROs (and thus the impetus of the dissertation) stems from several negative interactions and experiences with SROs in her previous employment as a criminal defense attorney representing juveniles. Accordingly, during analyses, the researcher actively sought out discrepant evidence and negative cases. This was to ensure that the researcher did not ignore unsupportive findings. Qualitative researchers "have an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible" (Patton, 2015, p. 531). To be transparent and credible, the researcher used memos during the coding and subsequent phases to monitor her decision-making criteria and the processes adopted during analyses. For example, during the coding process memos were used when encountering a conflict as to how to categorize a concept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By using such memos, the researcher created a paper trail of decision-making to assess for researcher bias or illogical conclusions.

Once all the initial codes were identified, the third phase of thematic analysis involved generating initial themes. Initial codes used to address the research questions and objectives are presented in Appendix C. The researcher engaged in a process of refining, collapsing, and sorting the initial codes. The researcher clustered codes that appeared to share a central organizing concept, *and* potentially addressed a research question or objective. This process assists in identifying overarching themes, possible subthemes, and irrelevant codes that may be abandoned by the researcher. This strategy

also provides a preliminary understanding of the prevalence and significance of potential themes, so that candidate themes materialize.

In the fourth phase of analysis, the candidate themes were further developed and reviewed by assessing their fit and viability with the full dataset. This involved ensuring that there were enough data to support themes, identifying the boundaries of each theme, and assessing the coherence of each theme. In response, themes were further refined, expanded, collapsed, or fragmented. The researcher also engaged in visual thematic mapping to explore relationships between provisional themes and organize the overall “story” of the analysis.

The next phase includes refining, defining, and naming the themes. This phase is concerned with precision, especially the ability to define and summarize each theme. During this phase, the researcher returned to audio recordings to verify the data segments that would most likely be quoted in support of the themes (e.g., checking for sarcasm). The researcher also established the names the themes would be given for identification and discussion in the dissertation.

The final stage consists of producing the report, or in this case, the relevant chapters of the dissertation. The researcher must tell the “story” of the data while producing sufficient evidence for the existence of the identified themes. There should be enough data extracts (e.g., direct quotes from participants) to demonstrate that a theme is prevalent, however, data extracts should also illustrate the points the researcher is arguing in their narrative to answer the research questions. This is provided in Chapters 5 and 7.

Quantitative Data and Analyses

Quantitative Data

From the outset of the study, the researcher planned on requesting access to data measuring school-based arrests. The literature discussed in both Chapters 2 and 3 makes it apparent that much of the previous research has not analyzed school-based, SRO arrest data. However, the completed observations suggested that Baker Act apprehensions were more problematic for SROs than arrests, and the interviews supported this assertion. Thus, the second quantitative research question emerged from the qualitative data.

Data consisting of all school-based arrests and all school-based Baker Act apprehensions of juveniles completed during six subsequent school years (2013-14 through 2018-19) were obtained from the sheriff. The data specialist in the youth services division of the sheriff's office extracted the relevant cases from two separate county-wide administrative databases. LEOs in the county complete incident reports for criminal calls for service while out in the field. These reports are collected in an administrative database. The data specialist extracted the data related to incidents involving juveniles at a school which resulted in an arrest during the relevant time period. Similarly, all LEOs in the county responding to a call for service involving a mental health incident must complete and submit a form, which is entered into another administrative database. The data specialist extracted the incidents resulting in a Baker Act apprehension of juveniles at a school during the relevant time period. The report/form completed by the LEOs for both of these formal actions require the LEO to select the location of the relevant incident, allowing the data specialist to extract all of the incidents where "School/University" was selected. The data specialist de-identified the two datasets and

provided them to the researcher via Excel spreadsheets. A variable with a unique identifier was provided so that multiple charges associated with a single student's arrest could be identified and merged into a single case, preventing the same incident from being included more than once in the analyses.

The decision was made by the researcher to not include the 2019-20 school year in the study due to three critical events. First, a mobile crisis unit was implemented in one region of the county in August 2019 and a second region of the county in February 2020, meaning the SROs assigned to schools in these regions now had an additional option for responding to student mental health crises. Second, training expectations for SROs changed with a further focus on youth mental health issues. Third, the school district switched to virtual learning in March 2020 in response to COVID-19. Since these events are expected to influence the dependent variables of interest (school-based arrests and school-based Baker Act apprehensions), the 2019-20 school year was excluded from the study.

The quantitative data analyzed in this study consist of time series data, meaning that "a large series of observations were made on the same variable consecutively over time" (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 172). The time series consist of the two separate dependent variables of interest: school-based arrests and school-based Baker Act apprehensions. *Arrests* is operationalized as the monthly count of juveniles arrested at school from the 2013-14 through the 2018-19 school years. *Baker Act apprehensions* is operationalized as the monthly count of juveniles apprehended at school under Baker Act procedures from the 2013-14 through the 2018-19 school years. Since the study examines monthly counts over a six-year period, there are 72 observations in each series.

If the specific point in a time series where an intervention occurred is known, an interrupted time series analysis (ITSA) can be used to assess the impact of the intervention. The independent variable of interest is the “intervention” that occurred at the beginning of August 2016 when the SSU was formalized and expanded. This is coded as a dichotomous variable (0 = pre-intervention, 1 = post-intervention).

Both datasets collect other demographic and situational measures allowing for preliminary univariate and bivariate statistical analyses, with some variables also used to disaggregate the data and test the sub-hypotheses. For both arrests and Baker Act apprehensions, descriptive variables captured in the datasets include the law enforcement agency involved in the action, as well as the juvenile’s age, race, and sex. *Agency* represents the employing law enforcement agency of the officer arresting or apprehending the juvenile and is coded by assigning a number of 1 through 8 to each of the law enforcement agencies in the county. *Age* is a continuous variable representing the juvenile’s age at the time of the arrest or Baker Act apprehension. Both datasets include a variable representing the student’s race with categories including American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Other, White, or Unknown. Due to the small number of American Indian/Alaskan Native (n = 0 in arrest data; n = 2 in Baker Act data), Asian (n = 5 in arrest data; n = 25 in Baker Act data) and Other (n = 30 in arrest data; n = 48 in Baker Act data) students, these groups were combined with Black students into a non-White category. However, this category is comprised primarily of Black juveniles in both the arrest (97.7%) and apprehension (84.2%) data. Accordingly, *race* is coded as a dichotomous variable representing White (=1) and non-White (=2) students. The student’s *sex* is measured as male (=1) or female (=2).

The dataset for school-based arrests includes an additional relevant variable. *Offense type* represents the most serious offense resulting in the juvenile's arrest under Florida's criminal code. This is a categorical variable coded as 1 = felony, 2 = misdemeanor, and 3 = non-criminal. Non-criminal offenses include violations of probation, violations of other court ordered conditions (e.g., home detention), contempt of court, and failure to appear.

Quantitative Analysis Plan and Procedures

Quantitative analyses for the dissertation proceeded in several steps using both SPSS and Stata statistical software. First, univariate and bivariate analyses were completed to examine the data at the individual, case-level and determine whether significant associations exist between the situational variables and the intervention. Such descriptive analyses assisted with determining whether any changes occurred pre- and post-intervention, while also confirming the need to disaggregate the data and address the sub-hypotheses.

Time series data present some analytical issues. More common statistical techniques (such as OLS) cannot be used because they assume that the observations being analyzed are independent of each other. Observations in a time series are autocorrelated, therefore they are not independent, and require that the serial dependence be empirically modeled (McDowall et al., 1980). Additionally, observations of social processes in a time series frequently encounter seasonality (periodic or cyclical behavior in the time series) which must be controlled or modeled. For example, in the current study, students are not at school during regularly scheduled breaks (e.g., spring break, summer vacation), which could influence the number of school-based arrests and Baker

Act apprehensions occurring during the corresponding month. Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) models account for the autocorrelation of observations and seasonality present in time series data.

ARIMA techniques involve modeling the stochastic process generating the observed time series (McDowall et al., 1980). Underlying this process are what have been labeled “random shocks” representing the multiple factors producing observed variation in a time series. The random shocks are the input to an ARIMA(p,d,q) model, where p, d, and q are the three structural parameters acting as “filters” and determining the properties of the output time series. When these three structural parameters are appropriately modeled, the result is what is called “white noise.”

The first parameter “p” represents an autoregressive process and demonstrates the number of autoregressive structures in the model. This means that an initial random shock enters the system, remains in the underlying process indefinitely, but the impact of the shock diminishes exponentially (McCleary & Hay, 1980). An identified ARIMA(1,0,0) model has one autoregressive structure ($p = 1$), so that one past observation is used to predict the current observation in the time series. When discussing results this may also be expressed as the inclusion of an AR(1) term or first-order autoregressive process in the model.

The second parameter “d” represents an integrated process in the model, which may also be labeled as a “random walk” (McCleary & Hay, 1980; McDowall et al., 1980) or the presence of a “unit root” (Beckett, 2020). In an integrated process the random shocks entering the system accumulate over time. Such an accumulation results in a trend making the series non-stationary. This trend must be removed (or modeled) by

differencing the time series. This means that an ARIMA(0,1,0) model is differenced once ($d = 1$) to render the series stationary.

Finally, “q” denotes the number of moving average structures in the model. These represent a shock of finite persistence, and thus, “q” identifies the number of observations before the shock vanishes from the system entirely (McCleary & Hay, 1980). An ARIMA(0,0,1) model has one moving average structure ($q = 1$), so that a shock is persisting for only one observation in the time series. This is also referenced as the need to include an MA(1) term or first-order moving average process in the model.

The researcher used the iterative approach developed by Box and Jenkins (1976) to find the best fitting ARIMA model for each time series, and then subsequently perform ITSA. This approach involves three steps: identification, estimation, and diagnosis. In the next step of analyses, the researcher identified the possible model by visually assessing a line graph plotting the monthly observations for the specific time series being examined. This presented an initial visual examination of any changes over time, while providing preliminary information regarding the form, permanence, and/or immediacy of any effect.

After plotting the line graph, the researcher visually examined the correlogram of the autocorrelation (ACF) function of the time series, which provides clues as to the particular models to estimate. For example, if all lags in the estimated ACF are zero, then an ARIMA(0,0,0) model is suggested. In comparison, if the first lag of the ACF is greater than zero, but the remaining lags are zero, an ARIMA(0,0,1) process is inferred. However, identification using solely the ACF is not always simple as it can be difficult to distinguish between AR and MA processes. Due to these issues, the partial

autocorrelation function (PACF) of each time series was also estimated and the correlogram visually inspected, thereby suggesting the parameters needing to be included in the model. For example, a PACF with decaying, non-zero lags would provide further support for an ARIMA(0,0,1) model.

The line graphs, ACFs, and PACFs, were also used by the researcher to identify whether seasonality in the series needed to be modeled. Systematic patterns of dips and spikes in the line graph suggest seasonality. Similarly, systematic spikes in the lags of the ACFs and PACFs also suggest seasonality. In a monthly time series, a spike every 12th lag in the ACF and PACF implies a need to model 12-month seasonality. Such seasonality is indicated by the inclusion of subscript when describing the identified ARIMA model. For example, the identification of an MA(1) process in the data and 12-month seasonality would be written as: ARIMA(0,0,1)₁₂.

In addition to inspecting the line graph and ACFs of each time series when considering whether the series was stationary (i.e., whether $d = 1$ needed to be included in the model), the researcher supplemented by using formal tests to establish if the series is stationary. Since there is no widespread agreement on the “best” test for detecting non-stationarity in a series, the researcher used one or more of three tests available in Stata. The augmented Dickey-Fuller test estimates a parameter using OLS producing a test statistic needing to be compared to critical values. If the test statistic exceeds the specified critical values, the null hypothesis that the time series variable is non-stationary should be rejected. Failure to reject the null hypothesis means the time series variable is non-stationary and the researcher needed to difference the series. Due to concerns surrounding low power and difficulty with type I errors (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2014),

the researcher also consulted the Phillips-Perron test and KPSS unit root test. The test proposed and developed by Phillips and Perron (1988) offers an alternative nonparametric approach, calculating two test statistics requiring comparison against critical values. Similarly, the null hypothesis is that the time series variable is non-stationary. In contrast, the KPSS unit root test consists of a modified version of a Lagrange multiplier test, and the null hypothesis is that the time series is stationary (Kwiatkowski et al., 1992). Rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that the time series variable is *not* stationary and differencing is needed.

Once tentative models were identified, ARIMA parameters were estimated. Two criteria must be met for the model to be sufficient and for the analyst to continue to the third step of the Box and Jenkins approach. First, all parameters must be statistically significant. Second, any AR and/or MA parameters included in the model must be invertible, meaning they must be between -1 and 1 (McDowall et al., 1980). Depending on the results, the researcher dropped insignificant parameters and re-estimated, returned to the identification step, or proceeded to diagnosis if the two criteria were met.

The diagnostic step consists of comparing the estimated model's residuals to "white noise" using two assessments. The Q -statistic (also referred to as the Portmanteau test or Ljung and Box Q) and visual inspection of the ACFs and PACFs are used to assess whether the model residuals are "not different than white noise" (McDowall et al., 2019, p. 54). The Q -statistic tests whether the residual ACF is independent, with the null hypothesis stating that the residual ACF is not different from white noise. If the Q -statistic is statistically significant, the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning the model must also be rejected. When the Q -statistic was not statistically significant, the researcher

proceeded to visually examine estimations of the ACFs and PACFs from the residuals. If only white noise is present, all lags of the ACFs and PACFs should be zero (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2014). If the residuals satisfied these assessments, “white noise” was determined to have been reached, meaning the model was considered “statistically adequate” (McCleary & Hay, 1980).

ITSA introduces the intervention to the ARIMA model. ITSA is a quasi-experimental alternative when randomized designs are not feasible, such as in the circumstances of this study. If the intervention affected the dependent variables, the causal hypothesis is that there should be a change to the slope or level of the observations made after the intervention. The final step consisted of the researcher adding the intervention variable to the selected ARIMA model, allowing for an assessment of the impact of the exogenous intervention (creation of SSU in August 2016) on the time series data. If the intervention variable is statistically significant, *and* the other parameters also continue to meet ARIMA identification criteria (statistical significance and invertibility), assessments of the model residuals are required. If these assessments indicated appropriate model fit, the results would suggest that the intervention significantly impacted school-based arrests or Baker Act apprehensions.

Previous criminal justice research using ITSA (Corsaro & McGarrell, 2009), the SRO literature (Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Theriot, 2009), and the broader policing literature (Brown et al., 2009; Schulenberg, 2010) suggested that the disaggregation of data based on offense type and students’ age needed to be explored. Florida’s laws recognize zero tolerance offenses requiring referral to the juvenile or criminal justice system if committed at school (Fla. Stat. § 1006.13). The law is very broad in that zero

tolerance policies must apply to “any act that poses a threat to school safety,” but does restrict school districts by requiring that such policies not be applied to “petty acts of misconduct.” Although there are examples in the literature of individual school principals instituting their own zero tolerance policies for offenses such as fighting (Kupchik, 2010), generally, zero tolerance policies requiring referrals to law enforcement consist of more serious, felony offenses. Therefore, whether or not an SRO is assigned, schools have likely been reporting felony offenses to law enforcement, which would mean the intervention in the current study would not have a substantial impact on school-based arrests for felony offenses. However, the SRO literature suggests that the introduction of an SRO to a school campus contributes to the redefining of student misbehavior into misdemeanor criminal conduct and increasing student arrest and/or justice system referral rates (Kupchik, 2010; Nolan, 2011; Theriot, 2009). Thus, to test the sub-hypothesis the researcher disaggregated the arrest data to repeat the procedures described in this section for the offense type subgroups (felonies, misdemeanors, and non-criminal offenses).

Furthermore, since the creation of the SSU especially impacted elementary schools, the researcher disaggregated the data by age to analyze any possible impact of the intervention on age groups separately. Unfortunately, the administrative databases did not include a variable identifying the school where the arrest or apprehension occurred until some point in 2017, meaning the researcher was unable to conduct separate analyses based on school level. Accordingly, the researcher chose to disaggregate the data into two separate age groups determined by the typical ages of students in elementary school versus those in middle and high schools. Since the upper grade of elementary schools in the county under study is fifth grade, which typically consists of students no older than

11-years-old, the researcher disaggregated into an 11-years-old and younger group and a 12- to 17-years-old group for both the arrests and Baker Act apprehension data, allowing the researcher to repeat the procedures described in this section and test the sub-hypotheses regarding the intervention having a significant impact on younger students.

Integration of the Qualitative and Quantitative Strands

One of the major advantages of mixed methods research is the ability to combine qualitative and quantitative methods, so that findings can be triangulated and mutually corroborated (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). After the separate analyses of the qualitative and quantitative strands, the data were merged in order to compare results and assess whether and how the results converge. A side-by-side comparison was performed, where the quantitative results and qualitative findings are presented together in a discussion allowing for efficient comparison. This analytic strategy allowed for assessments of “the extent to which the two databases converge, whether differences or similarities are found, and what conclusions can be drawn from the differences and similarities.” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 232). The following chapter reviews the qualitative findings. Chapter 6 presents the results of the quantitative analyses. The integration of the two strands is discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The findings of the qualitative strand are presented in this chapter. As a reminder, the research questions (RQ) and objectives (RO) are:

- RQ1: What are the responsibilities, duties, and/or roles of the SROs?
 - RO₁: To investigate activities SROs engage in as part of their job.
 - RO₂: To examine SROs' perceptions of their roles and duties.
 - RO₃: To explore whether, and how, SROs respond to student misbehavior.
 - RO₄: To explore whether, and how, SROs respond to student mental health problems.

- RQ2: How are SROs prepared for undertaking these responsibilities?
 - RO₅: To explore the personal and professional backgrounds of the SROs.
 - RO₆: To investigate the types of training SROs complete as part of their job.
 - RO₇: To examine SROs' perceptions of the training they received (or did not receive).

Qualitative descriptions and themes identified in the data are provided and discussed to address these questions and objectives. Specifically, six categorical themes⁴ were generated from the data and organize the findings of this chapter including: the primary role of the SRO is safety and security; a secondary role identified by some SROs consists

⁴ As described in Chapter 4, the interviews, observations, training materials, and contract discussed in this chapter were collected in 2017 and 2018. Changes implemented due to the initiatives of the SSU, school district, and/or the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act may also mean changes to findings if data were collected at the time of final drafting in Spring 2022.

of engaging in positive interactions with the school community; ambiguity exists surrounding expectations for SROs' roles and responsibilities; SROs' responses to student behaviors are influenced by other actors; not just any LEO can be a successful SRO; and finally, there are problems with SRO training that could be remedied.

The Primary Role of the SRO is Safety and Security

The literature review of this dissertation discusses NASRO's triad model (law enforcement officer, informal counselor, and teacher) of responsibility and how it dominates the conversation regarding the roles and responsibilities of SROs. The U.S. Department of Justice recently amended the triad by adding a fourth role of emergency manager. However, due to a lack of research into SROs' activities, along with many school districts not adopting an MOU, it can be unclear whether SROs across the country adopt these roles or engage in activities related to these roles. In Central County⁵, the contract with the school board, required training, SROs' reported daily activities, and the SROs' perceptions of their job all indicate that the primary role of the SROs is safety and security, encompassing both the law enforcement role of the triad model, and the U.S. Department of Justice's expectations for the emergency manager role. The first two subsections presented below will provide a descriptive overview of how the role is established through a formal contract with the school board and the training provided. This lays the foundation and context through which study participants' attitudes and experiences are based.

⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, pseudonyms are used for the county under study, as well as for cities, individuals, local law enforcement agencies, and local programs.

Contract with the School Board Emphasizes SROs' Safety/Security Role

SROs in Central County are provided with some guidance regarding the roles SROs are expected to fulfill through the contract between the school board and the involved law enforcement agencies. The contract does not specifically adopt the triad model, but it does delineate four purposes for the agreement which appear to coincide with the expected responsibilities of the SROs. These purposes⁶ include: 1) “foster better relations between students and law enforcement personnel”; 2) “deter crime” through the “presence of a law enforcement officer”; 3) “have law enforcement officers available for presentations to students, faculty and parents concerning law enforcement”; and 4) provide for the operation and funding of the Strive for Safety⁷ program in the county’s elementary schools.

Furthermore, the contract contains attached exhibits listing duties and responsibilities that the SRO “will” perform, with the contract specifically stating that these duties are “in addition to the routine duties and responsibilities” of a law enforcement officer. The first exhibit lists 25 duties/responsibilities. Some of these listed “responsibilities” appear to be purely administrative, such as the item stating that student records “will be maintained in accordance with the provisions of Florida Statutes” and another item requiring the SROs to complete the training set forth in the contract. Importantly, of the 25 duties/responsibilities, 19 directly relate to the safety and/or security functions of the SRO. Law enforcement-specific examples include the mandate

⁶ Quotations are directly from the copy of the 2016-17 school year contract provided to the researcher, which is not included as an appendix due to confidentiality.

⁷ This is a 10-week educational program for fifth grade students taught by the SROs assigned to elementary schools.

that “[n]o students will be contacted during school hours in conjunction with a criminal investigation of any nature without notice first being given to the school’s principal,” and that the “final decision for arrest or not to arrest will be with the attending [SRO].…”

Some of the items are more security focused, such as the SRO “will assist […] in developing plans and strategies for the prevention and control of dangerous situations at school” and that the SRO is “expected to conduct regular safety and security checks.”

Although it is the 23rd item listed, the following item leaves very little doubt as to the principal function of the SRO: “The primary responsibility of the [SRO] is the safety of all students, staff and school property and to provide emergency response and stabilization of critical school incidents.”

Training Emphasizes Safety and Security

The required SRO training in Central County also provides direction regarding the expected roles for the SROs. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Basic SRO course identifies three roles for the SRO during the first training unit where the history, philosophy, and implementation of SROs are reviewed. The course adopts the triad model with the student guide (physical manual distributed on the first day of training) listing “law enforcement officer,” “law-related teacher,” and “law-related counselor” as SRO responsibilities. However, similar to the contract, the training emphasizes the safety/security responsibilities of the SRO. There are 10 units covered in what is supposed⁸ to be a weeklong, 40-hour course. Seven of the ten units focus on the

⁸ As will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter, the FDLE Basic SRO training observed by the researcher was less than 40 hours.

law enforcement role of the SRO, covering topics such as laws and legal issues, drug trends, emergency management, gangs, and cybercrimes.

SROs in Central County are also required to complete CIT training (described in Chapters 2 and 3). Since the training was created specifically for law enforcement officers, the training understandably focuses on responding to mental health crises from a law enforcement perspective. Many training sessions discussed the Baker Act and related procedures including visiting two of the three mental health facilities used for involuntary commitments. Training participants were also introduced to other criminal justice system aspects for crisis responses including presentations conducted by the various specialized units within the Central County Sheriff's Office (e.g., Domestic Violence, Elder Crimes), the county's specialty courts, and a session covering the state's forensic hospitals.

The week prior to school commencing, all SROs attend what is labeled as "Wraparound" training. The training sessions largely appeared to be an opportunity for the SSU's chain-of-command to make administrative announcements to all the SROs in the county at one time, although there were also presentations surrounding a wide array of topics related to the SRO position. The topics, sessions, and announcements overwhelmingly consisted of issues surrounding the SROs' law enforcement and security functions. Field notes reflect that sessions explored critical incident responses, threat assessments, the Raptor⁹ system, target hardening efforts, the Rave Panic Button¹⁰, and safety drills. A variety of law enforcement topics were also covered including requesting

⁹ This is software specifically developed for school districts to manage and monitor visitors, volunteers, and emergencies (<https://raptortech.com/>).

¹⁰ This is a smartphone mobile app allowing school staff to immediately dial 9-1-1 and simultaneously notify other school staff members of an emergency occurring on campus (<https://www.ravemobilesafety.com/products/rave-panic-button/>).

K-9s for drug sweeps, truancy, reporting monthly arrest numbers, Baker Act procedures, and a session with the lead juvenile court prosecutor.

The researcher was also in attendance for a 3-day training preparing SROs for teaching the Strive for Safety program in the elementary schools. Even during this training discussions surrounding some of the law enforcement responsibilities of the SROs crept into the training sessions, with the lead instructor spending time on SROs' responsibilities regarding truancy, formal responses to bullying, and new sexting laws. For example, field notes from the first day of the Strive for Safety training described:

[SRO SB] emphasized the importance of developing a relationship with their assigned school's social worker. The social worker is required to print out monthly truancy reports. At this time, the [SROs] do not automatically receive the report, and instead must request it from the social worker. [...] [SRO SB] stated that the [SROs] should "concentrate on the top five" students with truancy issues. She said that truancy is a part of their responsibility because if a student with truancy problems at their respective school "ends up dead in a ditch" the chain-of-command will want to know what avenues the [SRO] used to address the truancy issue, and it will be unacceptable to have not known there was a truancy issues (CYA tactic). An SRO asked if they are allowed to accompany social workers to well-being checks if the social worker is afraid for their safety. [SRO SB] said that should absolutely be a part of their job. (Field note, 7/25/17)

Discussions surrounding completed training during interviews with the SROs also indicated a heavy emphasis on training related to their safety and security role. When asked about the relevant training completed prior to commencing the SRO position, the SROs mentioned many safety and security focused courses including CIT, FDLE Basic SRO, D.A.R.E., Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.), active shooter, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), interview interrogation techniques, truancy, and the Wraparound training. Similar responses were also received when inquiring about the training completed since switching to the SRO position with the

addition of courses such as Stop the Bleed and other first aid-type training, FDLE Intermediate SRO, FDLE Advanced SRO, firearms training, hostage negotiation, narcotics investigations, and sex crimes investigations. Accordingly, SRO training supports that the primary role of the SRO is safety and security.

SROs Perceive Their Main Responsibility to be Safety and Security

During interviews, the SROs overwhelmingly perceived their primary responsibility to be safety and security, no matter the assigned school level or type of school. For instance, when asked what the responsibilities of an SRO are, SRO CT stated, “The safety and security of the school, the kids, the staff, everybody that’s here at our school.” This straightforward response was similar to others, such as SRO BS who responded, “Our number one job is to keep everybody safe. The security of the school is our number one thing.” Some SROs offered more detail regarding their responsibilities:

I think the main responsibility is school campus safety, hands down. I mean, that can be anything from a possible active shooter to an irate parent on campus, which I’ve had a few. Make sure they don’t get out of hand. To crossing the kids, I cross the kids on the crosswalk, anything like that. [...] I have a presence in the hallways and in the lunchroom trying to keep everybody safe. It might deter them from wanting to get into stuff like fighting or something like that on campus. (SRO DS)

First and foremost, it’s to neutralize any threat to the school, the students. That is the number one. You are to protect staff, students. Without that, they cannot learn. Everything after that is just icing on that, it’s secondary. [...] But you’re the fucking gun, and your job is to fuck up anything that tries to come and harm the kids. If you think it’s anything else than that, then you shouldn’t be an SRO. A lot of SROs are thinking that they’re staff employees, that they’re school employees. Your job is to fuck people up. It might be the students, and that’s the other thing people forget, a lot of these people, these school shooters, are actual students from the school, so the threat is sometimes within, and so you got to be ready to shoot a kid. (SRO ME)

These SROs immediately associated their position and responsibilities to involve the possibility of an active shooter on their campus. However, SRO DS provided a broader conceptualization of “school campus safety” to include traffic-type duties and a deterrence function. In comparison, SRO ME’s focus on safety was more extreme, addressing how the threat may be internal and requires an SRO willing to “shoot a kid.” Further, there is a suggestion that protecting the school is the *only* responsibility of an SRO.

Noticeably, the SROs assigned to high schools tended to expand their description to include law enforcement duties and their responsibility for responding to crime. For example, SRO EP (assigned to a high school), described how they felt that that the high school they were assigned to was like a “little city”:

Well, primary is safety and security of the campus, and that can range from someone coming on campus to a fire alarm going off. I mean, it just runs the gamut. I always try to explain that this is a city within a city. I have my own little city here and I just have to manage the safety and security of it, so there can be a lot of different aspects. I handle all crime. If there's a theft or anything like that and I work a case in my department, they allow me to work the case to the fullest extent. I don't have to turn it over to investigations until I can't clear it any further. [...] So quite a few I will solve here on my own.

With the high schools in Central County enrolling between 2000 to 4000 students, the analogy of the high school as a “little city” is not farfetched. This statement also suggests ownership over their assigned school, as well as a heightened level of responsibility. This heightened level of responsibility appeared to be associated with expanded expectations for their public safety role. As explained by SRO MM, “not only are we an officer, we’re the investigator [as well].” They further explained how visibility is central to the SRO position:

To remain visible so that people know that you're on campus. To provide security in the sense that we're in the areas when kids are coming on campus, we're making sure the gates are locked, we're making sure the perimeter of the school is good. Enforcement of even the school policies of checking doors to make sure they're locked. Our role really is visibility. We can control a lot with us being out and visible. So, class changes, lunch, arrival, dismissal. We're here for safety. We're here to provide that service of making sure everybody feels safe. We do the calls for service on campus as well. If there's a cell phone theft or a fight or anything like that, we're here for that. And then we're also here for the investigation portion of things where if a kid's phone is stolen or there's a crime that has been committed, we follow up the whole thing. Where road they send it to investigations, we investigate everything that happens here on the campus.

SROs identified over 50 types of activities they engage in on their school's campus. Most of the frequently mentioned activities were clearly associated with the safety and security role of the SROs including being a presence, securing campus, surveillance, responding to various calls and emergencies, investigating incidents, and formally responding to student misconduct. Other related activities that were mentioned by some of the SROs were addressing truancy, assisting with child abuse investigations, preparing for critical events, and preventing trespassing.

However, there were several other activities that at first glance do not immediately give the appearance of being categorized as a safety/security activity, but ultimately, can be classified as such. For example, the SROs consistently mentioned responding to student mental health problems, which some may associate with the informal counselor role in NASRO's triad model, but due to their powers under the Baker Act, the SROs regularly respond to student mental health issues under their law enforcement role. SRO DN stated, "Generally, couple times a week I'll have some sort of Baker Act investigation, whether it be actually Baker Acting someone, or just handling it with the parent, or talking the kid down." Another SRO (TP) mentioned, "There's not a

given week on the campus that we don't have a kid that fits the criteria, or relatively is treading on that line for Baker Acting." They further offered, "I've had as many as four in one day." Such situations seem to be prevalent enough that an interview was interrupted due to a possible student mental health issue. Notes from the interview with SRO AC indicate that the interview was interrupted due to SRO AC receiving a call from a staff member that a student was claiming he wanted to harm himself. SRO AC instructed the staff member to take the student to the guidance counselor first, and they would follow up.

Most of the SROs also mentioned involvement with student arrival and dismissal. Some of the SROs' involvement was straightforward in that they directed traffic, such as SRO TW, "Before I even come to school, I direct traffic in the front." Directing traffic is a task typically delegated to law enforcement officers, and thus, falls squarely into the SROs' safety role. Others mention more of a monitoring or surveillance function, such as SRO KC, "So I get on campus and I sit out near the road and monitor the parents turning in for car line, failing to follow the rules, so I monitor that." Similarly, SRO AR stated, "Typical day at work I work the car line in the mornings, keep everybody in control. Watch over everybody while I'm doing it." Other SROs discussed the importance of their "presence" during student arrival, which is reminiscent of the discussion surrounding "visibility" above. One example is SRO LM's description of how they handle student arrival:

Wait for 8:05 for the parents to start dropping their kids off, going through the line, busses drop off, just kind of greeting the kids in the front, and kind of keeping a presence up front. Occasionally, I'll go back to the rear gate where we have our walkers that come in and just greet them, letting them know that I'm here, because it's all about presence. Letting the parents know and letting the

students know that I'm here so that the parents feel safe that their kids are getting dropped off here at school, and the kids feel safe when they're arriving.

Concerns for safety were also apparent during descriptions of student dismissal, although several SROs indicated they do not direct traffic. During such discussions, SROs expanded their safety functions to include dealing with traffic infractions:

Now we have a new dismissal program. So, what I do is we have three lanes that are being dismissed in the car line, and I'm always there, period. Make sure that all the kids get in their cars before somebody drives off. I've stopped many people for speeding. [...] So, I'm really proactive with traffic. I think the most important thing for me is to be close to the doors so I can visualize something or somebody walking in and I could stop it before they get into the building. I also have a radio on me so I can communicate with all the staff and tell them if there's a code red or code yellow. But the safety is my number one concern. (SRO JV)

I just stand out to make sure everything's okay. Check for car seats or booster seats because at this age they're still supposed to be in a booster seat. And I usually give my parents a little talk first, and then afterwards I have to maybe go ahead and issue that citation. (SRO MR)

Thus, in Central County, the SROs' duties, responsibilities, and roles involve safety and security. The contract with the school board is clear surrounding the expectation that the SROs' primary responsibility is ensuring the safety of their assigned school. Additionally, the training completed by the SROs emphasizes their safety and security functions. Notably, the SROs' own descriptions of their daily activities and their perceptions surrounding their responsibilities all indicate that the primary role of the SRO is safety and security. These findings are unsurprising as others have suggested that the law enforcer role is the SROs' primary duty (Kubena, 2019; NASRO, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). However, the data from this study indicates that in Central County much more than a pure law enforcement role is adopted, as *security* responsibilities and activities were mentioned in combination with safety. These findings

suggest that expectations for SROs have been expanded from what national organizations are advancing as the roles of an SRO. The next section discusses an identified secondary role of the SROs.

The Secondary Role of the SRO Consists of Engaging in Positive Interactions

Although the data suggests that safety and security are the primary function of the SROs in Central County, the contract with the school board, activities the SROs engage in, perceptions of the chain-of-command, and SROs' perceptions of their job all indicate a secondary role of actively interacting with the school community. These interactions are expected to be positive and take many forms, including those activities aligning with the triad model's informal counselor/mentor role and teaching role. However, these interactions differ from what national organizations propose for SROs' roles (NASRO, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2019), in that for many of the SROs, interactions are not as structured or as well-defined as a counseling or teaching role may suggest. Furthermore, there was a great deal of discussion regarding the "community" and not solely interactions with the students, although the interactions with students were mentioned most frequently. The first subsection describes whether and how the contract between the school board and law enforcement agencies mandates the SROs to interact with the school community. Then, SROs' perceptions towards the various mechanisms for positive interactions are explored.

Contractual Obligation to Interact with School Community

As mentioned above, the contract between the school board and the law enforcement agencies provides the "purpose" for the agreement with the first being to

“foster better relations between students and law enforcement personnel,” but also to “have law enforcement officers available for presentations to students, faculty and parents concerning law enforcement,” and provide for the operation and funding of the Strive for Safety program. At first glance, the contract seems to emphasize these interactions over the safety/security role. However, the attached appendices clarify that the primary role of the SRO is safety/security. Out of 25 duties/responsibilities listed in the first appendix, only a handful fall outside of the safety/security role of the SRO.

Importantly, the contract does not mandate that the SROs *will* or *shall* counsel or mentor students, but one item indicates that they need to “make contact reports for each student counseled.” Another item states that the SROs “will interface with students between class breaks, during lunch periods, before and after school and at school activities at which the [SRO] is attendance [sic].” The appendix also mandates that the SRO “will serve as a referral resource for students, faculty, and parents to community agencies” and also that the SRO “shall attend meetings of the school faculty, student council, parent-teacher organization” at the request of the principal. Regarding teaching, the first appendix states that the SRO “shall participate in classroom teaching activities as requested by the school principal.” The second appendix is only applicable to SROs assigned to elementary schools and clarifies that the SROs “shall present” the Strive for Safety program to fifth grade students and “will coordinate classroom visitations with the kindergarten through fourth grade, pre-kindergarten, and ESE¹¹ students.”

¹¹ The Florida Department of Education uses the classification of “exceptional student education” for students with a range of intellectual, developmental, emotional, and physical disabilities, as well as students classified as gifted (students with superior intellect and capable of high performance). When referencing ESE students throughout the remainder of this dissertation, only students with disabilities are considered, and not those classified as gifted.

Accordingly, these items demonstrate a contractual obligation to interact with students and the broader school community as a part of their job. However, the contract does *not* adopt the formal models advocated by the U.S. Department of Justice (2019) or NASRO (2012). For example, the contract does not require SROs to engage in counseling or mentoring, and SROs assigned to middle and high schools do not have a formal educator role. Further, not much guidance is supplied to the SROs regarding the particular directives in the contract. For example, it is unclear what the SROs assigned to elementary schools are supposed to do when visiting classrooms. Thus, it appears to be up to the individual SROs as to how they go about actively engaging with the school community.

Mechanisms Facilitating Positive Interactions

When asked about their responsibilities, the SROs overwhelmingly mentioned safety and security, and for some SROs, this was the *only* responsibility provided. Nevertheless, many of the SROs offered other responsibilities that appear to relate to positive and supportive interactions with the school community, especially the students. How the SROs labeled and described these interactions varied, which is unsurprising since as indicated above, this secondary role is amorphous and not blatantly prescribed by the contract as a mentoring or counseling role. Based on interviews, three theoretical themes were identified that contributed to the development of positive interactions with the school community: mentorship, acting as an agent for change, and building rapport.

Mentorship

As described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the informal counselor/mentor role identified by the U.S. Department of Justice (2019) and NASRO (2012) includes informal counseling sessions with students, referrals to community agencies, and generally serving as a role model and mentor. When asked about their responsibilities, some of the SROs did specifically mention a mentoring role. For example, SRO LM stated, “You’re also just here basically, I would say to be a mentor, even though that’s not written, but you get into this to watch out for these kids.” Others mentioned counseling, such as SRO MT: “I think we’re in a way counselors. We guide the kids in a way to go.”

A responsibility to mentor seemed to be supported by the chain-of-command. When discussing expectations for the SROs, the sergeants expressed that SROs should engage with students, act as role models for students, and serve as mentors. For example, Sgt. CK stated “Here in the [SSU], mentorship is a huge thing. We want all our [SROs] to be mentoring someone in their respective schools because every school has at least one child that needs it.”

Although they may have not discussed mentoring as a specific responsibility, some SROs included mentoring-type activities when discussing a typical day in their job. Mentoring was mostly informal, such as the interactions described by SRO DN:

I have a pretty large group of kids I mentor that usually just come up and talk, hang out with me. I’ve got a golf cart they all jump on and ride around, and we talk and see how their day is going.

However, some mentoring was formal. SRO TH noted that one of the county’s diversion programs for youth required a mentorship component, and as the SRO assigned

to participants' school, they would be assigned as the mentor to the student for a 10-week period. SRO TH offered a positive mentoring experience with one student:

I took him to [local non-profit organization's] fishing derby to get him six and a half hours of community service, and he was great with the kids that were there. I couldn't ask for a better kid to come help because he was baiting the hooks, he was tossing the line, he was doing everything for the kids and just helping them out.

A minority of the SROs engaged in formal mentoring by being involved with students' extracurricular activities. Some examples of these activities included coaching athletics, facilitating the school's ROTC program, supervising the safety patrol program, leading the photography club, and teaching the G.R.E.A.T. curriculum as an after-school program. One SRO felt strongly that mentoring is an important aspect of their job, so they developed and coordinate an after-school mentoring program for at-risk students in their elementary school.

Relatedly, some SROs described activities that included counseling students. SRO TP described how on a typical day at their high school, "I can have five kids waiting to talk to me about various issues." While discussing the enjoyable aspects of the SRO position, SRO LF described how students sought them out for counseling:

I think it's my demeanor and the way I talk to them, they just feel like they can come in and say whatever, and they know I'm going to listen to them. But I think it's just the interaction with the kids that are good, and the ones that are having a hard time, that they'll tell you stuff, and they'll spill their hearts out. Like most of them trust you. It's just very cool.

Certain SROs connected a counseling role to addressing student misbehavior, incorporating a safety and security rationale for such activities. SRO AS discussed preventing physical fights at their school by acting as a mediator and forcing students to "come and sit down and talk about it like adults." SRO BB also described an instance

where they were “tipped off” regarding a fight and were able to stop it before it happened. They met with the students and “sat down with them and ironed out their differences and explained to them what would happen to them if they did fight.” Thus, in such instances, informal counseling may serve an additional purpose of addressing the SROs’ primary role of safety and security through preventing violence on campus.

An intriguing aspect of the data that was not identified or discussed in the previous literature, is how common it was for the SROs to discuss informal mentoring/counseling as involving more than just the students. When asked about their responsibilities, SRO HD responded with “mentoring,” but then clarified, “including the parents.” SRO CT described their responsibilities to include supporting both the parents and school staff:

Being a resource for the parents if they need help. I referred them to classes, or truancy people, or our transitional officers, or other resources if they needed help. Being a liaison between the sheriff’s office and the school system. [The principal] came to me and asked me about stuff on our side, like for example, the shelter stuff that we’re talking about for the hurricane. So, it’s just working side-by-side and working with them.

SROs indicated that parents reach out to them seeking assistance and/or advice, such as SRO MM’s response when asked about their relationship with parents: “I think our relationship with the parents and community is good. We have parents calling us asking us for advice.” SRO KS discussed responding to parent inquiries: “I’ll have parents call me and say, ‘I have a question about this app that my kid is using.’ If I know the answer, I’ll give it to ‘em. If I don’t, [...] I’ll do some research.” The SROs would frequently act as a referral source for parents. For example, SRO DS stated, “I have parents call a lot of times or come up, they’ll ask me about giving them information for

[diversion boot camp]. I had two of ‘em yesterday morning by ten o’clock that I gave that information to.”

SRO MT implied that parents reach out frequently enough that they’re “kind of counseling the parents” along with the students. SRO TP provided a specific example of what they described as the “culture shock” of working in a high school their very first day, where they essentially needed to counsel a mother of a student, resulting in the following exchange:

SRO TP: Parent comes in my office first day here, mom comes in, tells me her daughter, who she thought was a virgin, read her diary, and the daughter was on her fifth or sixth sexual partner in less than six months. [She] caught her daughter in the shower the night before, showering with a guy butt naked. And she comes to me wanting me to talk to her daughter about sex. Like, ma’am, what can I do for you?

Researcher: That’s interesting, so she came to you first, not a guidance counselor or therapist, she came to you?

SRO TP: Yeah. So, everything from marital issues to sleeping with animals. I have had that. My kid’s huffing. I mean, you just name all kinds of weird crap, it just goes on, so you deal with all kinds of crap.

Thus, the SROs are being confronted with difficult, and awkward, conversations from parents of students, which may catch new SROs by surprise if not adequately prepared. There is also the question of whether an SRO is the most appropriate person at a school to be assisting parents with difficult topics such as a youth’s sexual activity. Such scenarios may be made even more awkward if an SRO lacks the finesse and effective communication skills needed to tackle such controversial topics.

There may also be occasions where the SRO is proactively reaching out to the parents of a student. An informal conversation with SRO BS during a training break resulted in the following field notes:

She sits with parents and speaks with them when both she and their teacher feel like there may be an underlying issue to a student's disruptive behavior. She gave a specific example of a student who, to her, very obviously needed to be medicated. She sat with the mother and made a suggestion for testing. She said the mother responded positively, got the child tested immediately, and then he was put on medication. She said she experienced absolutely no problems with the child after he was diagnosed and properly medicated. (Field note, 7/18/17)

Although during the conversation SRO BS made it seem like a benevolent action, once again there is the question of whether an SRO is the most appropriate personnel at the school to be having such a discussion with a parent. A parent with negative perceptions of the police could easily interpret such a situation as a warning or threat of police involvement in response to their child's behavior at school. This means that SROs should tread carefully as to whether and how they broach such subjects with parents.

Accordingly, some of the SROs appear to be engaging in positive interactions with students through informal mentorship and/or counseling activities, which may be as simple as regularly chatting with students. There was also suggestion of more formal mentoring through county programs and SROs taking on additional responsibilities by participating in students' extracurricular activities. Additionally, the SROs indicated the need to engage in mentoring and counseling of parents. Importantly, counseling parents on serious topics such as the risky sexual behaviors of their child may overwhelm an SRO with no formal training or experience in counseling. Further, such interactions require a skilled communicator. Although the sergeants recognized mentoring as an important activity, the contract does not designate a mentoring or counseling role for the

SROs, which may lead to discrepancies for SRO selection purposes or training requirements. Such considerations are discussed later in this chapter.

Building Rapport

Many SROs did not specifically mention “mentoring” or “counseling” as responsibilities or activities they regularly engage in. However, some would describe responsibilities that appeared to be related, but more amorphous, such as “building rapport,” or “building relationships.” For example, SRO KG said:

You’ve got to build that relationship with these kids, and that’s the thing, if they trust you, they’ll come and tell you things that are going on that maybe they’re just looking for some guidance in. And that to me is what we’re there for, is to take care of the kids. That’s my biggest worry every day is I want to make sure they’re alright.

Similarly, when asked about their responsibilities, SRO AS indicated that “on paper” the SROs are in schools for “safety and security.” However, they noted a second responsibility that is “maybe not written down” of “building relationships.” To them, this meant “a lot of talking” and “getting to know” the students. SRO PJ also responded that “safety” is their first responsibility, but then later notes that they “build relationships with the kids.”

SROs reported engaging in several activities that align with building rapport with students. At the elementary school level, the SROs indicated that they visit classrooms to interact with students, eat lunch with students in the cafeteria, and/or play with students during recess. For example, SRO BS stated, “I go into the kindergarten classes, and I’ll read with them.” Similarly, SRO CT mentioned, “I’ve gone into specials and played recorder with the kids this year. I’ve gone into art and colored with them just to spend time with them and not interrupt their learning.” Interactions during lunch were

mentioned by several SROs, such as SRO BW: “I do my security checks and then just hang out with the kids. I’ll eat lunch with them, and I’ll hang out with them. Then I’ll go to recess and play some games with them.” When discussing their daily activities SRO KG also described interacting with students during recess, “Recess I’ll go out there if they’re playing any sports or something outside, I’ll throw the football with them.” SRO LM explained how the PTA hosts a Friday Fun Run at their school and how he participates with the kids: “I’ll run around this little makeshift track with all these kids, and the kids think that’s the coolest thing that they’re running around with a police officer.”

SROs assigned to elementary schools also mentioned a great deal of hugs, high fives, and fist bumps from students. When discussing their interactions with students at their school, SRO JV mentioned, “I get high fives. I get high fives all day long.” SRO CT described, “I’ve had kids that were scared of me the beginning of last year that come run up to me and give me a hug every single day because they’re happy to see me.” SRO CB indicated that these positive interactions can be impactful for the SROs as well:

I’m just always hugged and approached. At Christmas time, my gosh, I was overwhelmed with gifts, which isn’t what it’s about by any means, but it was insane. I’ve never had that, and it was really emotional and incredible to have that, the support, it was really cool.

Although they did not mention hugs, classroom visits, or eating lunch with students in the cafeteria, the SROs assigned to middle and high schools did mention activities contributing to building rapport and developing relationships with students. SRO AS indicated they keep a desk drawer full of snacks, leading to students dropping into their office requesting a snack and chatting with them. SRO ME mentioned that they,

“play football with the kids during lunch time.” SRO RL described how they regularly walk the hallways of their middle school, so they can “talk to the kids.” SROs assigned to high schools also indicated that they attended special events that they were not necessarily required to be at, but chose to attend, such as graduation, football games, and prom.

Once again, although students were the focus of discussions surrounding developing rapport, school personnel and parents permeated conversations. SRO AR noted, “Being assigned to one school full time, you build a relationship with the administration, you build a relationship with the kids, and you build a relationship with their parents.” Sergeants’ expectations appeared to support the need to build rapport and engage with the broader school community. Sgt. KL noted, “The expectation is that you’re gonna be involved in the school. You’re gonna immerse yourself in the culture of the school.” Sgt. AO also discussed the need for the SRO to develop relationships with the principal, social worker, and guidance counselors, so that they can learn about issues such as “a family in need that we can be helping out.”

Several activities involving positive interactions with the broader school community were identified during interviews including helping school personnel, checking in with staff, speaking with parents, and assisting the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). SROs described how they sought to be helpful to teachers, administrators, and staff, with many of these activities being straightforward, especially in the elementary schools. SRO BS described how they “walk little ones to class all the time” and “help out in the front office.” SRO PM was assisting their school at the time of the interview by “helping run the fundraiser.” Such interactions with school personnel

also consisted of frequently “checking in” with various staff members to informally chat or to generally see whether there were issues needing to be addressed by the SRO. For example, SRO HD starts off their school day by, “I say hi to everybody in the office and we drink our coffee and talk about our weekend or our night or whatever.” Some SROs also described a friendly relationship with school administrators and/or teachers, such as SRO SB who mentioned that she and the administrators “eat lunch together every day.”

Lunchroom duties and/or assisting cafeteria personnel was mentioned by almost every SRO assigned to an elementary school. SRO RA provided specific examples of how they support both school staff and students during lunch while building a rapport:

And the next responsibility, I think, is just to build a rapport with the students and with the staff. I think that’s very important. And I help out wherever I can. We don’t have to work in the cafeteria, we’re not cafeteria workers, but if I see that the staff is backed up and there’s no food out there for the kids, I’ll go get a tray of food or I’ll help them serve just to get them caught up. And I do walk through the cafeteria and the little kids need help, they need help opening their milk cartons and their juice packs and stuff. The big kids usually don’t need help, they just have a lot of questions. But I think that it’s really important to interact with them, because that’s why we’re here.

The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was also mentioned by several of the SROs assigned to elementary schools. SRO DL stated, “A lot of it is just building community relationships. I work a lot with the PTA planning events.” However, this relationship may be limited to an elementary school setting, as the SROs assigned to middle schools, high schools, and non-traditional schools never mentioned the PTA. However, there were some examples of SROs in middle and high schools reaching out to parents in other capacities. In one instance, SRO ME described how he organized and facilitated an evening class for parents covering “social media awareness.”

SROs also discussed how they can use resources and programs within the

sheriff's office to secure items and services for the families of their students. SROs specifically mentioned assisting homeless families with securing housing and household items, but also obtaining shoes and other apparel for students. For example, the crossing guard program for the county is housed within the sheriff's office and donates bicycle helmets to students each year. SRO TH described how they were able to assist a family in need:

[The student's] family, they all got brand new bikes for Christmas, and three weeks after Christmas, they were all stolen out of the backyard. Four kids, three bikes were stolen. We arranged it and I got a bunch of donations from other schools, and we got four brand new bikes, and had the crossing guards come out. We got 'em brand new helmets. We went and bought bike locks to lock it to the house or wherever. [...] The mom has my personal number. She checks in every now and again.

For SROs employed by the sheriff and one of the municipalities, rapport building with students and their families is prevalent even when school is *not* in session. SROs employed by the sheriff supervise the Police Athletic League (PAL) spring break and summer camps, while the SROs employed by the Santana Police Department are responsible for planning and facilitating a weeklong camp for youth during spring break. The camps are little to no cost for families and aim to provide safe and supervised activities to youth, while also building positive relationships with law enforcement. This means the SROs can continue to engage in positive interactions with students during school breaks, while also providing a much-needed service for parents.

It was also interesting how the SROs would continue to emphasize their primary role of safety/security by connecting it to building rapport with students, families, and school personnel. In one example, the responsibility to build relationships with students was seen as a preventative measure, as SRO HD explained:

Building relationships with the kids, because these are the kids that in the future could be out and be influenced by gangs and crimes and drugs and things like that. So, you're trying to influence them, educate them, and build that relationship with them.

This SRO conceived "building relationships" as a strategy for preventing later gang or criminal involvement. During another interview, SRO AD described their responsibility to build relationships with the community as "building bridges," and directly associated such tasks with their safety and security role:

Once you have your safety and security issues in hand, our next responsibility is to make a connection and build bridges with the kids and their families. To me, it's hand-in-hand with safety and security. When you do that, the families also feel free to talk to us. They might notice something that could make our security better or how things are going, and they'll feel good to approach us, feel good to tell us, and they'll also feel more of a part of it. They start watching out for things. [...] I really feel like just building the bridges with the kids and the families, if you do that, and you have the safety and security down, you're going to prosper as an [SRO].

SRO AD asserts that by building rapport and being approachable, the families may feel more comfortable reporting information to support their primary role of ensuring the safety and security of their assigned school. This was also recognized by SROs when discussing school personnel such as teachers. SRO SB provided a specific example during their interview:

I think then it comes to our relationships with the kids within the school, and even your relationships with some of the teachers, because if a teacher doesn't feel comfortable coming to talk to you and they have something going on personally, you put the school in danger too if they're in a domestic violence situation where they have a violent husband. So, it's having a good relationship with your staff and your students, where they feel comfortable, where they know you're here to help.

Thus, building rapport can be perceived as a dual-purpose mechanism for supporting SROs' primary and secondary roles. Through the development of

relationships with students, families, and school personnel, SROs believe that they are also engaging in prevention and safety efforts. The next subsection explores how some SROs regard their positive interactions with students and the greater school community as a means to change negative perceptions of law enforcement in general.

Acting as an Agent for Change

Interview questions asked SROs whether they encountered resistance to their presence from school personnel, parents, and students. In general, SROs in Central County had not encountered much opposition from any of these populations. However, SROs recognized that there may be members of the school community who harbor anti-law enforcement attitudes and beliefs. Thus, for some SROs, their position provided an opportunity to change negative perceptions of law enforcement, and in several instances would report engaging in “building rapport,” “building bridges,” or “bridging the gap” with this purpose in mind.

It was clear from the interviews that the SROs believed that the number of students holding negative perceptions towards the police was much smaller in elementary schools, but steadily increased into upper grade levels. However, SROs assigned to elementary schools did discuss changing the perceptions of students. For example, SRO AC described their responsibility as being an influential role model for children, so that they would “view police in a more positive light.” Similarly, SRO PM described their responsibilities as including “bridging that gap” for students who are raised to believe that “the police are bad, police are crooked” and demonstrate to them that “police are there to keep them safe.” Thus, they interpreted their responsibilities to include acting as a positive model of policing in order to change perceptions towards policing generally.

SROs assigned to middle schools also identified responsibilities and/or activities related to changing students' negative perceptions, but specifically discussed how they interact with students or "build a rapport" with students in order to do so:

First and foremost is you've got to build a rapport with the kids. We're trying to get that police are bad out. Let them think that police are not that bad, my SRO is pretty cool, I can talk to him, I give him fist bumps, stuff like that. He's personal. (SRO MT)

It's mostly just interacting with the kids and building relationships. And that's what I find fun here, just dealing with the kids. Some of the kids that hate law enforcement for, they don't even know the reason why, just from what they see on the news, and they're like "Oh, you're not bad. Just a normal person!" (SRO MP)

These SROs envision interacting with students as a means to demonstrate that they are unlike the preconceived ideas students may hold surrounding law enforcement officers in general. They appear to engage with students in a hope to be seen as "pretty cool" or as a "normal" person. However, according to their interviews, neither of these SROs were frequently arresting students, and thus, the ability to transform negative perceptions may be easier than at the high school level where SROs may be regularly involved in official and punitive law enforcement actions against students. Nevertheless, some of the SROs assigned to high schools also suggested that they aim to change students' perceptions:

The biggest thing is just being available to the kids and trying to help them out as much as they need. And it's kind of hard sometimes because, especially in the high school, a lot of these kids don't want to be around cops and law enforcement. So, trying to bridge that gap of what they hear and see on the news, or what they've experienced, to let them know that I'm available for them if they need anything. (SRO BH)

I wish I could be in a t-shirt and jeans sometimes, because [students] would relate a lot better. Some of them are absolutely turned off by this [pointing at their uniform], and that's their learned experience. And I always try to debunk that. I've had kids come in here and give me attitude before I even speak. [...] "I don't

like cops.” Well, you’ve never met me! I call them out on it. We’re going to have a conversation about this. I’m not the one who did whatever to whoever. We need to talk about this. You’re going to be here at [Yates High School] and we’re gonna need to be able to communicate. So, I try my best to do that, but that’s a lot of work. I mean, it’s probably seven out of every ten kids that I deal with. (SRO EP)

Thus, these SROs indicated that changing negative perceptions is more difficult at the high school level. SRO EP also noted that making such efforts can entail “a lot of work.” This suggests the need for SROs who are willing to engage in such conversations with students, while also possessing the patience and communication skills to facilitate productive conversations with students.

Although not as frequently mentioned as in the previous themes, some SROs did suggest that the opportunity to change perceptions is not solely relegated to students. For example, SRO AD stated, “We build bridges in this job. We are the direct line with the community and their families to the [sheriff’s office]. So, we have that opportunity to change people’s perception if it is negative towards law enforcement.” This indicates that SROs may be perceiving themselves in a community or public relations-type role. Acting as the “direct line” from the school community to the sheriff’s office implies a position as the sheriff’s representative within the school, which if the sheriff or chief of the various law enforcement agencies envision the position in this way, careful consideration for SRO selection and assignment is critical to ensure that an individual is willing and able to engage in such community relationship building.

Accordingly, the data suggests that there is no well-defined secondary role of the SROs in Central County, however, there is some indication that the SROs should be engaging in positive interactions with students and the broader school community. The

contract with the school board, SROs' perceptions of their responsibilities, SROs' descriptions of their activities, and the sergeants' expectations all provide support for this idea. However, without clear guidance and instruction, the mechanisms for how these positive interactions occur varied, with some SROs engaging in mentorship, building rapport, and/or acting as an agent of change. Moreover, it was striking that the broader school community was consistently mentioned when discussing these themes. Finally, unlike the primary role of safety/security that was consistently supported by all SROs no matter the school level or type, SROs assigned to elementary schools described engaging in the activities leading to positive interactions more frequently, and in more varied ways.

Ambiguity Exists Surrounding the Expectations for SROs' Roles

The literature review of this dissertation notes how conflict and ambiguity may arise regarding the roles SROs are expected to adopt and how they execute these roles (Finn, Shively et al., 2005; Kupchick, 2010; Schlosser, 2014). Frequently mentioned as a source of ambiguity is the lack of an MOU clearly defining the expectations for the SRO. Tension may also arise from the SRO operating under two sets of policies, those of their law enforcement agency and those of the school district. Understanding this tension is at the heart of the research objectives aiming to examine SROs' perceptions of their roles and duties and explore whether and how SROs respond to student misbehavior and mental health issues.

Unlike many of the SRO programs across the country, the program in Central County standardized and streamlined policies and training requirements, while also executing a contract between each participating law enforcement agency and the school

board. Thus, it would be expected that ambiguity surrounding the SRO position is minimized. However, review of the contract, participant observations of training requirements, interviews with the SROs, and interviews with the sergeants all demonstrate the existence of ambiguity, with the most prominent example in the data consisting of whether and how SROs are involved in school discipline. Specifically, the following factors contributing to ambiguity were noted: contractual contradiction, training does not ameliorate the ambiguity, inadequate organizational support, and a lack of consistency related to disciplinary responsibilities.

Contractual Contradiction

The contract between the law enforcement agencies and the school board is clear that the SROs “are at all times employees of the” law enforcement agency. The contract further states that the SROs “are law enforcement officers and not a school administrator or employee.” The appendix to the contract contains a few relevant clauses clarifying the SRO’s employment status, such as the SRO “shall at all times perform his/her duties in accordance with” their agency’s standard operating procedures, “shall maintain all law enforcement powers, duties and responsibilities” while assigned to the SRO program, and “shall be responsible to his/her agency in all matters related to employment.” The contract also notes that the SROs are not “school officials” for purposes of disclosure of information. The FDLE Basic SRO course’s introductory unit reaffirms that the SRO is supervised by law enforcement chain-of-command and is responsible to their law enforcement agency. Field notes indicate that during the training Sgt. KL (the instructor of the training) “emphasized that none of the [SROs] work for the school board.” (Field note, 7/17/17).

As straightforward as these clauses and statements may be, there are other policies and procedures contradicting the assertion that SROs are not employees of the school board. Some of these contradictory items can be found in the contract itself. A major example is that the captain of the SSU also functions as the “Safety and Security Manager” of the school district. The contract notes that this individual:

has many duties and responsibilities and among them is the responsibility for providing oversight of the [SRO program] and [Strive for Safety] program administered within [Central] County Schools which includes oversight in the areas of selection requirements, training, curriculum, the provision of services, and compliance with minimum training requirements.

Both the captain and the lieutenant of the SSU are housed within the main school board building in the county, although they are part of the sheriff’s office chain-of-command. Interviews with some of the more veteran SROs indicated that the Safety and Security Manager was a civilian position not at all associated with any law enforcement agency prior to the creation and implementation of the SSU within the sheriff’s office. Thus, the contract seems to suggest that the captain is almost a hybrid-type of employee obligated to both the sheriff and the school board.

Although not a focal point of the interviews, a thorough discussion with one of the veteran SROs employed by a municipal police department illuminated how the captain of the SSU (Cpt. JT) may be perceived due to this unique, blended position. The researcher inquired as to how the SRO responds to issues with their principal and where they would seek guidance when dealing with such issues. When the researcher brought up Cpt. JT, SRO EP contended, “Even his position is different than mine because he works at that building. He works for [Central County Public Schools]. I don’t see my position the same. So sometimes I go to my supervisor because I need direction on the

law.” This SRO perceives Cpt. JT as a school board employee, and due to this, indicates they would go to their direct chain-of-command when a legal issue arises.

Furthermore, as part of the agreement, the school board is responsible for funding “fifty percent (50%) of the personnel costs, including benefits” associated with the SROs and provides the assigned SRO “with access to information and resources needed to perform the objectives” in the contract including office space, computer access, school staff contact information, and directory information. Once again, such clauses can lead one to wonder whether the SROs are a hybrid employee of *both* the sheriff and school district, but also what this may mean for purposes of liability, accountability, and the relevant caselaw surrounding searches, seizures, and interrogations of students at school.

Relatedly, the contract relegates some supervisory power to the principals of SROs’ assigned schools. For example, the contract states that the SRO is responsible to their agency in all matters relating to employment, “*except* that activities conducted by the [SRO] which are part of the regular school instructional program shall be under the direction of the principal” (emphasis added). Further, an item on the appendix mandates that the SRO must first give notice to the principal prior to any criminal investigation of a student. The SRO is also required to coordinate any absences during the school year with their principal and is required to attend any school-based meetings if requested by the principal, even if falling outside of regular school hours. The contract also provides the procedures for a principal to recommend to the Superintendent of the school board that the assigned SRO be removed from their school. Thus, it does appear that principals do have some control over the SROs. With these various contradictions within the contract,

both SROs and school personnel may encounter confusion when attempting to determine the responsibilities and activities of the SRO.

SRO Training Does Not Ameliorate the Ambiguity

Importantly, the discussion so far assumes that the contract is shared with all SROs and school administrators, and that these individuals review it. If questions arise or clarifications are needed, then the assumption would be SROs and/or school administrators seek out answers from the appropriate personnel. In an ideal situation, the contract could also be used as a starting point during new SRO training when introducing the SROs to their expected responsibilities and activities. The data for this dissertation suggest that none of this was occurring in Central County at the time of data collection.

The first training required to be completed by the SROs in Summer 2017 (and the first training observed by the researcher) was the FDLE Basic SRO course. The instructor was one of the sergeants of the SSU. Sgt. KL referenced the contract on the first day of training leading the researcher to request a copy. Sgt. KL agreed to provide a copy and mentioned reviewing it the following day with the SROs. However, field notes indicate that although Sgt. KL provided the researcher with a copy of the contract, “None of the [SROs] had any interest in reading over the contract with the school board so Sgt. [KL] didn’t cover it. Instead, there was [sic] discussions regarding a 3% raise all of them are supposed to be getting.” (Field note, 7/18/17). The contract was never reviewed with the SROs during training sessions observed by the researcher.

During interviews, it was apparent that SROs were unfamiliar with the contract. In one example, the researcher inquired as to the training and/or information the SRO believed was critical for new SROs. SRO AR’s response not only indicates that the

contract is not being distributed and reviewed with the SROs, but also the ambiguity they confront in their position:

There's a happy medium that has to be met with the administration of the school, and at the same time, following your policies. And so, you're kind of in a power struggle between the two, not too bad, but you just got to keep in mind you have a boss, and you have to do things a certain way. But at the same time, the principal's in charge of the school, and you need to do things their way too. So, you need to kind of balance things out a little bit. Last year we had a contract. It kind of specifically stated every little thing that we needed to do. This year we didn't have a contract, okay, but they still had training with the principals what they expected of the SROs, but they didn't tell us what they expected, so we had to learn these things on our own.

In another interview, SRO PJ indicated that they always attend the extra events held at their school, even when falling outside of regular school hours. The researcher asked if these extra events were a part of their contract or something they willingly engaged in on their own time. SRO PJ responded:

I've always willingly done it. I need to check the contract. I thought it was a part of the contract. The contract is if there are kids on campus, we're supposed to be here. [...] My principal says it's in the contract. I haven't read the contract. I'm willing to help out, I'd rather be here. So, I'm not 100 percent sure.

SRO training and preparation in Central County did not seem to ameliorate the ambiguity inherent in the SRO position. The specific terms of the contract and what they mean for the expectations of SROs' responsibilities and activities *could* be reviewed during the required Wraparound training prior to the commencement of each school year. However, the researcher did not observe this occurring, and the SROs being unaware of the existence of a contract or admitting they have never read it, demonstrates that it does not seem to be occurring through other methods.

The field notes from training observations demonstrate that the problem of clarifying the responsibilities, activities, and expectations for the SRO was not confined

to the lack of review of the contract and its contents. Particularly during the FDLE Basic SRO course, SROs asked questions or engaged in discussions attempting to clarify their responsibilities and whether they should be engaging in certain activities. A sergeant from the SSU was the instructor of the training, and a newly hired sergeant of the SSU was present as a participant. Cpt. JT also made appearances throughout the week. This means individuals were present who should be able to answer the SROs' questions.

Nevertheless, this did not occur for several important topics brought up by the SROs during the training. For example, SROs inquired as to whether addressing bullying is a part of their job, whether they are supposed to respond to parents spreading rumors on social media, whether SROs are supposed to be invited to faculty meetings at their schools, who is responsible for Baker Act determinations within the school setting, and whether they are allowed to record incidents involving students. The SROs were not provided with a firm answer for any of their inquiries surrounding these issues the week of training, and later field notes and interviews indicate they may have never received clarification. In one example, the discussion surrounding recording incidents involving students arose from the training session covering confessions, and the SROs' desire for body-worn cameras to record incidents and student confessions. As stated in field notes:

SRO [MR] mentioned an issue he encountered when he recorded an incident on his [sheriff's office issued] cell phone. He stated that they were having issues at his school with a female student that kept "beating on a teacher" and that the administration specifically informed him that they wanted him to take a "hands off approach." He seemed to disagree with this. He decided to record an incident as it was occurring. [Central County Public Schools] took his phone to download the video, but then wiped all of the information stored on it. No one ever informed him whether or not he was allowed to record the incident using his phone. Sgt. [KL] was unsure. Sgt. [CK] had his laptop open so [Sgt. KL] instructed him to send an email to the legal department to see if they could get a firm answer. (Field note, 7/18/17)

Notes made after the training was completed state, “The week of training ended without our returning to this issue or a bright-line rule being provided.” Further, the researcher interviewed SRO MR four months later and he still had not received any clarity, other than the school preferred that he did not record such incidents.

Similar problems were observed during the Strive for Safety instructor training and the Wraparound training. For example, SROs had questions about customizing the Strive for Safety lesson plans and presentation slides, policies regarding school employee badges, expectations for attending their school’s “meet the teacher” event prior to the school year commencing, and new sexting policies. Firm rules or expectations were never provided to the SROs during training sessions observed by the researcher.

Training sessions also contributed to ambiguity by presenting contradicting information. As discussed above, during the first day of the FDLE Basic SRO course, the SROs were repeatedly told they are not employees of the school board and are not “school officials.” However, field notes demonstrate that the SROs were told at least twice afterwards that they *are* considered “school officials” for purposes of search and seizure. Sgt. KL mentioned this later in the week and the prosecutor mentioned it again during their presentation at the Wraparound training three weeks later. During the prosecutor’s presentation there was also a dispute regarding how to handle collecting witness and victim statements arising from a school-based incident. The prosecutor, Sgt. KL, and the SROs all offered varying perspectives, and no real consensus was reached, or firm guidance provided by the end of the training session, and it is unknown to the researcher whether any follow-up was provided to the SROs.

Not properly providing guidance and instruction to the SROs regarding what their responsibilities entail and the expectation for their position has implications for the SROs and how they execute their job. For example, when asked about the difficulties they've encountered while serving as an SRO, SRO AS responded:

A lot of it is not, I guess I kind of figured it out on my own just like everyone else, but not formally, "What exactly is your job?" Because you hear every time you go to a school "Well, the [SRO] did this last year," or "They used to do that." [...] Some things are a little ambiguous. You have to figure it out on your own what your role is. It's wading through their bureaucracy and ours, and what the school can and can't do, and what you can't do then.

This reality was further reinforced when the researcher went to lunch with SRO TW and SRO DS the week of the FDLE Basic SRO course. The researcher inquired as to their perceptions of the training. Field notes indicate that SRO TW found "the training lacking" and was "concerned that he is expected to be a teacher and counselor but is not trained to be either." (Field note, 7/20/17).

Inadequate Organizational Support

Another issue that may contribute to the ambiguity experienced by the SROs is that members of chain-of-command do not have experience working as an SRO. Out of the five individuals comprising the SSU's chain-of-command, only one had personal experience working as an SRO. This did not go unnoticed by the SROs under their supervision and was mentioned by a few SROs when the researcher inquired as to some of the difficulties they've encountered with their job. SRO JV noted that their direct sergeant had no experience as an SRO and was frustrated because the sergeant did not listen "to a recommendation here and there, which it gets to the point where we just stop talking." SRO HD noted "We have a lot of higher ranks that have never been a [SRO]

before. We're doing a lot of extra things on our time at night, which takes away from our families and that have never been done before.”

SROs from two of the municipal police departments also voiced frustration with their inexperienced chain-of-command. SRO PJ discussed how they had recently been considering retiring and explains why:

The mentality of my supervisor that doesn't get my job. My sergeant has no clue. He's one of the ones that'll come in here and sit in this office all day and his mentality is "I'm on campus. If an active shooter comes on, I'm on." So, he doesn't understand my thinking. I've been doing it for 20 years. He's been doing it for two. He came from road patrol, so that's a challenge.

Relatedly, the sergeants and the SROs of the SSU discussed the large number of subordinates assigned to each sergeant (12-14 SROs each), and how that meant limited interaction. SRO CB noted, "I saw my supervisor twice. [...] That brings up a very crucial topic of how am I going to be properly evaluated?" Thus, the combination of chain-of-command having no SRO experience of their own and limited interaction with their subordinates means the sergeants may be unable to properly guide the SROs, but also simply do not have plentiful opportunity to do so.

Lack of Consistency Related to Disciplinary Responsibilities

Accordingly, in Central County, ambiguity inherent in the SRO position is not being ameliorated by the chain-of-command or the required training, leaving the SROs to figure out the expectations for their roles on their own. Nowhere was this problem more palpable than discussions surrounding whether and how SROs are involved in student discipline. Importantly, the contract between the school board and the law enforcement agencies specifically states that SROs "shall not act as school disciplinarians, as disciplining students is a school responsibility. School officials shall handle matters

involving school disciplinary matters of students which are of a non-criminal nature.” However, the contract also requires that the SROs “be fully familiar with” the school district’s “Student Conduct and Disciplinary Code, and particularly the School Board designated ‘Zero Tolerance’ incidents on school grounds.” No further context is provided.

The researcher obtained a copy of the Code during an interview with an SRO. At the time, the code was a 40-page document akin to sentencing guidelines in the criminal courts. The code contains discussions of the scope of authority of school personnel, lists of student responsibilities and rights, student dress code, a list of infractions and their definitions, and descriptions and guidelines of the various discipline methods. The document also includes samples of the county’s discipline referral form, the Florida Department of Education’s School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) Discipline Referral form, and the decision-making matrix of infractions and consequences. Importantly, this is a school board document and not a document produced by the law enforcement agencies. Mention of law enforcement is limited to school administrators being required under the code to refer students to law enforcement for certain infractions specified in the matrix. It does not, and legally cannot, specify how law enforcement will respond when the student is referred to them. The code does not mention whether or how SROs are involved in discipline, and since, according to the contract, SROs are not employees of the school board and are not to be school disciplinarians, the inclusion of this specific clause in the contract is perplexing.

Interviews with the SROs demonstrate that not only are some SROs unaware of, or possibly ignoring, the clause in the contract stating that they will not act as

disciplinarians, but also that SROs' reported involvement in discipline is wide ranging, falling on a continuum from no involvement whatsoever to involvement every time a disciplinary matter arises. Additionally, discussions suggested that what is meant by "discipline" can be unclear. Importantly, of the 40 interviewed SROs, only five specifically referenced the policy prohibiting their involvement in discipline. For example, SRO EP stated, "As you know, by policy, I am not to be involved in any discipline at all. So even if kids walk by me with dress code stuff, I don't say anything." One SRO recognized how their secondary role conflicts with being involved in discipline, as engaging in positive interactions with students is rendered more difficult if the SRO is constantly arresting or punishing students. When asked how often they are involved in discipline, SRO PJ responded:

Well, the first 18 years of my career, very much. And now the policy says that we are not to be involved in discipline at all unless it reaches a criminal level. So, the reason for that is from [the superintendent], is that he wants us to build positive relationships with these kids. So, discipline is supposed to be handled by administration.

A few more SROs responded that they are not involved in discipline without any mention of the contract or policy. For example, when asked how often they are involved in discipline, SRO MM responded "We're not involved in discipline. We may have referrals [from the discipline office], but we are not involved in discipline."

Several of the SROs indicated very little or rare involvement with school discipline. When asked how often they are involved in student disciplinary issues, SRO CB responded, "Very little. Little to none. That's not our role at all." Some of the SROs mentioned the ESE students and their assigned classrooms, when discussing the rarity of their involvement in discipline. SRO AC stated that she has been involved "very little,

almost none” with discipline but that her staff informs her if there is a “really bad” situation just in case. According to SRO AC, such situations usually involved the autism spectrum disorder classroom due to concerns for staff safety. SRO PM responded to the question of frequency of discipline involvement in a similar fashion:

Almost never. If I get involved, usually it’s along with the assistant principal with like our EBD¹² kids. Maybe they’re punching the walls and stuff, and they’re having a big spout, because a lot of times just my presence alone, they are like “oh no.” I don’t go in and actually give discipline, but I go there as a presence.

Some SROs described activities that do not involve doling out discipline but indicate some limited involvement in the process. A small number of SROs described escorting students to or from the discipline office or relevant administrator. For example, SRO AR stated, “When kids get out of line, the best thing that we SROs can do is just kind of diffuse the situation and escort them to the office.” SROs also mentioned removing misbehaving students, as demonstrated by the following respondents:

If a child is being completely unruly in class and the administrator's coming from the other building, I will take the kid from class and let them sit in here until the administrator gets here, just to give the teacher a break if they're being disruptive or hitting the other kids or if they're doing something that's unsafe. (SRO RA)

We’re really not involved with [disciplinary matters] because we’re not here for discipline. However, if there’s an issue with a kid refusing to get out of class or acting up in class, the behavioral specialist here may ask for my assistance to help remove that child. (SRO EG)

The most frequently mentioned activity was talking to students who were currently in trouble or in the discipline office. SRO KC discussed, “I don’t get involved with the discipline stuff, but I do like to talk to the kids when they’re up here to see

¹² ESE student classification for emotional or behavioral disability.

what's going on and maybe find out if there's a reason why they're acting out." In

response to how often they are involved in discipline, SRO DS explained:

We're not supposed to get involved with the discipline. Now, we got a kid that's been pretty bad, I may sit in with the deans and kind of enlighten him to you cross the line and it becomes criminal, you're gonna see me, and I let them know what's gonna happen.

SRO LM noted that being assigned to an elementary school, there are not too many problems that could be deemed law enforcement matters for purposes of being involved in discipline. However, they provided a specific example where they did get involved:

We've had issues here in the past two years where two separate incidents kids have taken money from teachers' desks. There's been one where the kid stole \$100 and then there's one where he stole like 10 bucks. You try talking to these kids and saying if these people wanted to press charges against you because you stole something from them, then I would have to take you, or your mom and dad are going to have to go to court because of this issue.

What is unclear is whether these three activities (escorting, removing, or talking to students for discipline purposes) would violate the contract with the school board since they are technically not doling out punishment, but rather assisting in the discipline process. Some may expect that any adult working in the school should contribute to such tasks when needed. However, the fact that the SRO is a law enforcement officer means that both students and their parents may perceive their involvement in *any* type of discipline differently, even if the SRO believes it to be a benign action.

Several of the SROs indicated that they are involved in discipline if it is a law enforcement matter, the law has been broken, or the incident crosses a criminal threshold. Typically, the SROs are not the individuals coming across the illegal behavior, rather the

administrators will involve the SRO at that point. Fights between students were the most common example. SRO RL described how this occurs:

The teacher calls the dean, the administration handles everything. If they need my assistance, they call me. They usually make me aware of stuff that's going on. So, it's a good team effort. And we usually come together, and we talk about discipline with the kids, how they handle like misdemeanor crimes and stuff like that, fighting and theft. We don't automatically jump to the law enforcement response, but they do ask my opinion and we discuss it for proper punishments for our school.

However, SROs also noted that the administrators appear to have discretion under the code of conduct as to whether to classify something as a “law enforcement matter.”

During their interview, SRO GB discussed their involvement with school discipline with notes reflecting:

School administration has a standardized way of getting SRO involved. Contract between the [law enforcement agency] and the school board leaves total autonomy to the administration to decide what is a law enforcement matter, so this may differ from school to school.

SRO SB provided clarification during their interview regarding the comments the researcher had received from SRO GB. When discussing problems with administrators reporting what would be considered criminal incidents to the SROs, loopholes in the decision-making matrix in the code of conduct were explained:

In our world a battery is a battery. It's an unwanted touch, right? Causes fear or harm. So, in the school's student code of conduct, [...] I can show you how it's done [flips to relevant page in the code]. So, you have a battery, same guideline for the school, which is a mandated report to law enforcement. But they also have an “unsafe act” which is not reported to law enforcement. A battery would be written up as what we call a SESIR, a state referral, it's a bigger deal referral. And then you have just normal county referrals, which is what the unsafe act would fall under. In our world, you have two kids fighting, that's a battery from a legal sense. But the school can write it as an unsafe act and never let you know. I've had instances where a kid straight went and coldcocked another kid in the face. The other kid never even went hands on [...] and the school wrote that as an unsafe act. And I'm like, that's not an unsafe act, that's an absolute battery. But I

can't control the way the principal does things.

Such situations suggest that the SROs may not be getting involved in discipline even when behaviors could be classified as illegal, but there is also the ambiguity inherent in getting involved when an incident is a "law enforcement matter." As noted by SRO SB above, low-level misdemeanor offenses such as battery have minimal thresholds, as unwanted touches can be expected to occur with some frequency in a school setting. Disorderly conduct is a similar offense mentioned in the SRO literature (e.g., Theriot, 2009). The existence of these offenses mean that SROs could *technically* involve themselves in disciplinary matters a great deal.

Further along the continuum were SROs who indicated they were frequently involved in discipline or involved all the time. One example is SRO SV who indicated that they regularly wrote disciplinary referrals: "I do a lot on my own to help discipline out. I'll write referrals for kids too if they're skipping. I will write them up. If they don't listen, I'll write them up." SRO KC responded to the inquiry surrounding discipline when they commented, "I'd say at least once a day I'm getting involved in something." SRO ME said, "Very often. I'm probably way more involved, at least have been told quite a bit by administrators that worked in different schools, they'll say 'you're way more involved in these administration disciplinary issues than a lot.'" The following statements further support this sentiment:

Every time because I want to be a part of it, because I want to be able to help, to see what I can do, if there's anything I can do. So, whenever there's an issue. I'm not like other ones, because I understand other deputies where they do not want to get involved with that at all. I don't mind. I'm here. I need to see what's going on to begin with. I need to solve the issue. So, I get involved in every one of them. They call me for every one of them. (SRO JV)

I'm very structured in the way that I do things. And I'm the same way with the kids here. I'm hard on them and I teach them the responsibilities of their own actions. They forget their cover, they have to wear a silly hat for the day. They forget their I.D. badge, they walk around with the five by five piece of cardboard with their name on it. I mean, we've got a kid walking around today with the rope tied to a piece of cardboard that's four and a half feet tall. He's like five foot. Essentially, you see his head from his bust up. A young lady yesterday forgot her driver's license, and her mom brought it out here and she didn't bother to thank her mom. So now she's carrying around a four by two, four by three piece of cardboard. It's got her the funny little picture and her name written on it. And 'thank you, mommy' written across it. Decisions have consequences. (SRO TH)

Accordingly, there were several SROs who are very involved in disciplinary matters, and importantly, describe being involved even when there is not an obvious law enforcement or criminal matter that would require the response of the SRO. These are exactly the types of activities that NASRO (2012) specifically advises SROs should *not* be involved in, but further the contract clearly prohibits. However, SRO TP linked their frequent involvement in discipline to their primary role of safety/security:

With this job, my level of involvement, I can be as involved as much as I want or not want. Obviously, if it's a criminal issue, I'm going to be involved. I like to involve myself with bullying. If the kid comes up saying, "I'm being bothered with...", I make it a point of involving myself, because I see the bigger picture, it's bigger than just bullying. If someone tells me they're being bothered, someone's bothering you, I see it as my obligation to step in and look at it, because if I don't address it, in that kid's mind, it may give 'em a justification the next day to bring a knife or a gun to school and deal with it.

SRO TP claims that involvement in discipline is discretionary, which is not necessarily accurate since the contract states "shall not act as school disciplinarians." Nonetheless, they attempt to justify their involvement in bullying by invoking a safety justification. This can be problematic since many student misbehaviors are not illegal but could be categorized as a "safety" concern, such as running down a hallway.

Thus, although the contract states that SROs are not to act as disciplinarians, there is a wide-ranging involvement in discipline among the SROs in Central County. Interviews with the sergeants of the SSU revealed that these wide-ranging responses regarding discipline are not limited to the SROs. The researcher asked each sergeant how often the SROs are involved in disciplinary issues. Sgt. KL responded, “It should be zero. I understand we’re called when it escalates, or we’re asked to observe, but school disciplinary issues we should not be involved with.” Similarly, Sgt. CK responded, “To my knowledge, they should not be involved in any school discipline.” However, the researcher followed up by inquiring as to whether the SROs become involved in discipline when an incident crosses a criminal threshold. Sgt. CK further explained:

Yes. If it becomes what we call a “law enforcement matter,” we are involved, and at times we do partner with the administration for outside the box kind of thing. Say you have a student that's in the office that's having issues with can't keep his hands to himself in elementary school. We can be brought in as kind of counselors, sit down with a kid and go, “Look do you understand why this shouldn't happen?” Because sometimes kids do view, depending on the child, will view an officer or a deputy in a bit of a more role of respect. They see the teachers and everybody every day and they're just kind of thumbing their nose, but they see a cop, they might sit and listen. But that depends on the situation, the culture of the school, and where the deputy feels comfortable.

The question again arises whether this strategy of talking to misbehaving students means the SROs are involving themselves in discipline for purposes of violating the expectations set forth in the contract. Although the SROs and the sergeants may accept this as a benign action, some may interpret such actions as intimidating students. As noted by Sgt. CK, the fact that the SROs are a “cop” may be leading to different responses from students.

Lastly, Sgt. AO had a differing response to the researcher’s inquiry regarding

SROs' involvement in discipline. They appeared to support SRO TP's discussion above surrounding involvement in discipline being discretionary:

It depends. It's different at every school. You could go to some school like [Butler Heights Elementary], and you have [SRO AD] who is very involved. I mean, he knows kids' names walking down the hallway and if a kid's acting up, [...] they will call him on the radio. And I'm there witnessing it, they'll still call him on the radio. And it's his choice. If he does not want to be involved in it he can certainly say, "Look, that needs to be more of a school thing." So, it really just depends on the school and the [SRO]. Middle school I think it's a lot more. [...] Elementary we're trying to get them on the right track before they make that wrong turn, so I mean, it's more of like a mentoring thing with them. Whereas middle school, it's usually [the SRO is] in there with the dean doing some kind of suspension.

Thus, all three sergeants had varying perceptions regarding the SROs' involvement in discipline, which may at least partially explain the SROs' myriad of responses. SRO MP noted their confusion due to receiving conflicting guidance from supervisors:

From what I was told, and I still need to know the right answer, we're not supposed to get involved with discipline. I've been told two different things. Last year was don't get involved with discipline at all. And over the summer, one of the supervisors said write a referral. So, but that's discipline.

At the time of the interview, SRO MP had been in their position for over 16 months and still did not know whether they were supposed to be involved in discipline, reflecting problematic ambiguity. Furthermore, this reflects that SROs may have varying involvement depending upon the directives of their supervising sergeant or which law enforcement agency they are employed by.

Accordingly, in Central County, although there is a contract in place providing some guidance surrounding the expectations for SROs, ambiguity continued to exist surrounding the expectations for their roles. Training sessions did not appear to ameliorate the ambiguity. Furthermore, the sergeants may be contributing to this

ambiguity. This problem was most apparent in discussions surrounding SROs' involvement in school discipline. The lack of clarity surrounding school disciplinary matters may contribute to whether and how SROs respond to student behavioral problems, an issue identified in the subsequent theme.

SROs' Responses to Student Behavior are Influenced by Other Actors

We turn to addressing RO₃ (To explore whether, and how, SROs respond to student misbehavior) and RO₄ (To explore whether, and how, SROs respond to student mental health problems). Findings regarding SRO decision-making and discretion as it relates to student behavior is discussed next. The quantitative results presented in the next chapter demonstrate that arrests and Baker Act apprehensions are a common occurrence in Central County, meaning the SROs are regularly responding to student behaviors under their law enforcement powers.

Prior to discussing the role and impact of other actors, which were key factors identified by respondents, it is important to note that many of the factors reviewed in Chapter 3 influencing officer decision-making when responding to criminal incidents and citizens experiencing mental illness, were described or identified by the SROs in Central County during interviews. First, in discussions surrounding referring students to the juvenile justice system (JJS), it was clear that much like patrol officers, the SROs have discretion as to how to respond to the delinquent behavior of students, and that no specific policy was in place mandating how the SROs respond to criminal incidents arising in the school. When discussing if there is a policy they must follow when deciding whether to arrest a student, SRO DN stated, "It's fully our discretion." SRO DS

mentioned, “The sheriff’s always left that up to the deputy.” Similarly, SRO MR described:

If it’s a criminal act, it really doesn’t fall under school policy, it falls under criminal policy. So, if the student committed a crime, then I would intervene whatever way I felt was necessary to do so, and it’s always on a case-by-case basis on how that would occur.

All three sergeants of the SSU confirmed the lack of a specific policy addressing student arrests and indicated that each SRO has discretion in their decision-making.

According to the SROs, common offenses they are responding to include battery/fighting, disruptive behavior, drugs, theft, and violation of probation. Although diversion programs and civil citation are available in Central County, procedures seemed unique in that LEOs must first physically arrest the youth, transport to an assessment center, *and then* may recommend that the youth be diverted or receive a civil citation in the related paperwork. Thus, although during interviews many of the SROs indicated their preference for diversion programs or civil citation, arrests may be more common compared to other counties that allow for procedures avoiding physical arrests, such as using notices to appear or citations. However, it is important to note that out of the 40 interviewed SROs, 18 indicated that at the time of their interview they had yet to arrest a student at their current school assignment, with 17 of these SROs being assigned to elementary schools.

When discussing arrest decision-making many of the factors identified in the literature as influential were also identified by the SROs, such as type of offense, seriousness of the incident, existence of evidence, and the student’s demeanor.

Coinciding with McKenna and White’s (2018) study of SROs in Texas, the SROs in

Central County repeatedly identified age and/or grade level as influential to their decision-making. For example, SRO CT declared:

I think [decision-making] is based on the school grade, elementary, middle, or high. Elementary we're going to do as much as we can before I put a 10- or 12-year-old in handcuffs and put them in the back of my patrol car.

There were other influential factors mentioned that may be specific to SRO arrest decision-making including the probation status, ESE classification, and behavioral history of the student. It is important to distinguish that the SROs have access to the ESE classification and behavioral history of students due to their position within the school. Patrol officers would not have access to such information for consideration. Moreover, it was clear from interviews that the SROs have direct access to juvenile probation officers (JPOs) in the county, and many times were the liaison between juvenile probation staff and school administrators. Thus, school-based arrests for violation of probation in this county was common.

Regarding their responses to students experiencing mental health issues, unsurprisingly the criteria required for an apprehension under the Baker Act is influential to decision-making, especially the student indicating they want to harm themselves in some way. Like arrest decision-making, the age of the student is considered by the SROs, with SROs indicating that they felt as though they needed to verify younger student's intent to harm themselves, since they were uncertain if they truly understood suicide.

Field notes from a Wraparound training session state:

Sgt. [AO] wants to make sure that [SROs] are verifying that students they are Baker Acting actually understand what they mean when they say things like "I want to kill myself," especially those students in elementary and middle school. [They] said, "We need to use our discretion" and determine that they are not just repeating something they heard elsewhere. (Field note, 8/9/17)

It appears that the SROs took this discussion to heart, as many echoed these sentiments during interviews and described trying to avoid Baker Act apprehensions of younger students. It was especially clear that SROs assigned to elementary schools were hesitant to apprehend the young students in their schools, such as SRO DL describing a particular incident with a student:

Dealing with kids, it's just very different. I had one situation last year, [Jamie], amazing kid, love her to death, but she made statements of "I want to kill myself." But after spending some more time with her, she didn't really know what it meant, so I didn't Baker Act her.

When asked if they've had to regularly apprehend students under the Baker Act, SRO KC responded, "I haven't had to. [...] This year nothing has risen to that. It's usually just words, and when you talk to them, they don't know what they are saying. They don't really mean it." Similarly, SRO PJ noted that they rarely initiate Baker Act procedures because students "make verbal threats and they have no means to carry it out. They don't have a plan, and they'll say, 'I was just mad.'" Importantly, only six of the 40 SROs indicated that they had *not* apprehended a student under the Baker Act at their current school assignment. All six were assigned to elementary schools.

Thus, many of the discussions surrounding SROs' responses to student behaviors were unsurprising and aligned with previous research. However, in SROs' interviews, there was frequent mention of other actors for whether and how SROs respond to student misbehavior and mental health problems. These other actors primarily consisted of school administrators and parents, but there was also mention of the SROs' supervisors and the county's prosecutors. The substantial influence of these other actors means that student outcomes are in many cases determined by other individuals. Based on interviews, the

following themes were identified: school personnel as gatekeepers; school personnel providing access and information for arrest decision-making; influence of parents on how SROs respond; the role of chain-of-command in decision-making; and the role of prosecutors in arrest decision-making. Each is discussed below.

School Personnel as Gatekeepers

The first theme identified in the interviews was that school personnel act as gatekeepers to the SROs, and thus, to the juvenile justice or behavioral health systems. As first alluded to in the discussion of SROs' involvement in discipline, SROs are regularly not the first individual encountering problematic student behaviors. Interviews with the SROs describe how school administrators act as gatekeepers, so that many times, the SRO is unaware of incidents involving students unless the administrators decide to include them. There was specific mention of the decision-making matrix in the Student Code of Conduct guiding administrators' decisions to involve the SRO. For example, SRO RL discussed:

[School administrators] follow their matrix pretty good. I'd say our deans follow it pretty much to the T. If it has to be reported to law enforcement, they report it. But if it says in their matrix that it's not their policy that they have to report it, they don't. And they don't really have to.

SRO SV mentioned how school administrators are the initiators of investigations: "So if the school has something reported to them, they have to investigate it first, and then if they deem it necessary and a crime is committed, then they have to tell me." SROs assigned to high schools mentioned becoming involved when students are caught in possession of drugs. When discussing how they become involved, SRO DN stated:

Usually [the deans] are calling me. You don't really catch a lot, because it's like anywhere on the street, it's not like I'm walking around going, 'look at him

selling drugs!' Even the ones I do arrest with drugs, I don't think I have yet to find them myself. Usually it's the deans [saying] "Hey, we got a tip, someone had drugs, we searched their backpack, there it is." And then if there is a possession of drugs, I always [arrest] them.

Similarly, SRO BH described how the school administrators and security personnel at their school are typically the individuals first responding to student drug possession. Furthermore, SRO BH notes how administrators do more than just notify them of the drug possession, they are also helping facilitate the justice system response:

What they'll do is, like we had a rumor that so and so has drugs, security will go and escort 'em, and then they'll sit them down. The deans or admin will search them and find everything, and then they just turn it over to me. So, they'll get the kids to write statements, and then I just go from there. So, they help me do a lot of my work.

Such gatekeeping also extends to possible Baker Act apprehensions. Many of the SROs indicated that guidance counselors, administrators, mental health counselors, or teachers initially screen student mental health problems prior to involving the SRO.

When asked whether they were involved in Baker Act apprehensions, SRO EP responded, "Yes, often. I work in tandem with the guidance counselors here at school. They have a protocol where they'll try to evaluate first or see, and they have a new form that they're using before they call me." SRO AD indicated that when a student is encountering a mental health problem at their school, "I'm usually not the initiator in the conversation. Almost never." They further explained:

I'm always called in after they've already talked to him, because usually guidance or [an administrator] is talking, and then they feel it's time to include me in on the conversation to hear what's going on, and they will ask my advice with it at that point.

When discussing the school personnel first involved in responding to student mental health problems, SRO AS indicated, "It's usually a teacher that has a relationship

with a student, and they open up to them, and then they'll talk to [mental health counselor], and then they'll come to me." Thus, some schools appear to only be involving SROs as a last resort.

However, there was some indication that schools may *over* involve the SRO in student mental health problems, with the SROs expressing frustration with school staff not understanding the criteria for a Baker Act apprehension. For example, when asked where distressed students are referred to at their school, SRO ME described:

They are sending them to a guidance counselor. I forced them to go to see a guidance counselor. They try to send them directly to me, and I'm like, send them to a guidance counselor, send them to the [mental health] counselor. Let them do a little assessment. If they come up and say the key words to that guidance counselor, then they call me. [...] But if you say the golden words, then there's no line. Then nobody wants to incur the liability. You say those phrases over there, and the kids feel comfortable, and they actually almost feel like they cause more Baker Acts because they get them comfortable and they get them to say those things, the key words and phrases. Nobody wants to incur the lawyers, the liability. I have to explain to people a kid cutting themselves doesn't necessarily fall under Baker Act criteria. Technically, you say that they're harming themselves, but if they're not actively doing it, are going to do it in the next whatever, I'm like, holy shit, this is not the intended purpose of this.

A remarkably similar exchange was had with another SRO frustrated by school personnel not understanding that cutting does not meet the criteria of the Baker Act. Yet, the SRO is frequently called by school personnel to address such issues, and it also appears that there may be an exaggerated concern for liability. This resulted in the following exchange with SRO MT:

Researcher: So, another thing I wanted to ask you about is Baker Acts. How often are you involved in those?

SRO MT: I Baker Act probably over 10, 12 kids a year. It's gotten [to be] a little bit more of a problem in the sense that the deans in my school, for whatever reason, can't talk to the kid without me being there. If a teacher said, "this kid I think is cutting," speak to the

kid, find out what are their thought process now. I don't care that they cut last week. I don't care that they cut two days ago. How are they feeling now? I can't Baker Act based on how they felt two days ago. Find out do you think this could be something that's going to be a Baker Act.

Researcher: So, they don't understand that part of the criteria, that it's an immediate harm?

SRO MT: Yes, they won't interview a kid until you're there. I do that as a courtesy. I sat in with you, but technically, you should be asking them, and you should be referring them to me if you think there is something. But now, it gets to the point that I tell the deans and the principal, I say "Hey, sometimes I'm busy, sometimes I can't go."

Researcher: How often does that happen?

SRO MT: Very often.

Accordingly, in some schools, if both the school personnel and the SRO lack a thorough understanding of the Baker Act's criteria, students may be involuntarily, *and* unjustifiably, apprehended and transported to the designated receiving facilities. There is also the question of why school administrators are relying on the SRO to assess student's mental health, as one would expect school administrators and guidance counselors to be more knowledgeable and receive more training in dealing with and responding to youth than a LEO. However, as explicitly noted by SRO ME, and alluded to by SRO MT, an overconcern for liability may be funneling students experiencing mental health issues into a Baker Act apprehension situation, when they could be treated by outpatient services.

During conversations surrounding the problems they've encountered in their position, the gatekeeping function of the school administrators was mentioned often, particularly in regard to SROs feeling as though they should be involved in incidents the

school administrators are *not* reporting to them. SRO RA described problems with a specific student and how the school administration stopped informing them of the misbehavior:

Well, I can tell you that [student] last year, he would literally jump on chairs and tables. He would run around the room hitting kids on the back of the head. He'd get off the bus and he'd be pegging kids with a football on the back of the head. He had, I don't know if you know what Takis are, they're like chips, and he'd put 'em in plastic baggies and crush 'em up and tie the baggies like little dope bags. He would have money, even if it was one-dollar bills, stacks of money, and he would always flash it in front of the kids. I was very, very concerned that he was at high risk for getting involved in gang activity and getting involved with drug dealing. He was very disruptive, very disrespectful. I mean, he would get in the teacher's faces and say, "You can't tell me what to do." He got in a couple of fights, but he didn't fight regularly. And I can tell you the last time he punched a kid in the face, they didn't even call me, because I told them, if I don't have to arrest him before this year ends, I'll be very surprised. He was in fourth grade. And so, the administrators started not telling me about some of those things.

Some of the incidents that SROs described being excluded from were trivial, although they could technically be considered crimes, such as theft or fights. SRO CT stated, "Fights happen, and I'm not made aware of it until another teacher tells me." SRO

AS noted:

There are situations where things have gone missing that I've heard third hand that was property of the school, but no one formally told me about it. So, it was one of those, well, until you let me know if this piece of equipment is in fact stolen or not, I'm just going to kind of stay out of it.

However, some SROs did mention specific incidents they were not immediately informed of that were more serious in nature. These included allegations of abuse at home, drug possession, sexual assault, and weapon possession. When asked whether they had encountered issues with school administrators reporting incidents to them, SROs provided the following examples:

The principal was not keeping him informed of incidents that were mandatory reporting incidents for purposes of reporting to DCF¹³. He found out about two of these situations and ended up notifying his command and contacting DCF himself. The principal was demoted due to these incidents. She was just promoted back to principal this school year. I asked if this has caused awkward tension between them, and he answered that it has. (SRO GB)

Not at my school currently, but I have run into that at another school. And the principal, his biggest fear at the school was making the media or having some big issue. [...] There was a student who had brought a knife, a big one, and was showing it to other students, and three different times was caught with it. Three times over a [month] and it was all the same week. That's why I hadn't heard about it because it was all like within four days, and they had a meeting, didn't say anything to me, instructed the front office staff, who always communicated with me, not to say anything. So, like on the fifth day, one of the students mentioned something about it and I went up front. Then we had a meeting on that, him and the assistant principal and everybody, and I assured them, you have less chance of making the media if you tell me and we had gotten a hold of the parent and handled it, than we do if you don't say anything, and it continues to happen and then eventually somebody gets hurt and it's found out that you never even told the law enforcement officer on campus about it. You hid it from him. That's gonna make the news. (SRO AD)

It is interesting that the exact types of offenses (child abuse and weapon possession) that one would expect the SRO to respond to are, according to the SROs, being covered up by school administrators. Once again, an overconcern for liability and/or media attention may be putting students and staff in danger if sweeping certain incidents under the rug. This also points to problems identified in Chapter 2 of this dissertation of SROs being adopted by school districts without the buy-in of school personnel (Coon & Travis, 2007), which can lead to conflict if school administration is not supportive of the law enforcement presence thrust upon them (Brown et al., 2020; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005).

The SROs indicated having experienced similar issues for purposes of Baker Act

¹³ Florida Department of Children and Families

apprehensions. SRO DB noted that they have “buted heads a couple of times over what a Baker Act is” with their school administration. They provided a specific example:

It was my understanding that a student had made a comment that he wanted to kill himself and was physically choking himself. I wasn't made aware, and then I heard them talking about it up front. So, I went to where that student was, who was with the behavioral specialist, and I saw the statement the lady wrote because the school writes statements too, they have incident report type things, so I saw the statement, and it said, “Okay, I just want to kill myself then.” For me, it's a pretty clear-cut Baker Act. Administration was pretty, I guess they were kind of shocked. They went and told the principal. The principal then came to me and said, “This isn't a Baker Act.” And I said, “Yeah, it is” and he got Baker Acted for the second time in three months.

Hence, whether SROs are involved in responding to student behaviors is frequently determined by school personnel. Some SROs expressed concern that they are not being involved as often as they believed they should be, while others described an overreliance on the SRO, especially regarding student mental health problems.

Ultimately, this means that the number of Baker Act apprehensions and arrests occurring at schools will vary a great deal from school to school due to how incidents are filtered to the SRO, and the attitudes and beliefs of the school administrators and teachers.

School Personnel Provide Access and Information for Arrest Decision-Making

Especially when considering student misbehavior or delinquency, other actors may influence how SROs respond by providing the SRO with access or information that assists with decision-making and arguably makes the SRO's job easier. Such situations were introduced above when discussing SROs' involvement in drug possession cases. Several of the SROs mentioned that the school will initially handle investigations of incidents, collect witness statements, obtain the suspect's written confession, and hand over all the information to the SRO, who can then arrest the student. The following

exchange during SRO DS' interview provides an example of how this occurs:

Researcher: So, when deciding to arrest a student, what input do teachers or administrators provide you to aid in your decision-making? Like are the deans involved first?

SRO DS: Yeah, the school, normally they get all the kids that are witnesses. They have them all write witness statements. Then they call in the suspect, talk to them. Generally speaking, they confess. They write a statement. The school will give them their punishment, like you're getting three days out of school suspension. And then once they're done with their side of it, they let me know what they have.

Researcher: And then they provide you with the packet of information?

SRO DS: Right. There you go. This is what we got. And then I'll go in and talk to them. "Hey, is this what you wrote? This is what happened?" They generally tell me "Yeah, that's it."

The scenario described brings attention to the assertion made by advocacy groups and scholars that student misbehavior at one time handled by school administrators is being criminalized due to the presence of an SRO, meaning that SROs directly contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline (Advancement Project, 2005; Heitzeg, 2018). One wonders if the school administration would be calling their local police department each time there is a fight or theft on campus. Further, there is the issue of SROs using the documents produced from *school* investigations for their own purposes, and whether patrol officers would be able to do so within the confines of the Fourth and Fifth Amendments.

Relatedly, several SROs indicated that they are present for interviews and/or searches of students. SRO MT specifically noted that they let the school handle the investigation because "it just makes the job easier." He further described:

A lot of the times, I don't have to interview the kid. I can sit in and let [the school administrator] do his interview. As long as I don't ask any questions, I could say I

was in the room, and this is what he said. If I don't want to read him Miranda, I don't have to because he's already said it.

SRO MT also discussed how if the student refuses to provide a written statement to him in such situations, he will let the student know, "That's fine. I'll use the one you wrote for the school. It's still your statement." SRO BH also described how he prefers the school to handle the investigation first while simultaneously involving them, because "especially with like searching kids, we need probable cause to search, but the school just needs reasonable suspicion on their end, which is not hard for them to articulate, and then they can search anybody for any reason really." Several SROs specifically mentioned this reduced burden of proof for school officials to search students when describing how incidents are handled at their school.

Some of the SROs discussed that they personally do not have access to certain student information, such as discipline records or grades. However, they suggested that they will request and be provided such information by school personnel. When asked what input teachers or administrators may provide when deciding to arrest a student, SRO DN offered, "I always personally ask for their discipline record, and what kind of student they are." SRO SV noted their frustration with their lack of access to such information but indicated that they just go to the "discipline secretary" who will pull up a student's grades and unexcused absences for them.

Thus, the SROs have access to information that would be unavailable to a patrol officer encountering juvenile delinquency on the street. Additionally, the inclusion of the SROs by school administrators during their investigations, and the forwarding of their investigative documentation, allow for the SROs to circumvent the constitutional rights

of students. This means that in many schools, the school administration is making it easier for SROs to formally respond to student misbehavior that could be classified as criminal or delinquent.

Influence of Parents on how SROs Respond

Parents of students were also mentioned as influential to SRO decision-making for both formal justice system responses to student misconduct and Baker Act apprehensions. One method for how parents may be influential to SROs' decision-making is the parents of an alleged victim requesting that the SROs take out charges against a student. The research reviewed in Chapter 3 is clear that complainant's wishes are an important situational factor in patrol officer decision-making (Black & Reiss, 1970; Brown et al., 2009). What is interesting about the findings in this study is that the SROs never referenced the student that was allegedly victimized, rather, when discussing arrest decision-making, it was the *parents* of the alleged victim requesting charges be filed or that the student be arrested. Every time this was mentioned, SROs indicated that they would file charges or arrest the student. For example, SRO HD stated, "Let's say there was a fight that broke out, and the parents want to press charges, well, there's an arrest that has to be made." When asked about when they arrest students, SRO PM responded, that for battery on students, the arrest is based on whether "the victim's parent wishes to press charges." When discussing the difficulties of dealing with ESE students suspected of delinquency, SRO EP said, "I have to tell you in our field if someone wants to report and requests me to file charges, I can't deny that." They elaborated, "If another parent is saying, 'I don't care what their disability is, I want a case,' I still have to process the case, and that's what I usually will do."

Discussions with the SROs appeared to suggest that the parents of the misbehaving student may also influence their decision. For example, SRO AS indicated that they would *not* automatically arrest a student in possession of a small amount of marijuana if “we talk to the parents and they’re very involved, [...] and they’ll handle the discipline.” SROs mentioned attending conferences with the parents of misbehaving students and school administrators as a method for avoiding arrest. The SROs suggested that such meetings allow them to assess the “cooperation” of the parents.

When discussing the difficulties they’ve encountered as an SRO, SRO MT mentioned parents and how “there’s always an excuse” when their child is in trouble, and how they are commonly in denial of their child’s behavior, which he labeled as the “not my kid” problem. SRO MT noted that when they encounter this problem it “makes the job a lot harder, because I know right off the bat, I can’t reach the parent.” They added, “So, if nothing is going to happen with the parent, the only other way to reach the kid is discipline, or if it’s criminal, criminal charges.” When discussing a specific incident with a student at their elementary school where formal legal action was taken, SRO CB justified their decision by explaining, “In this particular situation the mother is probably who needed more discipline than even the student, and that’s why I opted for civil citation, was to absorb the mother into this.” Thus, how parents respond to the misbehavior of their child may influence whether an SRO takes formal legal action.

Regarding Baker Act apprehensions, the cooperation and attitude of parents towards their child’s mental health problem appeared to be influential to SROs’ decision-making. The following SROs assigned to elementary schools described their philosophy surrounding their decision to initiate a Baker Act apprehension of a student:

My stance on Baker Act is, at this level, at this age especially, unless it's absolutely imminent, there is no reason to Baker Act. I feel we need to give the parent the opportunity to make corrective action. I try and treat it like I would want somebody to handle my own kid. So, when it comes to Baker Act, I've done some mental health assessments for, way more mental health assessments, but I always give the parent the opportunity. So long as there's not an imminent threat or risk to the parent to take custody of them, [I give] the parent the opportunity to step in and get the help, and then so long as the parent is complying, and that's what I tell the parents, you have to be compliant with this. You have to do a follow up visit. You need to go do the mental health assessment immediately, because if you don't, and this occurs again, I will take them into custody. So even if I have a kid, like I've had where I track one in a report and it was a continual tracking, I know Mom had him in therapy. I know Mom. She showed up to the school every time we called. She was handling it. So, you know where I could've articulated the Baker Act, I never did it, because of his age and having a parent who was compliant to taking care, and she was taking care of his mental health. (SRO SB)

Do I need to do it, or can I have Mom and Dad set up an appointment with a doctor right away and get that child to that doctor to see what's going on? I had that last year here with a student. Of course, I document everything. I write an information report and I'll document that on that day, I met with such and such student and the parents and they made contact with their doctor and the child has an appointment and follow up and all that. Because I'm giving that right to the parent. 'Cause to me, if you can take him to the doctor and get them the help that they need, it's more of a private issue. Instead of putting them in the back of my patrol car, especially in an elementary school setting, if it has to be done, it has to be done, but we try to work with the parents first and see if we can get them to understand where we're coming from and why the child has to be seen by a medical professional. And if they give us any resistance, then that's a different story. But normally the parents do work with you. (SRO BS)

SRO AD discussed occasions where they encountered a student "right on the borderline of Baker Acting," but they did not feel they needed to make an apprehension because "the student was already receiving counseling" and "when the parents are called, they'll respond immediately and take 'em straight to the person they're talking to." SRO RA provided a specific example of where a Baker Act apprehension occurred because they did not feel the parents were adequately addressing the child's mental health problems:

The kid came to school and told his teacher, he said, “I wasn't here yesterday because I tried to stab myself.” And the teacher asked more about it and told the principal. The principal called the mom, and the mom says, “Oh yeah, that happened.” The kid was still talking about wanting to kill himself. I felt like if the parents were gonna do the right thing, they would have done it by then. They were kind of just in denial. So, they were really upset when I interviewed this child, but he told me and he told the principal the same thing, that he still felt like he wanted to kill himself. That child I did Baker Act.

Thus, interviews with the SROs indicate that they include parents in their Baker Act apprehension decision-making, with the recognition and cooperation of parents towards their child’s mental health problems being influential to how many of the SROs respond. If the SROs do not feel as though the parents will properly address the issue, then the SRO will apprehend the student. However, this requires that parents have the means and resources to immediately respond to the school to take their child for assessment and treatment, which could lead to disparities in which students are apprehended versus released to their parents.

Role of Chain-of-Command in Decision-Making

Although not mentioned as frequently as the other actors discussed in this section, some SROs indicated that they sought guidance in decision-making from their chain-of-command. SRO EP indicated that they have contacted the entire chain-of-command of the SSU, including the Chief, to investigate options for “non-enforcement programming” and other resources. SRO KG expressed that the ability to get input from their sergeant was a benefit over their previous law enforcement position stating:

It's nice to have that person to call and say, hey, let me bounce this off of you and make sure I'm doing the right thing, because ultimately, we want to do the right thing for the child. And they may be thinking something different than I am, that I'm not clearly thinking of at that point. So, it's nice to have someone to bounce it off of.

The sergeants of the SSU indicated that they are contacted by their subordinates seeking assistance and perceive supporting the SROs as a part of their job as a sergeant. For example, when asked about their responsibilities, Sgt. CK mentioned, “To help [the SROs] work out situations for decision-making” as one of their duties. Sgt. KL offered, “answering and helping and coaching the [SROs]” as well as “just being available for them to bounce ideas off of or questions or just to provide that support.”

How such guidance and support may occur was described by two of the sergeants during discussions surrounding Baker Act apprehension decisions. Sgt. AO mentioned that when it comes to Baker Act apprehensions, “a lot of the [SROs] call me because I have a lot of experience with CIT. So, they’ll call me to ask my opinion or see if we can get extra help for a kid.” When asked about their involvement in SROs’ Baker Act apprehensions, Sgt. CK responded:

The only time I'm brought into it is if it's borderline. If it's something with a lot of moving pieces and parts, maybe they really are struggling with making that decision because there's so much information that they've got they could go either way, and they understandably look for a second opinion.

This sentiment was echoed by SRO MR, who brought up a specific episode where he perceived that a very young student may have been experiencing a mental health problem, resulting in SRO MR calling their sergeant:

I was debating about Baker Acting him, I made a phone call. I’m like, look, this is a Kindergartner, he’s got some obviously emotional things going on, and we talked it out and made a decision not to Baker Act him at that time.

Therefore, when the SROs encounter uncertainty such as in “borderline” cases, the interviews revealed that many seek the assistance of their chain-of-command. This was most prevalent during conversations surrounding Baker Act apprehensions.

Sergeants embraced providing such assistance as a part of their job. Thus, a student's fate in situations where an SRO is considering a Baker Act apprehension or arrest may depend on how the situation is described to a sergeant, and the sergeant's advice to the SRO.

Role of Prosecutors in Arrest Decision-Making

For arrest decision-making, the prosecutor is also an important actor influencing SROs' responses. In several instances, SROs indicated that they use the prosecutor as a "cover your ass" (CYA) tactic. SRO MT noted that parents will want charges pressed against a student who the SRO feels is a "good kid." In such cases, SRO MT suggested that they file charges against the student, but then, "I'll call the state attorney and put it in their ear [that] I'm filing this because the parents wanted it, but the kid's a good kid, and in the end they don't file." They further elaborated, "I'm covering my ass, so if the parent ever comes and complains, I say, 'Hey, I charged them. State attorney dropped it.'" In another example, during a training break, the researcher chatted with SRO DS about the lead juvenile prosecutor in the county. Field notes demonstrate the following:

He said that next week the [prosecutor] will give a presentation at the training and she is interesting to listen to because she doesn't sugarcoat anything. She will get mad when they send her garbage cases and will call them out. He said he had a few cases last school year where the parents got involved and asked that charges be taken out for assault after a fight. He will write in his report to the [prosecutor] that he is solely sending her the case because of the parents' intervention, so she knows he did not think the case was worth pursuing. (Field note, 7/31/17)

Similarly, SRO EP noted during their interview that if a parent requests charges, but they don't necessarily agree with the need for the student to be processed in the justice system, they will create a case number and report without arresting the student. SRO EP indicated that this allows them to transfer decision-making to the prosecutor:

“I’ll call the state attorney to let him know this is what I’ve got going on. And then it kind of puts the burden on their end to decide whether or not they’re going to file the charge.” Hence, it appears in many situations it is ultimately up to the prosecutor whether a student is formally processed in the juvenile justice system.

The prosecutors were also influential in SROs’ decisions whether to arrest students and for what charges. For example, field notes from a Wraparound training session demonstrate that the lead juvenile prosecutor informed the SROs that they would not pursue cases involving thefts of cell phones. Relatedly, SRO SV noted that cell phone thefts are an issue at their school, but they no longer arrest for it because the “state throws it out.” Other SROs mentioned choosing certain charges over others because of meetings or conversations they’ve had with the lead juvenile prosecutor in the county. For example, when asked about the most common reasons for arrest, SRO MM indicated, “Lately, it’s been the fighting on campus, so we’re charging them with the affray. [The prosecutor] doesn’t like us to do campus disruption, so it’s typically the affray, mutual combat of the students.”

Accordingly, there is evidence in the data that in many situations SROs are not encountering problematic student behaviors on their own. Instead, school personnel frequently act as gatekeepers involving the SRO when they see fit. When informed of behaviors, other actors may influence SROs’ decision-making, especially school personnel, who may provide information and access influencing student outcomes, and that are not typically available to patrol officers on the street. Lastly, SROs’ decisions may also be informed by the parents of students, chain-of-command, and prosecutors.

Distinguishing SROs from Other Officers

The previous sections in this chapter are related to addressing the first research question and related research objectives. This section covers the fifth research objective in the qualitative strand of this study involving the exploration of the personal and professional backgrounds of the SROs. However, the concept that not just any LEO can be an SRO is related to the second section of this chapter, that the secondary role of the SRO consists of engaging in positive interactions. If the expectation is that SROs are solely acting as a patrol officer transplanted into a school setting or that their only focus is safety/security, then technically any LEO could be placed into a school. The information identified so far in this chapter has shown that this is not the case in Central County, and evidence from the interviews with the SROs suggests that the SRO position is different from other LEO positions and requires careful screening and selection. Furthermore, when selecting SROs, individuals need to be able to navigate working within a school context and be effective communicators.

Careful Screening and Selection

Conversations during training observations and the interviews with SROs and sergeants reflected that there is an application and interview process for SRO selection in Central County. There was recognition that officers should not be ordered to take an SRO position, rather they should be volunteering for it. Further, Sgt. KL argued that making a school safer required assigning “one of your best officers or deputies” and that the SRO position “shouldn’t be a dumping ground” for subpar officers because “that’s who’s going to influence the perception of your agency for decades.”

Although there was some indication that the screening and selection process had improved since the creation of the SSU, some SROs continued to be critical and concerned about whether the process was truly filtering out officers who may be inappropriate for the position. For example, SRO PJ stated:

It takes a special cop to be an SRO. And I'll be the first to say you stick me out on the road, I'm going to be calling for help. I can handle the call, but as soon as it comes time to do the report, figure out what statute, I'll be like, "Hey, I need help, I don't know what I'm doing." I'm the first to admit that, because [being an SRO] is my world. So, when they come into my world, you can't come in with that attitude. Just like I can't go out to their world and do what I'm doing here. So, it's a mentality switch, and we're not screening the officers for a good fit. For example, there's a lot of public speaking. There have been officers sent to SRO positions that hate public speaking. How are you going to get up in front of a class or do the morning announcements? That's part of our job.

Interestingly, when discussing needed training or suggestions for additional training requirements for new SROs, a substantial number of the SROs responded that they believed that better selection for the appropriate personality and/or background may be more important than additional training. This assertion was made by SROs assigned to every grade level and type of school. For example, when asked whether there is training new SROs should complete, the researcher received the following responses:

I wouldn't say training. I would say during interviews, or anything like that, you definitely have to have the personality and to make sure you like kids. That is the most important thing. And a lot of times when I do try to recruit people and I ask them, why would you be interested? Why would you want to do it? When they go, "The schedule is great and I get a lot of time off," well, you didn't mention children in there anywhere. Do you want to mentor? Do you want to be a part of collecting toys and helping families in need? Do you want to be working with your guidance counselors and help counsel kids? That all comes into play here, and if you don't have the ability to talk to kids, or you're not interested in talking to kids or teaching kids, it's not gonna be the job for you, that's for sure. (SRO RL)

No, I don't. My main thing is vetting of individuals that have the personality. Not everybody is suited for it. So, it's more of a vetting. What you learn is on the job

training, in my opinion, OJT. But prior to, I don't think there's any actual specified training to be an SRO as much as do you have the personality that makes you a little less rigid than the other police officers. There [are] individuals that are very justice based, and you have to understand you're dealing with kids, there's a little bit more leeway that you provide, a little less rigidity in that. I've seen in years that the more rigid ones have difficulty adapting to it, because you're working with civilians as opposed to working by the statutes and policy, procedures. So, to be able to kind of have common sense and a little bit of flexibility, that is a personality thing, not training. (SRO ME)

Thus, the SROs indicated that screening for the right "personality" or "mentality" is critical for success in the SRO position. They note that not every LEO is going to be suitable, and individuals should not be switching to the SRO position due to factors such as a better schedule. Interestingly, in each of the three examples above, it is suggested that a rigid, stereotypical street cop who wants to chase bad guys will encounter problems working within a school.

Lived Experience as a Parent

One belief that was frequently mentioned was that lived experience as a parent should be an important consideration for SRO selection. Of the 43 interview participants, 32 had children of their own and several commented on how helpful the experience of raising children had been to their position. When asked if they felt like they needed some additional training prior to commencing the SRO position, SRO HD responded, "I think I was good to go. I'm a mom. That's the training you need." When discussing what preparation or qualifications new SROs need for their position, SRO KS answered:

They really have to not be afraid of bodily fluids. I can't stress that enough. I was talking to a kid in the hall one time not knowing she was going to get sick, and she threw up all over my shoes. I mean it happens, but if you're not prepared for that, then this isn't the position for you. You need to know how kids operate, and if I didn't have my own kids, I don't know if I'd be so well prepared. I think being a parent gives you a little bit more of an insight on how to handle kids in general.

The difference between are you really sick, or are you just whining because you don't want to take a test?

When asked about important training or experiences for new SROs, two of the more veteran SROs also believed that having children of their own is important. SRO SV stated, “I think it’s good if they have their own children.” SRO MT responded, “My personal opinion based on my experience is I think it would help immensely if they have kids of their own first.” This perception may be due to the belief that having children may better prepare SROs for the challenges of working with kids. SROs who are parents have direct experience responding to children’s tantrums and their inquisitiveness. There was also an indication that by having children of their own, the SROs encountered less surprises working in the schools (like the vomiting example above) since they’ve experienced such situations with their own children.

Age and Experience

Moreover, age and experience as an LEO were mentioned by some SROs as criteria that should be considered in the selection process. These characteristics were viewed to be important because of young LEOs possibly being too close in age with some of the clientele in the schools and their lack of both life and LEO experience. There was also the fear that a rookie LEO may be too “gung-ho” or overzealous when responding to issues arising in the school. When asked whether there are any areas that they thought SROs should receive more training in, SRO TW pivoted to SRO selection:

I don’t think there should be new deputies. I think they should have some tenure to ‘em before they come here. Because you have to resolve the problems here. This school is all mine. There’s no one else standing here telling me what to do. [...] I don’t think a new officer should be in a school.

SRO TW is noting how a rookie LEO may rely on other officers' advice and support, but when an SRO is assigned to a school, they must work independently and be able to resolve issues on their own. A rookie with little experience may be overwhelmed by such a situation. This was also discussed by SRO AR, who connected such an issue with the possibility of needing to use a gun on the school campus. When asked whether their wealth of experience as a patrol officer and investigator helped them when they switched to the SRO position, SRO AR replied:

Yeah, absolutely. Just the other day it was brought up that there's some deputies in the schools that don't even have road experience or investigative. They came straight from the courthouse and went to the SRO position. And I could see where they would be having a tougher time. There was a conversation brought up about that between me and another officer the other day, and then also during the year when they were talking about arming teachers, certain teachers with guns and everything. We had that discussion going on, it came down to one of those things, granted you could put a gun in somebody's hand, but are they mentally able to take action [on] something? And that's where our experience comes in. We know how behavior is, how bad guys react, what we need to do to handle the situation, where [new officers] haven't, they don't have that experience.

Similarly, when discussing the possibility of young, new recruits being assigned to an SRO position, SROs provided the following responses:

It's difficult when you're 22 and you don't have life experience. I think there should be an age [limit], and this is my old self speaking, but I think that although it's good to have the interaction with the younger officers because the kids relate better, it can be a conflict in itself. We don't need friends on campus. You got a police officer and a student. It gets dicey sometimes. (SRO EP)

Sending a kid [into the school], I don't think is good. Someone young, and you're usually hiring young recruits, they don't have enough life experience to be able to tolerate the position. You should have I'd say at least three, four years of road experience. (SRO MT)

As indicated by the previous respondents, some rookies may be very young, especially in Central County where none of the law enforcement agencies require

completion of a college degree to be hired as an officer. This means that individuals can enter the academy at the age of 18, straight out of high school, with one of the SROs indicating that they did just that. As mentioned by SRO EP this can easily create a conflict of interest if a very young rookie is assigned to a high school, where they would be similar in age to the students. However, there is also the idea of “life experience” being needed to tolerate the position that an immature, new LEO will most likely not possess.

Ability to Work in a School Context

Interviews with the SROs provided insight as to how the SRO position varies from other LEO positions. A major difference from other positions is that an SRO is working within the context of a school. Discussions resulted in the identification of four themes related to working in a school context. First, adults are no longer the main clientele, which means SROs should have the desire to work with kids, since most of their interactions will involve the students at their school. Second, the school atmosphere is going to be less aggressive than working the streets and requires a gentler demeanor. Third, unlike working in the courthouse, investigations, or patrol, SROs must work independently, but must also be able to multi-task to respond to the multitude of issues that arise. Finally, the SROs noted that their responses to issues were more comprehensive than if they were working patrol and may involve a more proactive approach and greater problem-solving.

Desire to Work With Kids

Although it may seem obvious to some, the desire to work with kids is crucial, as the SRO position differs from other LEO positions in that the clientele the SRO is constantly interacting with primarily consists of children and/or adolescents. When contrasting his time on patrol, SRO DS noted, “You’re dealing with kids all day [as an SRO]. I rarely deal with adults unless they have some issues with the school.” SRO BH similarly stated: “I do a lot more interaction with kids.” This was also echoed by SRO AR: “You hang out with kids all day long. That’s a big difference. You don’t do that on the road.” SRO MT mentioned how this constant interaction with kids means: “You got to like kids. If you don’t like kids, you should not be an SRO. It just doesn’t work.”

Because they are working mostly with children the types of calls the SROs are responding to and the issues they deal with differ from other LEO positions. SRO SB stated that the “calls for service is [sic] different” in the SRO position, while SRO MP noted that calls in the school consisted of “less surprises.” SRO LM compared his time on patrol to his current SRO position:

The biggest thing is, here, I'm dealing with a lot of issues with the children. It can range from behavioral problems to having CPS getting called out and dealing with some of the cases that they have in terms of abuse going on at home or neglect things of that nature. Whereas when I was on the road, I was dealing with adults that were just making bad choices. Every once in a while, yeah, you'd run into a teenager or something like that stealing at Kohl's or Target. But on the road, you're responding to calls that primarily deal with adults.

When detailing some of the activities they’re involved with, SRO AD explained: “I get involved with a lot of school things that don’t apply to what the road guys would do, like tardy sweeps.” SRO EP discussed how the constant kid-related calls means, “Juvenile law applies when you’re out on patrol, but you have to be a little bit more

versed [as an SRO] because you're dealing with it every day." Thus, the SROs indicated that an officer must like kids, but must also be willing to engage in activities and knowledge that are not required of LEOs assigned to other positions.

Gentler Atmosphere

SROs provided descriptions indicating that the atmosphere of a school is different and thereby informs their responses to calls or incidents. For example, SRO PM noted that responding to incidents at their school was different from the street because "There's policies at the schools you have to follow as well." Similarly, SRO EP asserted that:

The unique part of this position, I feel, is that I am held accountable because I'm stationed at the school, I have a certain accountability for 504¹⁴ and IEP plans¹⁵, and I can't know every students', but when they're special needs, I have to try and accommodate just like the staff does here.

SRO EP is suggesting that by being in the school she must give due consideration to laws and policies that do not apply out in the street when responding to juvenile delinquency. This means an officer must be willing to learn about these policies and work within them. However, this also suggests the need for properly training SROs on such topics, as a patrol officer has no need for such knowledge and may encounter conflict with school personnel if not abiding by these additional laws and policies.

There was also mention of the lack of "running and gunning" and "chasing bad guys" in schools, alluding to the idea of the stereotypical street cop position. SRO DN stated that patrol was "more of an aggressive law enforcement." SRO KS expanded on the idea of the SRO position being less aggressive or "gentler":

¹⁴ Provides accommodations for students with disabilities under the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

¹⁵ Individualized education plan (IEP) created for students with disabilities to ensure a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

I'll never forget the first thing that my principal ever said to me is, "If you're the type of person that gets squeamish over snot, tears, and vomit, this isn't the place for you. If you're not the type of person that can't stop what they're doing and tie somebody's shoe, this is not the place for you. If you can do all this, then you will go very far in this position." And that's just kind of something that's always stuck with me. You treat that type of environment, meaning the people in that type of environment, completely different from those that you would deal with out on the road. And it's not a matter of the different types of respect, it's a gentler type of atmosphere. You're not going in there balls to the wall like you would if you were responding to a call for service. So, you tend to look at things from a different perspective. It's not always the criminal aspect of things, you see that that gray area for sure.

Therefore, the interviews suggest that individuals who went into policing seeking the excitement of aggressive responses to street crimes may not be a good fit for the SRO position. The general atmosphere SROs are working in requires a "gentler" approach. Further, the SRO should be giving consideration to additional educational policies patrol officers are not constrained by.

Independence

Several of the SROs also discussed how they are on their own as an SRO and are the sole source of law enforcement in rather large schools. SRO BB described the difference from their previous position at the courthouse:

Well, here you're more on your own. I almost equate it to the school's your city, and the principal's your mayor, and you're the chief of police. You have more control, more say on things. I'm on my own here. I mean, obviously, if I get on the radio, get on the computer, call my sergeant, text him, I have resources at my fingertips, but for the most part, I'm here by myself and handling day to day issues.

Not only are the SROs working on their own, but they are also responding to a myriad of issues, requiring the ability to multi-task. This is very different from positions in patrol or the courthouse, where LEOs are able to address one call or task at a time.

SRO LF discussed this when contrasting his time as a patrol officer, "You don't have a

lot of help. You're pretty much doing everything yourself. You got to be able to multitask because this place will eat you alive." SRO SV also discussed how much work they must do on their own as an SRO:

Here I'm on my own with little to no help really from anyone. [...] I have a supervisor I can call, but they really want you to do it on your own. It's very vulnerable here being the only cop. You have 2600 students and over 200 teachers, and I'm the only law enforcement. So, my phone [rings] through the day, through the night, into the weekends. [...] Sometimes I feel like I should get the detective pay, the extra percentage, because I'm opening and closing all of my own cases. Now the road is supposed to go as far as they can go in a shift to get enough information and then it gets sent to the detectives. I'm expected to open and close all of my thefts and all the cases that I work on. And I have mostly the same cases here as the road has minus, thank goodness, a homicide. But I'll have mostly the same, I have rapes, child porn, we have burglaries here, we have batteries here, we have thefts here. I had counterfeit, someone was doing counterfeit bills, someone was making the money. I mean, we have had crazy cases happen here. They're all similar to the road, but I'm kind of doing them on my own.

Both SRO LF and SRO SV are assigned to high schools where incidents that could be classified as criminal are more common, and as SRO SV describes, means they work their own cases as investigators. However, if working at an alternative school serving students removed from their traditional school due to behavioral problems, such problems may be amplified due to the SRO needing to respond formally to student misbehavior more often than at other schools. For example, when describing their time at one of the non-traditional schools, SRO CT stated,

I was so busy over there, sometimes I felt like it was too much I was trying to do. I would do three, four reports in one day. I could arrest six people a day if I really wanted to, I just didn't have the time nor wanted to. It was just very overwhelming there on the amount of my workload.

This means that an LEO who may appreciate the slow pace of the courthouse or the ability to finish a patrol shift without making any arrests, may not be suited to

working in a high school or alternative school. However, SROs assigned to lower grade levels also suggested that they are constantly working. For example, SRO RL asserted: “The schools are busy. [...] Soon as I come in the morning, you have either parents or teachers or students that want to talk to you, and it’s pretty much all day until you’re done.” SRO CB colorfully described the SRO position as being “busier than a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest.” SRO DL, who previously worked patrol, stated, “This is the most work I’ve done in a long time.” SRO BS described their surprise at how busy the elementary school setting has been:

When they said we're gonna assign deputies to the elementary schools, I thought, okay, and have them there all day? What are we going to do all day? Well, you know what? It is busier than what I thought. There are days that I, just yesterday, I looked up and it was already 12:30 and I haven't eaten lunch. And I'm going like, where did the time go? But because I'm teaching, and I'm helping out, I don't even notice the time. So, it's busy.

Hence, the interviews indicate that the SRO position requires an individual who can work independently and multi-task. In Central County, the unrelenting tasks the SROs are expected to undertake means that the SRO position should not be sought out by those seeking what some described as “an early retirement gig.” Such perceptions surrounding SROs may have been prevalent in the past, however, it was clear that the SROs at every grade level and school type had to be able to work on their own while tackling various activities and problems.

Comprehensive Approach

One of the most frequently mentioned differences with other LEO positions was the comprehensive nature of how SROs respond to issues within their schools. The SROs specifically noted how the position required a greater knowledge of their “community,”

being more proactive, and engagement in long-term problem solving. The comprehensive approach was needed because as SRO TH noted, “I’m in the same location every day. I got the same kids every day. I get to know their routines and who they like and who they don’t like.” Thus, unlike patrol or investigative positions, there was frequent involvement with the same individuals, all in the same place, every day. Due to this, some SROs described the need to take a proactive approach. For example, SRO AD noted, “Being on the road, you’re being mostly reactive because you’re responding to calls for emergencies. [...] In the school, it’s reversed, it’s your proactive most of the time.”

Similarly, SRO KC stated:

I think on the road you’re more reactive with people, but with the kids you’re more proactive in getting them to avoid that deviance that that criminality, and I feel like you can have more of a difference working with the kids than working with adults who are more set in their ways.

Discussions of the comprehensive approach to the position frequently entailed a greater involvement in cases compared to their previous experiences working on patrol or in the courthouse, including more problem-solving. SRO GB stated that patrol officers have the ability to hand off problems, because different officers are called each time, however, in a school “you are the person everyone sees every day” so that “any problems not solved by you will get worse.” Such sentiments were echoed by other SROs:

Probably the biggest thing that I’m seeing here is the need to be more involved. So, understand in law enforcement, if I come to your house, and there’s an incident, we resolve it within minutes, maybe even 30 minutes. We just try to help you with your life’s problems, and we leave. Either we arrest someone, we don’t, depending on the situation. But a lot of times we leave and that’s it. Tomorrow, someone else will probably be working. Tonight, someone else will be working. I might not ever go back to your house. Here, there needs to be the ability to then maintain and keep, if that makes sense to you. We have to now be involved longer. So, it’s more of a long-term incident as opposed to a short-term resolution. [...] It’s like we don’t just put the Band-Aid on and walk away or whatever you

want to call it. We literally have to keep going. We have to find a long-term resolution to this or continue to try to make sure we can fix it the best way we can 'cause it's not gonna go away. Tomorrow they all come back here, and I see 'em again. (SRO TW)

When you're working patrol, you're pretty much delegated to being a responder. You go in, treat the symptom, put a Band-Aid on it, and you keep moving. In this position as an SRO, you got to spend more time and build relationships with those kids that hopefully you can steer them in the right direction, or encourage them, or let them know that they have options other than the one they're choosing. (SRO TP)

It appears that a benefit of working patrol is the ability to quickly respond to a call, leave, and hopefully never return. The SROs identified how this is not possible since they work in the same place with the same individuals every day. A student with a behavioral problem will return the next day and that issue will not have miraculously disappeared overnight. Similarly, the traffic issues encountered during student arrival and dismissal will consistently be there if it goes ignored by the SRO. The idea of patrol consisting of quick fixes or a "Band-Aid," while the SRO position does not, means that an individual working in the SRO position should have the desire to work proactively and problem-solve in order to comprehensively address the issues arising in their assigned schools.

Thus, evidence from the interviews suggests that SROs need to be able to work in a school context, which is different from LEO positions on patrol and in the courthouse. Specifically, the school context requires an individual who wants to work with kids, can assimilate to a gentler, educational atmosphere, and can work independently while multi-tasking. Lastly, the SRO must possess the ability to comprehensively address the calls and problems arising in their school.

Effective Communicator

Related to what has already been discussed in this and the previous sections of this chapter, factors such as long-term involvement in cases requires the building of relationships, which connects to the expectation that the SROs are engaging in positive interactions with the students and the broader school community. Accordingly, communication skills become pivotal to the SRO position. When asked for the characteristics of an ideal SRO, Sgt. CK listed:

Flexibility. Ability to communicate, especially orally. They don't have to be politically polished, but they got to have political savviness, and that comes with interacting with parents and staff and especially administration. Being able to achieve a goal. You want people to agree and work with you to do something, you don't want to tell them to do something. Humility and a very open attitude. Very sociable.

Several SROs specifically mentioned the manner of speaking to children. For example, SRO MP stated, "Just the way you got to talk to kids. You have to talk to them way differently than you can talk to an adult." Similarly, SRO EG mentioned the importance of controlling their demeanor as an SRO, "Holding back saying things that you want to say about some of the kids, because it's a lot different than being on the street than talking to a kid. It's not like you can say 'shut up' to a kid."

There was recognition that assignment to different school levels required consideration for how the SRO communicates with students. SRO PM had experience working in several schools and grade levels. They explained:

Working in all three levels, elementary school kids, [you can't use] words like 'plethora' and the higher end words they may not understand, you sugarcoat a lot, and you try to really break it down so they can understand and relate. Versus high school, where you can pretty much talk to them as you would any of your peers, because at that point they have a higher understanding of what you're trying to tell them. And then middle schools, you're taking that balance of them being

young, but trying to be old, and being more cautious with their feelings and emotions.

SRO AS had experience being assigned to an elementary school, but at the time of the interview was assigned to a high school. When asked whether they missed working with elementary school students, they noted:

Sometimes. They are cuter, but I find, like for me, it's like you have to filter everything. [...] And here, they say stuff that would make a sailor blush. So, it's like, oh my God, they're talking like that, are you serious? I don't have to worry about saying anything that's going to offend somebody, or they're going to go home and get upset.

Many of the SROs identified *patience* as a key to effective communication with students, while also noting how it may be a characteristic lacking in many patrol officers. For example, SRO LF connected the need for patience to the comprehensive approach they must take to resolving issues, and the “gentler” atmosphere described above:

You have to be more patient than on the road. On the road, you're handling calls and you want to get 'em done and handle them to the best of your ability, but get them done, so you can go to the next one. Here you can spend more time. You have to be more patient with the kids. You can't always speak to them the way you would outside because you're going to see them again, you're going to see their parents. So, you got to kind of treat them a little bit more patiently with stuff. You can't fly off the handle, some you can't scream at.

In a middle and high school setting, there is also the issue of students pushing boundaries, having attitudes, and being disrespectful. Such circumstances may not be well received by many LEOs and could lead to substantial problems for LEOs who are incapable of dealing with these typical adolescent behaviors. Furthermore, an SRO could find themselves in trouble with the school, their agency, or in the media if they allow students to “push their buttons” and react inappropriately. Two SROs addressed this in their interviews:

You've got to have an amazing amount of patience. [...] You just can't do the pissing contests with kids, especially in front of all their friends and other kids in the class. You just can't do that. And if you think you're going to come out here and be Chuck Norris in the middle of all those kids, then you're going to come out here and do something stupid and be on Snapchat 500 times. The news will be out here interviewing everybody. So, there's a lot of room for error and there's a lot of, alright, I'm gonna let this one go, because they are just kids. (SRO AS)

I think too aggressive of an officer would get themselves in trouble in a school because [students] tend to push your buttons here. They want to see how far they can push the envelope sometimes. And so that can wear on you sometimes. (SRO EP)

The idea of just “let[ting] this one go” was also voiced by other SROs. Having the requisite patience was equated with tolerating more from students than perhaps they would while working the road. For example, SRO JM described the characteristics SROs should have:

I think they just need to have a lot more patience with kids, because sometimes it can be very trying. You have to handle a kid completely different than you handle adults on the road. [...] The [Destiny School¹⁶] was nothing new, [I'd say] “good morning,” they'd give you like a “Fuck you.” [Laughter] “Okay, have a nice day!” So, you have to have a thick skin to work that school and it takes a very special deputy.

However, as noted earlier in this chapter, interactions in the SRO position are not limited to students. SROs are expected to engage with the broader school community, which means they must be able to effectively communicate and interact with not only the students, but also school personnel and parents. SRO BB recognized this when considering what makes an ideal SRO:

I think the key of being a good [SRO] is having an open mind, being a good communicator, because you have to communicate with the kids, you have to communicate with the parents, have to communicate with the schools and the teachers, all the different levels. So, I think the key is someone who's articulate,

¹⁶ This is a non-traditional school specifically serving students with emotional and behavioral problems.

someone who can stay calm, not rush to judgment, and can talk to, find a way to reach the kids.

SROs work within a school also employing school administrators, staff, teachers, counselors, etc. As indicated in previous sections, the SROs must regularly work with these individuals to address student behaviors but should also be developing a rapport with them. Moreover, the contract provides a semi-supervisory role to the principal over the SRO. This means that the SRO must navigate working with these individuals and must be able to effectively communicate with them. SRO KS emphasized how critical this is to their job:

The thing that you really have to learn to do is work with your administration, although you might not always agree with them. You have to have that working relationship. Otherwise, your life's gonna be a living hell. I mean, it really is. It's not going to go anywhere, it's going to cause tension, and so you've got to have that working relationship. I mean, I have mine call me all the time, whether I'm on or off duty, I take their calls. There [are] some officers that won't. I was in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico and my [assistant principal] was calling me about a situation. How I had cell phone service, I don't know, but I did. But, I took care of it, I did. It's just the things that you have to do.

SROs seemed to be aware of the distinction between how they communicated with the community in their SRO position, compared to their time on patrol. SROs associated this difference with their responsibility to be developing relationships, but also the comprehensive approach they must take to resolving problems in their schools. The SROs identified the distinction as being more “personal” or “personable”:

Obviously, because you're dealing with children, you have to kind of scale back a whole lot. This is more of a personal feel because, a call on the road, you can just do your thing and that's it. You don't have to work with or see that person again. But here you're working with the same teachers and the same parents. So, you want to make it to where it's always amicable and respectful. So, I'm not saying that you get disrespectful on the road, but there are times where it's like, look man, I got five other calls holding and I don't have time for this nonsense, so this is not a criminal issue, so bye. But you can't really do that here. (SRO DL)

We have to develop that relationship with the school and the admin team here and the security guards. So, I say that we have to be more personable than you do on patrol. Because in patrol, you go, you answer the call, you leave, you probably will never see that person again. Where we have to make sure that we're giving them a higher level of service because we have to work with them every day.
(SRO MM)

Accordingly, the SROs were aware that a bad interaction in an SRO position could continue to reverberate into the foreseeable future, meaning being “respectful” and “personable” with individuals they would constantly be seeing and/or working with is important. Some SROs noted how this could be difficult for LEOs. SRO MR noted that they hadn't received much pushback from parents at their assigned school and believed that such issues arise when other officers “don't know how to speak or talk to people.” Similarly, when asked about issues they may have encountered with parents of students, SRO BH responded:

I haven't really had any negative feedback so far. But I think that also has to a lot with like the deputy themselves, 'cause there's some [officers] that don't really know how to talk to people and verbally de-escalate situations, so they just make it a shit storm. And so that plays into the job as well, like if you can articulate things, and explain things well, a little about your job and what you are doing, then the parents kind of understand for the most part.

Taken together, the substantial differences with other LEO positions, the need for good communication skills, and the emphasis on careful consideration of who is selected for the SRO position, means that the SRO position is distinct from other LEO positions, but especially patrol and courthouse positions. Further, many of the SROs specifically connected the expectations stemming from the secondary role of engaging in positive interactions to the requirement of a certain personality for the position. The “right

personality” for the SRO position was of such prominence that some SROs suggested that appropriate screening of individuals may be more important than training.

Training Could be Improved to Meet the Needs of the SROs

This section addresses RO₆ (“To investigate the types of training SROs complete as part of their job) and RO₇ (To examine SROs’ perceptions of the training they received (or did not receive). In Central County, the contracts between the school board and the law enforcement agencies mandate the SRO “to complete all required training as set forth in this agreement or designated by the School Safety and Security Manager...” The contract provided to the researcher during data collection specified a list of specialized training including the FDLE Basic SRO course, instructor techniques, Strive for Safety, trauma informed care, crisis intervention, cyber safety and social media dangers/awareness, autism awareness, bullying prevention, and ESE awareness. It is unclear how or when these trainings are expected to occur or how training completion is tracked. Instructor techniques, trauma informed care, cyber safety and social media dangers/awareness, bullying prevention, and ESE awareness trainings were not provided during the data collection period and were not mentioned by most, if not all, of the SROs as trainings they had completed for the SRO position. The researcher observed the FDLE Basic SRO course, Strive for Safety instructor training, CIT training, Wraparound training, Stop the Bleed, and Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) training, all described below.

The FDLE Basic SRO course is a 40-hour, weeklong training consisting of 10 units with the instructional goal of providing an overview of the mission and role of

SROs “in applying school-based policing and school safety strategies in an education environment.” These units included: the history and implementation of SRO programs; laws and legal issues; foundations of ESE; interviewing, counseling and family dynamics; drug awareness and current trends; crisis identification and intervention; emergency management; gangs; and cybercrimes and internet ploys. A manual was distributed to each participant and completion of the course required passage of a final exam with a score of at least 80 percent. Other supplementary resources were not used during the training (i.e., corresponding PowerPoint slides, videos, handouts), except for the use of a quiz website for answering practice exam questions. The only qualification for an LEO to instruct the course is the completion of the FDLE’s Instructor Techniques course. This means that at the time of the training, the instructor was not required to have experience as an SRO. However, the course observed by the researcher was taught by the sole sergeant of the SSU with prior SRO experience. The training occurred in a formal, classroom setting at the local community college. The course primarily consisted of participants taking turns reading the manual out loud to the class and periodically stopping for discussion.

The Strive for Safety instructor training occurred over three days at one of the elementary schools in the county. The goal of the training was to prepare the SROs for being able to present the program in the elementary schools. The instructor of the training was an SRO serving on the Strive for Safety curriculum committee. The first day of training consisted of distribution of the materials (i.e., USB drive with PowerPoint slides, student manual, lesson plans), history of the program, a Q&A session with elementary school teachers, and review of the curriculum. The second and third days of training

focused on the SROs practicing presenting the curriculum. The SROs were evaluated by the instructor on the third day when presenting a module and provided with a certificate of completion.

The CIT training the researcher attended was a four-day course developed by the Central County Sheriff's Office and held in their training facilities. The course was not approved by FDLE, and the original Memphis CIT model was never mentioned. It is unclear whether or how much of the county's CIT training was adapted from the original model. The instructor of the training was the sergeant of the domestic violence and elderly crimes unit in the sheriff's office, who claimed that they developed the CIT training in response to a critical incident that occurred in the county in 1998 involving an individual with a history of paranoid schizophrenia. The training was not specifically tailored for SROs, and there were patrol officers in attendance from the various law enforcement agencies in the county along with SROs. PowerPoint slides were used throughout the training and were distributed to all participants on a USB drive. Several guest speakers from community organizations presented during the four days. Topics covered Baker Act apprehensions, mental health disorders, de-escalation, behavioral health in older adults, autism, adolescent mental health, suicide, domestic violence, veterans and PTSD, law enforcement mental health, outpatient services available in the county, state forensic hospitals, and the specialty courts established in the county. Some limited activities were also interspersed in the training, including tours of two of the Baker Act receiving facilities. Each participant was provided with a CIT pin to wear on their uniforms on the final day of training. There was no final exam or evaluation required to complete the course.

In August 2017, the Wraparound training sessions provided to the SROs occurred over three days. As described in the first section of this chapter, sessions covered a variety of topics, but mostly consisted of administrative matters and announcements focusing on safety and security issues. These sessions were presented by chain-of-command. Some “refresher” sessions were also provided discussing CIT/mental health, autism, and community resources, with some being presented by guest presenters, such as the prosecutor’s session reviewing school-based legal topics. The training occurred at the sheriff’s training facility and the school board auditorium.

In November 2017, the researcher attended Stop the Bleed training. It is a national training with the purpose of teaching the general public basic actions they can take to stop bleeding following severe injury and emergencies. The course was presented by medical personnel from a local hospital and covered tourniquets, identifying life threatening bleeding, wound packing, and compression. A PowerPoint presentation provided several photos for examples. After the presentation, participants were split into groups to practice the techniques using fake human limbs. A pamphlet with the information covered in the training was available, and certificates of completion were distributed to all participants even if they did not engage in practicing the techniques. The training was held at the sheriff’s office training center and lasted approximately two hours.

In August 2018, the researcher attended and observed the SROs completing Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFHA) training. This is a national training managed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing. The goal of the training is to teach members of the public how to respond and offer support to a young person experiencing

a mental health emergency. The training was not developed specifically for law enforcement or SROs but is meant to be applicable to any adult who works with youth. The curriculum covered: typical adolescent development; mental health problems, illnesses, and disorders in youth; signs and symptoms of mental illness in youth populations; and crisis situations. Activities applying a five-step plan for responding to youth mental health problems occurred throughout the training. The certified instructor was a licensed clinical social worker from another region of Florida contracted to provide the training to the SROs. PowerPoint slides were used during the training and each participant was provided with a manual. The training occurred in the school board's auditorium.

The researcher was able to attend and observe a single day of the SSU's Wraparound training the day after the YMHFA training in August 2018. The training occurred in a high school auditorium and was similar to what the researcher observed the prior summer. The major difference was that the safety/security focus was even stronger, due to the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School occurring just a few months before, an incident that was referenced a great deal throughout the day.

Several problems with these training sessions were identified in the qualitative data that could be remedied to better meet the needs of the SROs, but also their agencies. These problems include an inefficient use of training time, ineffective instruction and/or classroom management, lack of participant engagement, and the need to expand on or include important topics. Each is discussed below.

Inefficient use of Training Time

First, it is critical to note that over the year the researcher collected the qualitative data, every law enforcement agency in the county was short-staffed. This problem was mentioned repeatedly during training and interviews with the SROs. This means that there were instances where SROs missed training sessions or did not complete training because they were needed elsewhere. However, it also means that training should be both efficient and effective to ensure that resources are not wasted, and the SROs' time is being well-spent. If not, the SROs could be more useful to the agency by filling in for other short-staffed units.

Field notes from the various training sessions indicate that although each of the training courses were scheduled (and at times required) to be completed over a certain number of hours, *none* lasted for the projected amount of time. This issue was most prevalent during the FDLE Basic SRO course which was created as a 40-hour course, and thus should have taken place for eight hours over five days. The researcher recorded in their field notes the specific times when training sessions began, as well as when breaks and lunch occurred each day. For example, on the first day of the course, the training began 20 minutes late, and then the first break occurred in less than an hour of the training having commenced. There was another break in the morning lasting 17 minutes. Next, lunch lasted for 1 hour and 35 minutes. There were two more breaks provided in the afternoon, and then class ended 45 minutes early. This means that although the class was scheduled from 8am to 5pm, 217 minutes of the SROs' workday did not include any instruction. The following day was worse, with multiple breaks lasting 20 minutes, lunch over 2 hours, and the class ending 50 minutes early. Furthermore, the instructor started

the day with a video of a TED Talk of an individual they admired because they needed to “burn 10 minutes.” On the following day, the class attended the sheriff’s office promotional ceremony, which was in no way related to the training or the SROs but used up approximately 1 hour 25 minutes of the day. Excessive breaks and lunches, along with random unrelated videos and activities persisted throughout the week of the training, which means the training did not come close to providing 40 hours of instructional content. If the SSU wanted to keep the training as is (simply reading the manual out loud and stopping periodically for some discussion) it could easily be covered within three days.

This problem was not unique to the FDLE Basic SRO course. The field notes from the Strive for Safety, CIT, Wraparound, and YMHFA trainings all reflect excessive breaks, lengthy lunches, late starts, and sessions ending earlier than scheduled. In another example, the YMHFA training is supposed to provide eight hours of training content, but the actual instructional time observed by the researcher consisted of 5 hours and 50 minutes. All three days of the Strive for Safety instructor training ended early, but the instructor would not allow the class to leave until the scheduled end time of 3PM, meaning the SROs would sit around chatting with each other until then. Although scheduled from 8AM to 3PM, field notes show that 2 hours and 30 minutes of the first day of training consisted of breaks and lunch. Thus, the SROs were paid for a full day of work, although instructional time consisted of less than five hours.

Trainings were inefficient in another regard: repeat presentations. One example is the Wraparound training. For SROs who completed the Strive for Safety instructor training and the CIT training, they would have to sit through some of the exact same

presentations during Wraparound. This did not go unnoticed by the presenters or the SROs. One presenter recognized that they had already presented to many of the SROs the week before during the CIT training and that they were reviewing a condensed version of the same presentation. SRO HD commented to the researcher that they were “pissed” that they had to sit through the same presentations again.

There is also the question of whether the SROs should be completing training not tailored to their position as SROs, and whether that time could be better used covering topics important to the SROs (an issue discussed more thoroughly below). This problem was most apparent during the CIT training. From the first day of training, the instructor indicated that they personally would not be covering topics related to children and adolescents because they “hate kids,” but there would be some other presenters covering the topic. Over the four-day training, only approximately three hours were devoted to covering mental health issues, developmental disabilities, and/or available services for youth populations. However, over half of the training participants were SROs who work almost exclusively with child and adolescent populations.

This did not go unnoticed by SROs. For example, during their interview, SRO KS provided the following critique of the CIT training: “I would have liked to have some juvenile speakers to get the juvenile perspective. Yeah, we get the adult perspective, but we’re not really dealing with adults. We’re dealing with kids.” In another example, an entire afternoon was devoted to driving out to two different Baker Act receiving facilities for tours. One tour lasted over an hour because the guide took the group to every single building of the compound and described each program, although the various programs were already described in presentations during the classroom sessions of the training.

Furthermore, they did not show the participants the most critical piece of information: where they drop off individuals for Baker Act apprehensions. But especially perplexing is the fact that this particular facility does not accept children or adolescents for Baker Act apprehensions, so SROs would typically never go to the facility. The following day the researcher discussed this with a group of SROs who described the activity as “pointless.”

Lack of Participant Engagement in Training Sessions

Field notes from the training observations suggest that SROs were not participating or engaging in several training sessions, but also that their behaviors frequently became inappropriate. During the FDLE Basic SRO course, the SROs did not have many questions, commentary, or examples of problems they encounter. Notes reflecting on the first week of training state: “There was [sic] a lot of officers there that I didn’t hear a peep from the entire week.” (Reflection memo, 7/22/17). However, this is the course that is supposed to provide the SROs with an overview of their job, and as discussed previously in this chapter, the SROs have encountered many problems in their job requiring clarifications, discussion, and guidance. The instructor at times attempted to facilitate classroom activities that required some level of engagement, but SROs would not participate. In one example from the field notes: “Group activity forcing class to get up and talk to each other and ask questions. Most of the SROs did not seem to be really interested, as many just stayed in the same spot throughout the activity.” (Field note, 7/19/17). In another example, “[Sgt. KL] gave the class the option of using Kahoot!¹⁷ to study for their test or to leave and ‘study at home.’ Everyone wanted to leave so class

¹⁷ Learning website allowing instructors to create quizzes and presentations.

ended.” (Field note, 7/20/17). The notes indicate that class ended 1 hour and 15 minutes early on this day.

Furthermore, when certain SROs attempted to participate and ask questions, fellow SROs would engage in childish behaviors. Notes from a conversation with SRO TW during lunch indicated:

[SRO TW] and I started talking about his thoughts on the training and the [SSU] generally. In general, he finds the training lacking and is especially concerned about the young [SROs] who have only been LEOs for less than a couple years. [...] He also criticized the text we are using (it is full of editing errors and provides stats that are over 10 years old) and noted how much time we waste watching videos or discussing irrelevant topics. [...] He is also annoyed that when he brings up legitimate concerns or issues he would like to discuss, certain individuals in the class are snickering behind his back. He told me that he is sure I know who he is talking about and that I’ve probably noticed that certain individuals have no business being [SROs]. (Field note, 7/20/17)

The FDLE Basic SRO course had fewer participants ($n = 23$) and was hosted in a much smaller classroom than the other trainings observed by the researcher. Furthermore, one of the sergeants of the SSU was the instructor, and another sergeant was a participant. This difference was immediately noticed by the researcher in the subsequent trainings, because training engagement and participation plummeted even further, which may be related to the greater number of participants, much larger classrooms/auditoriums, and presenters who were not the immediate supervisors of the SROs. There were two major engagement issues identified in the field notes: SROs constantly playing on their cell phones and SROs talking with each other during presentations. A note from CIT training states: “Some of the [SROs] sitting in the back of the room keep talking to each other which is very rude and distracting.” (Field note, 8/2/17). A note from the YMHFA training indicates: “There was an entire group of

[SROs] not paying attention and talking among themselves, making it difficult to listen to [the instructor].” (Field note, 8/6/18). During the first day of the Strive for Safety instructor training, the researcher noted, “Several of the SROs were playing on their cell phones.” (Field note, 7/25/17).

This lack of engagement was not relegated to purely lectures and presentations. Like the FDLE Basic SRO course, SROs chose not to participate during group activities/assignments. Notes from a Wraparound training session covering critical incident responses state:

The class was split into four groups. We were given a scenario of a hostage situation at the McDonald’s on [Main Street] in [Nolan]. Groups were tasked with assigning a leader and coming up with a plan for handling the critical incident. I walked around the room to gauge how the four groups were handling this task. In each group there seems to be people who are way more engaged in the activity. For example, the one [SRO] in the room who is a member of the SWAT team was very enthusiastic about the activity. Those who are not that interested are chit-chatting with each other and playing on their phones. I was assigned to a group with both [SROs from the sheriff’s office and Windsor Police Department]. [SROs JM, HD, BB and JV] jumped at the opportunity to engage in the activity immediately. The [Windsor] SROs remained in their seats for the most part and gave very limited feedback to the [other SROs]. (Field note, 8/7/17)

Similarly, field notes from the YMHFA training reflect: “Auditory hallucinations activity. [The instructor] told the [SROs] they didn’t have to complete the activity if they weren’t comfortable. It appeared as though most elected not to participate, as many were on their phones or talking to other [SROs].” (Field note, 8/6/18).

The Strive for Safety instructor training included a “homework” requirement. The first day of training reviewed the materials and curriculum. The expectation was that the SROs were to review the materials and lesson plans in the evening so that the second and third days of training could consist of practicing presenting the lessons in the curriculum.

The field notes from the first day of training state: “[SRO SB] informed the class that they will have to pick a lesson to practice teaching tomorrow. The [SROs] did not seem too happy about this.” (Field note, 7/25/17). A later notation states that the SROs were even more upset “when they found out it needs to be a full length, 30-45 minute lesson.” (Field note, 7/25/17). Although they were forewarned, the following day, the SROs were not prepared to practice presenting. For example, notes surrounding the first presenter show: “[SRD IU] went first presenting the *Drugs* lesson. He had absolutely no idea what he was doing.” (Field note, 7/26/17). However, the SROs continued to blatantly disregard the expectation of preparation for their practice presentations as indicated in the field notes from the third day of training: “[SRO CC] presented the *Gangs* lesson. [...] Similar to yesterday, he very much struggled teaching the material and seemed unprepared.” (Field note, 7/27/17). In another example from the field notes: “[SRO BW] presented *Internet Safety* lesson. There was no improvement from yesterday, as she did just as poorly. She seemed pretty unprepared.” (Field note, 7/27/17). During a break, the researcher broached the subject with a group of the SROs, demonstrated in the following note:

I went back into the classroom, but the presentations hadn’t started up yet. I chatted with [SRO IU, BB, and CC]. I asked them if they had reviewed the material last night. Before [SRO IU] answered, he laughed, and asked me if I absolutely needed to know for data collection. I said no, but it was something interesting to know, because so many of the [SROs] last week had brought up [Strive for Safety] as a negative aspect of their job. They all answered that they had not reviewed the material last night, although none of them did particularly well yesterday and knew lessons would be assigned randomly. (Field note, 7/27/17).

Thus, it does not appear that the SROs took the Strive for Safety training seriously, although they have no formal training in teaching and would be taking up

valuable class time in their schools to be presenting the program to fifth grade students. However, each training encountered sessions with low engagement. There is some irony in this, since during interviews SROs identified student cell phone use as one of the major problems they encounter in the schools, yet, the SROs were frequently observed to be playing on their phones rather than paying attention to what were at times important topics, and while taxpayer dollars were being spent for them to complete the training.

Ineffective Instruction and Classroom Management

The SROs' behavior during training sessions may be partially explained by the ineffective presentation skills of some instructors/presenters, unprepared instructors, a lack of classroom management, and chain-of-command not assisting with classroom management when present. First, the instructors for both the FDLE Basic SRO course and the Strive for Safety training indicated to the researcher that they had just been informed that they would be teaching the courses the week prior to the training, not leaving much time to plan activities or prepare the lessons, and the field notes indicate that the lack of preparation was apparent. During other trainings it was also clear that the instructors were unprepared. For example, the YMHFA instructor was from a different region of Florida and could not answer the SROs' questions that were specific to Central County (e.g., available community resources).

This lack of preparation may have also contributed to the ineffective presentation skills of some presenters, but some presenters may have simply lacked the finesse needed to keep the attention of a room of LEOs. According to field notes, during the CIT training a representative from one of the local mental health facilities:

Presented on the involuntary programs available at their facility. He did not have a PowerPoint presentation and just stood in front of the class discussing each program one by one. His voice was extremely monotone and low. Some of the information he was discussing was valuable, especially regarding the court order option for individuals with multiple Baker Acts, but the poor delivery of the information means that it was likely lost on most. Several of the LEOs were not paying attention, did not ask any questions, and were playing on their phones. Much of the information he presented also seemed to be irrelevant. I'm still unsure why LEOs need to know about commitments to the state hospital due to NGRI¹⁸ and competency, yet it seems to have been discussed a lot today including by this individual. One of the SROs from [Santana PD] asked if anything [the representative] was discussing was relevant to juveniles, and he responded "no" that [the facility] only works with adults. [Sgt. SK] jumped in that everything being discussed today is only relevant to adults. (Field note, 7/31/17).

Although supplementary material such as a PowerPoint presentation is not necessary for a useful presentation, it must be noted that the presentations leading up to the one just described all used one, and the difference was felt immediately, especially since the presenter did not project his voice well, making his presentation quite difficult to follow. Moreover, as indicated in the field notes, the presenter did not connect the material in his discussion to the work of LEOs and/or SROs. The combination of the delivery and then being told that nothing being presented is relevant to your work as an SRO, means it is easy to comprehend why the SROs were not engaged in the training.

The choice of training location also impacted delivery in some instances, and instructors did not seem to adapt. In one example from the Wraparound training, field notes state:

[Lt. JP] presented on general housekeeping information. During her time speaking a construction crew was working on the roof. They made a ton of noise. There were times I had difficulty understanding [Lt. JP] while she was speaking and I wasn't seated in the back row. However, absolutely no one said anything, so I'm pretty sure many [SROs] did not even obtain a good proportion of the information she conveyed. (Field note, 8/7/17)

¹⁸ Not guilty by reason of insanity

Similar instances are described in the field notes from the YMHFA training which was held in a rather large auditorium. On five separate occasions throughout the day the field notes indicate that the instructor did not use a microphone, resulting in no one being able to hear her questions or discussion. There was also an ice cream social being held in the room next door with the individuals being extremely loud, resulting in one of the sergeants informing them that a training session was occurring and requesting that they quiet down. The field notes indicate that this was to no avail, resulting in the SROs repeatedly yelling at the YMHFA instructor “to use the microphone” (Field note, 8/6/18).

As noted in the subsection above, SROs’ behaviors during training many times were not ideal. This included frequently playing on their phones during sessions, talking with each other during presentations, snickering at fellow SROs with legitimate questions, replying sarcastically to inquiries, and at times, making offensive and/or inappropriate comments. The field notes indicate that there was a lack of classroom management on the part of instructors, but also on the part of the SSU’s chain-of-command who acted as instructors/presenters for many training sessions or were in attendance. If any of the SROs’ behaviors were ever addressed, it was not during training sessions in the presence of the researcher.

During the Strive for Safety instructor training, the researcher never observed the chain-of-command address the lack of preparation of the SROs during their practice presentations, although at least one of them had been in attendance. Another example from the field notes of the Strive for Safety training demonstrates the lack of classroom management on the part of the acting instructor (who was an SRO):

The class was acting very silly and joking around a lot more compared to the morning or yesterday's presentations. It was apparent that they were over this training. The behaviors continued for the rest of the afternoon and [SRO SB] did not try to stop it, and at some points was joining in. (Field note, 7/27/17)

Although not relevant to the SRO position, during the FDLE Basic SRO course there was a discussion of the need for school uniforms to be adopted in the county. Field notes reflect the following exchange:

Some of the [SROs] live in the neighboring county where they are implementing a new uniform policy this school year. [SRO HD] said it was fantastic and she was excited because it makes it so much easier. [SRO MP] stated that when the idea was first introduced he was against it, but after working in the middle school last year and seeing "all the whores" he supports it. (Field note, 7/21/17)

Importantly, there were two sergeants in the classroom (with one acting as the instructor) and neither appeared to bat an eye at an SRO calling 11- to 13-year-old female students "whores." Language that some may deem offensive was observed in other training sessions. During an instructor led discussion focusing on coping mechanisms, the YMHFA instructor asked the SROs for suggestions to deal with stress. One of the SROs told her "I like orgasming" (Field note, 8/6/18). The instructor ignored the comment. Although the training session was exclusively for the SROs, there were three people in attendance during the YMHFA training (including the researcher, instructor, and an assistant) who were not associated with any of the law enforcement agencies or the school district. It was surprising that an SRO tasked with working with children thought it was appropriate to give such a response when outsiders were present.

In another part of the YMHFA training, groups were required to present and discuss their posters listing elements of typical adolescent development. The field notes show:

While presenting his group's poster, [SRO GB] kept getting phone calls from another SRO in the room. [SRO GB's] cell phone was not on silent, so he would have to look at his Apple watch and decline the call. This happened three times while he was presenting, and other participants were laughing. (Field note, 8/6/18)

The instructor did nothing in response, but most importantly, a sergeant of the SSU was in attendance during the YMHFA training and the researcher did not witness them address these and other behaviors. This did not go unnoticed by other SROs as described in some of the final field notes from the training. While the researcher was talking to the instructor at the end of the training the following occurred:

[SRO AD] had finished his posttest and came up to us. He told [the instructor] that he was embarrassed by the behavior of his fellow officers. He said that one problem was that there were just too many of them in the room and that trainings with LEOs need to be kept small. He wanted her to know that some of them took her training seriously and really do care about the mental health issues of the children they work with. He said he was also disappointed that his direct supervisor [Sgt. AO] sat and played on their phone or made calls during the training and didn't attempt to rein in the behaviors of some of the other officers. (Field note, 8/6/18)

Hence, many of the observed training sessions experienced issues arising from ineffective instruction and classroom management. This problem coincides with the subsection above describing the lack of participant engagement. However, such problems could be easily remedied by tactics such as smaller class sizes, providing adequate preparation time to instructors, and chain-of-command actively monitoring the training sessions to ensure the SROs are engaging and behaving appropriately.

Omission of Critical Topics Relevant to the SRO Position

Interviews with the SROs suggested that the training needs to expand coverage of certain topics or needs to address topics that are not covered. The hyperfocus on safety and security issues seem to come at the expense of some of the more common issues

encountered by the SROs, especially ESE students and Baker Act apprehensions of students. Several SROs indicated that the training they received did not prepare them for their position. When asked if they felt as though the training prepared them for their role, SRO DN responded, “Nah, just the law enforcement side, not what it entails to be an SRO successfully.” SRO BH responded:

Kind of. [...] I would have liked to have some better training prior to going in, because making that switch, how’d you handle somebody on the road would be different than obviously you’d handle a child. So, a lot of questions, I was calling a lot of people and, hey, how do you guys do it? You do it this way? Or this way? Calling my sergeant and finding out what’s acceptable or not.

When asked the same question SRO MP stated, “Not really, no.” Similarly, SRO AR replied, “Not really.” When asked about some of the difficulties they’ve encountered in the SRO position, SRO PJ responded, “Getting the proper training to understand the differences between this job and road patrol. It’s a very different job.” Thus, there was evidence in the data that many of the SROs did not feel that the training they received was sufficient to transition successfully to the SRO position.

Interviews also inquired as to whether there were topics that should be addressed in SRO training. Interestingly, even those SROs indicating that they felt the training they had received was sufficient provided suggestions and recommendations, implying that there are areas needing to be expanded upon. School administration, juvenile legal topics, and child custody issues were a few of the topics provided by multiple SROs. However, the two most common responses were a need for training on ESE students and responding to youth mental health issues. The following subsections address each.

ESE Students

The need for training on ESE students was clear during the interviews and provides further support to results of other studies demonstrating that responding to incidents involving ESE students is a major issue for SROs (May et al., 2012). When discussing problems with students, dealing with ESE students was the most frequently mentioned issue by the SROs. There was a lack of knowledge surrounding the various ESE classifications and what they meant for the SRO's responses to these students' behaviors. Many of the SROs knew little to nothing surrounding IEPs and 504 plans required under federal law. For example, when asked what information is critical for SROs to know, SRO TH responded:

The school system and law regarding education and the “alphabet students,” the ESE students. I am completely ignorant to that and if you don't understand that system, it's extremely difficult to deal with the students.

The researcher followed up by inquiring as to whether the SRO had the opportunity to sit down with administration to go over some of the labels and acronyms related to ESE students. SRO TH replied:

I had a teacher who handled that at another school, and she printed me out a list of the “alphabets” and what they all mean, but not necessarily the legal requirements behind it. I sat down with their ESE team. What are the requirements? How are we allowed to do this? And they informed me, these kids, they can't have any more than 10 suspensions.

There was also indication that these classifications and restrictions surrounding discipline were a source of conflict for the SROs and their school administration and/or parents of ESE students. SRO SV asserted, “These IEP things and the way it is in this state, they need to make changes. Now you speak to an IEP person, or the people who

work for that, they do a lot of coddling, and we butt heads a lot.” Field notes from the FDLE Basic SRO course state:

[SROs] vented their frustration of parents of students with disabilities. They feel like parents abuse the statutes and policies and ignore that many times the root of their child’s problem is a lack of discipline rather than their disability. They constantly excuse their child’s disrespectful behavior and discipline issues through their disability, whether its ADHD or a learning disability. (Field note, 7/18/17)

Interviews also revealed the belief on the part of the SROs that the parents are taking advantage of their child’s disability status or are in some way manipulating the school system. SROs also seemed to suggest that they did not necessarily agree or believe the diagnoses or classifications of some students. For example, during an interview with SRO KG, they discussed an arrest of a particular ESE student:

The one arrest I had at [Destiny], he battered another student, and then I put him in cuffs. He tried to escape, slip the cuffs under his legs, very agile, tried to escape my office. I had to get him. We got into a bit of a tussle. He ended up kicking me in the face twice and stuff. So, he had some major felony charges, but it wasn’t that bad. But he was back to school on Monday, so that was the frustrating part. [...] I mean, this particular young man apparently has a very low IQ. I don’t see it, but they say he does, and mom uses that to work the system.

Unit 4 of the FDLE Basic SRO course covers “Foundations of Exceptional Student Education.” Only 11 pages of the student guide are devoted to this unit, and it consists of what can be described as an outline rather than a thorough review of the various information individuals working in schools should know. This unit could be easily supplemented by having school personnel well-versed in the laws, policies, and procedures surrounding ESE students present on the topic, rather than a sergeant who is as ignorant surrounding these issues as the SROs. Furthermore, the incredible amount of

unused instructional time during the FDLE Basic SRO course means that a thorough review of this topic could easily be accommodated into the schedule.

Youth Baker Act Apprehensions

When asked for some areas that the SROs believed they need more training in, youth mental health, but particularly Baker Act apprehensions, were mentioned with regularity. For example, SRO MP responded: “Baker Acts.” Similarly, SRO BW replied, “The thing that’s always difficult is Baker Acts on younger kids.”

The researcher also inquired as to what surprised SROs and sergeants about the position or what was an unexpected part of their job. The prevalence of student mental health issues and the need to apprehend students under the Baker Act was one of the top responses. SRO JM, who had 30 years of experience in law enforcement, indicated that the only thing that surprised them in the SRO position was “the amount of Baker Acts that we do.” When asked whether they expected to deal with so many mental health issues in a middle school, SRO BB responded: “My first day here, I had a Baker Act situation. So, it did take me for a loop in the beginning. It is a little bit more than expected.” Sgt. CK echoed the SROs: “I’ve noticed it seems that we deal with a lot more Baker Actable type situations than I would have expected.”

Since the county’s CIT training does not thoroughly cover youth mental health topics, and national training programs such as YMHFA do not cover state specific statutes such as the Baker Act, student mental health issues and related Baker Act apprehensions should be expanded upon during the SROs’ required training, whether it be during the FDLE Basic SRO course or Wraparound training. Unit 7 of the FDLE Basic SRO course covers “Crisis Identification and Intervention,” and could easily be

supplemented by having experts in crisis responses and youth mental health present this unit and provide more thorough information and assistance to the SROs.

This section reviewed the training completed by the SROs in Central County. Field notes from the observations of the training identified some problematic areas including an inefficient use of training time, a lack of participant engagement during training sessions, ineffective instruction and classroom management, and the omission of critical topics identified by the SROs as needed for their position. The evidence suggests that the training in Central County could be improved to better meet the needs of the SROs, their agencies, and the schools.

Summary

Chapter 5 presented the qualitative findings of this dissertation addressing the first two research questions of this study. Regarding the first research question (What are the responsibilities, duties, and/or roles of the SROs?), this chapter provides evidence that when the data was collected in Central County in 2017 and 2018, the primary role of the SROs was safety and security. There was also a secondary role the SROs were expected to execute which consisted of engaging in positive interactions with students and the school community. There were several mechanisms identified in the data for how the SROs went about engaging in these positive interactions including mentorship, acting as an agent for change, and building rapport. However, ambiguity existed surrounding the expectations for how the SROs carried these roles out. This ambiguity meant that whether and how SROs responded to student behavior was influenced a great deal by other actors.

For the second research question (How are SROs prepared for undertaking these responsibilities?), the findings in this chapter demonstrate that not just any LEO can be placed into the SRO position, as the SRO position differed in many respects from patrol, investigative, and courthouse positions at the time of data collection. Lastly, the training completed by the SROs was described, and evidence presented that there were some issues with the training that could be improved to better meet the needs of the SROs. Chapter 6 presents the quantitative results to address the third and fourth research questions.

CHAPTER SIX: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative strand of this mixed methods dissertation, and aims to address the following research questions (RQ) and related hypotheses (H):

- RQ3: Does the expansion of SROs affect the number of school-based arrests?
 - H₁: The expansion of SROs significantly increased the number of school-based arrests.
 - H₂: The significant increase in school-based arrests is attributable to misdemeanor offenses.
 - H₃: The significant increase in school-based arrests is attributable to an increase in the number of younger students arrested.
- RQ4: Does the expansion of SROs affect the number of school-based Baker Act apprehensions?
 - H₄: The expansion of SROs significantly increased the number of school-based involuntary commitment apprehensions.
 - H₅: The significant increase in school-based Baker Act apprehensions is attributable to an increase in the number of younger students apprehended.

To accomplish these aims, univariate and bivariate analyses were performed at the individual, case-level for the separate arrest and Baker Act apprehension data. ITSA were then performed for the separate time series. The time series data were disaggregated, and analyses were repeated to address the sub-hypotheses. Results of the analyses for school-

based arrests are presented first, followed by analyses surrounding school-based Baker Act apprehensions.

Results of Analyses for School-Based Arrests

Results from preliminary analyses are reported in Table 1. There were a total of 2570 school-based arrests of juveniles in the county over the six school years. The sheriff's office was responsible for a majority (66.3%) of these arrests, which is unsurprising since sheriff's office deputies comprised over half (55.2%) of the SROs in the county when the SSU was created and implemented in August 2016. Also unsurprising is that male (74.4%) and non-White (59.3%) students are overrepresented in school-based arrests. The arrested juveniles ranged in age from 9 to 17-years-old with a mean age of 15.10. Approximately 22.4 percent of arrests were for felonies, 40.8 percent for misdemeanors, and 36.8 percent for non-criminal offenses.

Importantly, contrary to the first hypothesis, the number of arrests before the intervention (n = 1318) is greater than after (n = 1252), representing a decrease of 5 percent. Table 1 demonstrates that the main contributor to the post-intervention decrease is the sheriff's office, with a reduction in arrests of 22 percent. Highland Creek PD's substantial decrease can be attributed to the agency deciding to remove their two SROs after the 2016-17 school year. SROs employed with the sheriff took over the two schools beginning in the 2017-18 school year. Along with these two agencies, Baxter Lake PD experienced a decrease in arrests of 64.5 percent. Nolan PD had the same, low number of arrests pre- and post-intervention, which is unsurprising since they solely cover two elementary schools in their jurisdiction. Of particular interest is that Lakeview PD, Palm

Hills PD, Santana PD, and Windsor PD all added SROs in August 2016 and experienced the hypothesized increase to their arrest numbers post-intervention. Lakeview PD's arrest numbers increased by 97.1 percent, Palm Hills PD by 33.3 percent, and Santana PD by 57.7 percent. The greatest percentage increase in arrests was attributable to Windsor PD, which saw an increase of 162.8 percent.

Bivariate analyses were performed to determine if significant relationships exist between the demographic variables and whether the arrest occurred pre- or post-intervention. Results of a chi-square test of independence (χ^2) suggest that there is no statistically significant relationship between the arrested student's sex and when the arrest occurred [$\chi^2(1, N = 2540) = 1.73, p = .19$]. There is also no statistically significant relationship between the arrested student's race and when the arrest occurred [$\chi^2(1, N = 2523) = .95, p = .33$]. However, an independent samples *t*-test indicated that the mean age of arrested students before ($M = 15.18, SD = 1.52$) the intervention is significantly greater than after ($M = 15.00, SD = 1.57$) the intervention [$t(2305) = 2.79, p < .01$], but the effect size is small (Cohen's $d = .12$).

Table 1: School-Based Arrests Pre- and Post-Intervention

	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Total
<i>Agency n (%)</i>			
Baxter Lake PD	31 (73.8%)	11 (26.2%)	42
Central County SO	957 (56.2%)	746 (43.8%)	1703
Highland Creek PD	94 (82.5%)	20 (17.5%)	114
Lakeview PD	68 (33.7%)	134 (66.3%)	202
Nolan PD	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)	4
Palm Hills PD	54 (42.9%)	72 (57.1%)	126
Santana PD	26 (38.8%)	41 (61.2%)	67
Windsor PD	86 (27.6%)	226 (72.4%)	312
<i>Age M (SD)</i>	15.18 (1.52)	15.00 (1.57)	15.10 (1.55)
<i>Race n (%)</i>			
White	518 (50.4%)	509 (49.6%)	1027
Non-White	784 (52.4%)	712 (47.6%)	1496
<i>Sex n (%)</i>			
Male	987 (52.2%)	903 (47.8%)	1890
Female	320 (49.2%)	330 (50.8%)	650
<i>Offense type n (%)</i>			
Felony	239 (41.7%)	334 (58.3%)	573
Misdemeanor	495 (47.3%)	551 (52.7%)	1046
Non-criminal	583 (61.8%)	360 (38.2%)	943
<i>Total arrests n (%)</i>	1318 (51.3%)	1252 (48.7%)	2570

Note. The student's age is missing in 263 cases, sex in 30 cases, and race in 47 cases, while offense type is missing in 8 cases.

A chi-square test of independence was also performed to investigate the relationship between whether the arrest occurred pre- or post-intervention and the type of offense related to the arrest. Results suggest a statistically significant association between the two variables [$\chi^2(2, N = 2562) = 69.52, p < .001$], however, Cramer's *V* indicates that the strength of the association is weak (.17). Table 1 shows that arrests for felonies and misdemeanors increased after the intervention, but arrests for non-criminal offenses decreased. Accordingly, results of the bivariate analyses provide preliminary support for the sub-hypotheses for RQ3 and justify disaggregating the data by offense type and student age.

Monthly arrests were used as the dependent variable for purposes of ITSA. The dependent variable was plotted in a line graph to visually inspect any effect the intervention may have produced, while also examining the series for seasonality. Results are displayed in Figure 2. The minimum number of monthly arrests was zero while the maximum was 75. The mean number of monthly arrests was 35.69. The line graph does suggest a 12-month seasonality, with the fewest number of arrests occurring in the summer months of June and July, while peaks tend to occur during the months students are continuously present (e.g., October, April). Noticeably, there does not appear to be any discernible trend upward or downward. Moreover, there is no visible abrupt shift in the line's trend after the intervention in August 2016 represented by the straight, vertical line.

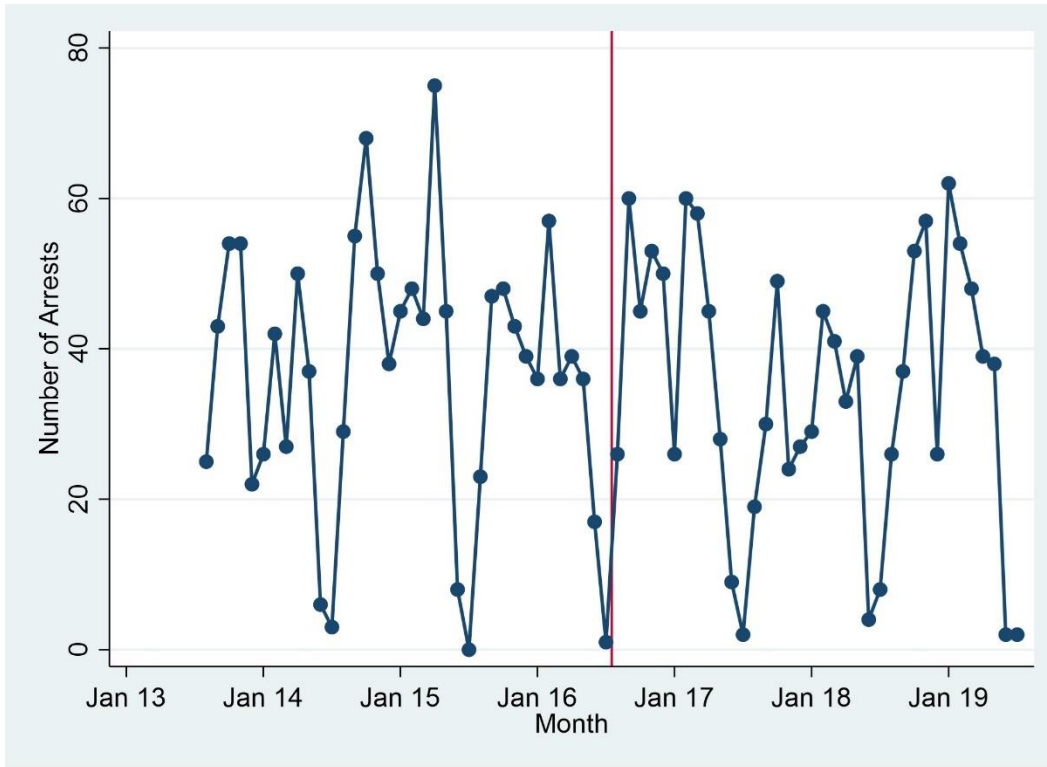


Figure 2: Number of School-Based Arrests by Month (N = 2570)

Next, tests for identifying the appropriate ARIMA model were conducted with patterns in the ACFs and PACFs confirming the presence of 12-month seasonality since spikes were apparent every 12 lags. The ACFs and PACFs suggested either an MA(1) or AR(2) process needing to be modeled. Results from the augmented Dickey-Fuller test were significant ($Z(t) = -5.69, p < .001$), supporting the visual inspection that the series is stationary.

Results from three estimated models are displayed in Table 2. An ARIMA(0,0,1)₁₂ model was estimated first since the preliminary tests suggested either an MA(1) or AR(2) process. Recall from Chapter 4 that MA(1) signifies a first-order moving average process, while AR(2) signifies a second-order autoregressive process

being present in the time series. Although all the terms included in the model were statistically significant, the Q -statistic was significant (134.69, $p < .001$) indicating the continued existence of underlying processes needing to be included in the model (i.e., not reaching white noise). Subsequently, an ARIMA(2,0,0)₁₂ was estimated. All included terms were again statistically significant, but the Q -statistic was no longer significant suggesting an appropriate fit (35.48, $p = .40$). The ACFs and PACFs of the model's residuals provided further support since initial lags were all at zero.

Table 2: Time Series Analyses for Monthly School-Based Arrests (N = 2570)

	ARIMA(0,0,1) ₁₂	ARIMA(2,0,0) ₁₂	ARIMA(2,0,0) ₁₂ with intervention
Constant	35.59*** (2.67)	35.18*** (4.66)	37.03*** (5.01)
AR(1)	-	.37** (.11)	.33** (.11)
AR(2)	-	.48*** (.12)	.54*** (.13)
MA(1)	.47* (.15)	-	-
Q -statistic	134.69***	35.48	-
Intervention	-	-	-3.71 (2.78)

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. ARIMA(p,d,q) models are presented where p = autoregressive (AR) process, d = integrated process, and q = moving average (MA) process.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

In the final step of ITSA for the full time series, the intervention variable was introduced to the selected ARIMA(2,0,0)₁₂ model. The coefficient of the intervention term was not statistically significant ($p = .18$), indicating that the integration and expansion of Central County's SRO program did not have a statistically significant

impact on the monthly number of student arrests. Moreover, as mentioned above, there was a 5 percent *decrease* in arrests post-intervention. Thus, H₁ of this study is not supported.

To address the sub-hypotheses, the arrest data required disaggregation. Specifically, to explore H₂, the data were disaggregated into the three separate time series based on type of offense: felonies, misdemeanors, and non-criminal. The previously described steps were repeated for each of the series representing the three offense types. Figure 3 displays the line graph of the plotted monthly counts of felony arrests. There was a total of 573 felony arrests over the six-year time series. The minimum number of monthly felony arrests was zero, the maximum was 29, and the mean was 7.96. There were 239 felony arrests pre-intervention compared to 334 post-intervention, meaning felony arrests increased by 39.75 percent. The seasonality observed in the full series is also present for felony arrests, as well as a lack of a visible trend upward or downward. However, there is some suggestion in the line graph of an abrupt shift as the number of felony arrests in August 2016 (n = 11) is greater than previous felony arrests occurring in August 2013, 2014, or 2015. Further, subsequent months in the 2016-17 school year also experienced a greater number of arrests compared to previous school years.

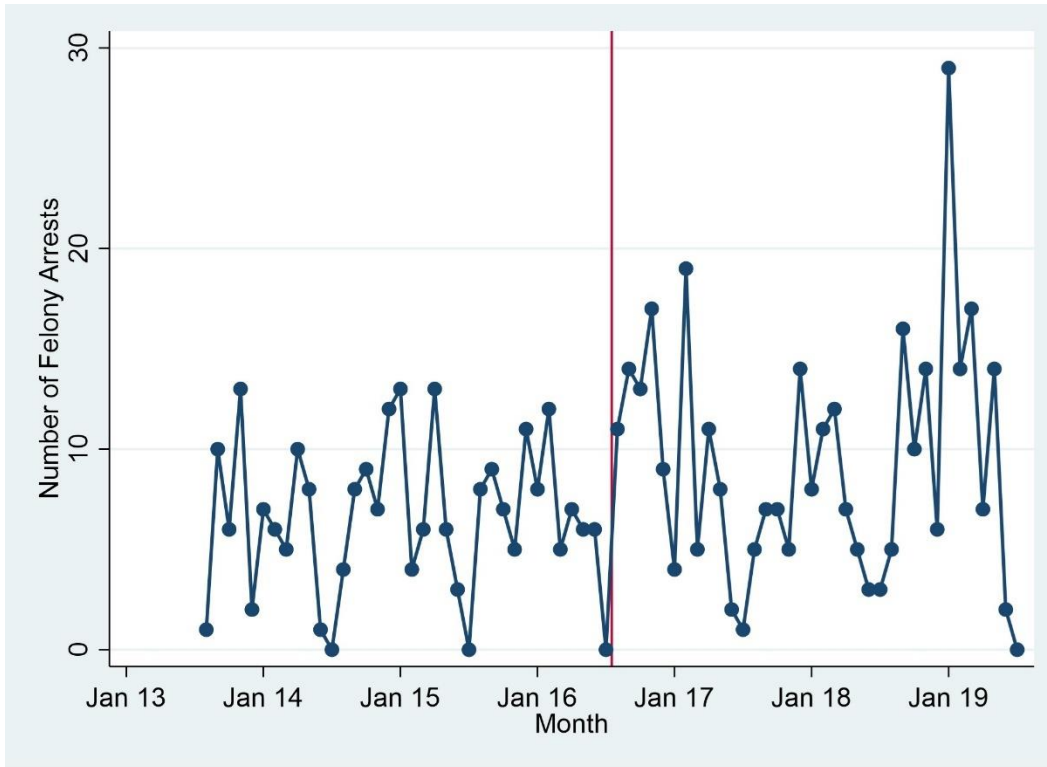


Figure 3: Number of School-Based Felony Arrests by Month (n = 573)

Table 3 provides the ARIMA models produced for the disaggregated arrest time series. The ACFs and PACFs of the felony arrest series suggested that there were neither autoregressive nor moving average components needing to be included in model estimates. Results from the augmented Dickey-Fuller test were statistically significant ($Z(t) = -6.98, p < .001$) confirming the visual inspection that the series is stationary, and a trend or drift did not need to be modeled. Accordingly, an $ARIMA(0,0,0)_{12}$ model was estimated. Although model components were statistically significant, the Q -statistic was also statistically significant ($59.99, p < .01$), indicating that not all of the underlying data generating processes had been modeled, and a need for a different model to be estimated.

Table 3: Time Series Analyses for Monthly School-Based Arrests Disaggregated by Offense Type

<i>Felony arrests (n = 573)</i>			
	ARIMA(0,0,0) ₁₂	ARIMA(1,0,0) ₁₂	ARIMA(1,0,0) ₁₂ with intervention
Constant	7.96*** (.70)	8.03*** (1.02)	6.57*** (1.38)
AR(1)	-	.34* (.17)	.33* (.17)
Q-statistic	59.99**	37.17	32.92
Intervention	-	-	2.91* (1.46)
<i>Misdemeanor arrests (n = 1046)</i>			
		ARIMA(2,0,0) ₁₂	ARIMA(2,0,0) ₁₂ with intervention
Constant		14.22*** (2.14)	13.93*** (2.29)
AR(1)		.43** (.14)	.43** (.14)
AR(2)		.33* (.15)	.32* (.16)
Q-statistic		36.77	-
Intervention		-	.59 (1.59)
<i>Non-criminal arrests (n = 943)</i>			
	ARIMA(2,1,0) ₁₂	ARIMA(1,1,0) ₁₂	ARIMA(1,1,0) ₁₂ with intervention
Constant	-1.96** (.60)	-1.99*** (.56)	-1.30 (.78)
AR(1)	-.54*** (.14)	-.59*** (.09)	-.62*** (.09)
AR(2)	.10 (.19)	-	-
Q-statistic	-	26.70	-
Intervention	-	-	-3.02 (1.96)

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. ARIMA(p,d,q) models are presented where p = autoregressive (AR) process, d = integrated process, and q = moving average (MA) process.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Since the identified ARIMA model for the full series included an autoregressive component, the researcher decided that such a component may also need to be modeled in the felony arrests series, so an ARIMA(1,0,0)₁₂ model was estimated. All included

terms were statistically significant, with the subsequent Q -statistic no longer being significant (37.17, $p = .33$). Assessments of the ACFs and PACFs of the model's residuals also indicated a good fit with lags at zero. The intervention term was then introduced to the $ARIMA(1,0,0)_{12}$ model. Results show that the intervention term *is* statistically significant ($p < .05$). The Q -statistic was not statistically significant (32.92, $p = .52$), and the ACFs and PACFs of the model's residuals corroborated good model fit. Thus, results indicate that the integration and expansion of Central County's SRO program in August 2016 had a significant, abrupt impact on felony arrests. Specifically, the results suggest that the intervention significantly increased school-based felony arrests of juvenile students.

Analyses were repeated for misdemeanor offenses. Figure 4 displays the line graph plotting the monthly number of school-based misdemeanor arrests. There were a total of 1046 misdemeanor arrests over the six-year period with 495 occurring pre-intervention, compared to 551 occurring post-intervention, which means there was an 11 percent increase in misdemeanor arrests. This is notably smaller than the percentage increase in felony arrests. There was a minimum of zero monthly misdemeanor arrests and a maximum of 33. The mean number of monthly misdemeanor arrests was 14.53. Like the full arrest time series, there is a clear indication of 12-month seasonality present in the line graph and there does not appear to be an abrupt shift in the line's trend in August 2016.

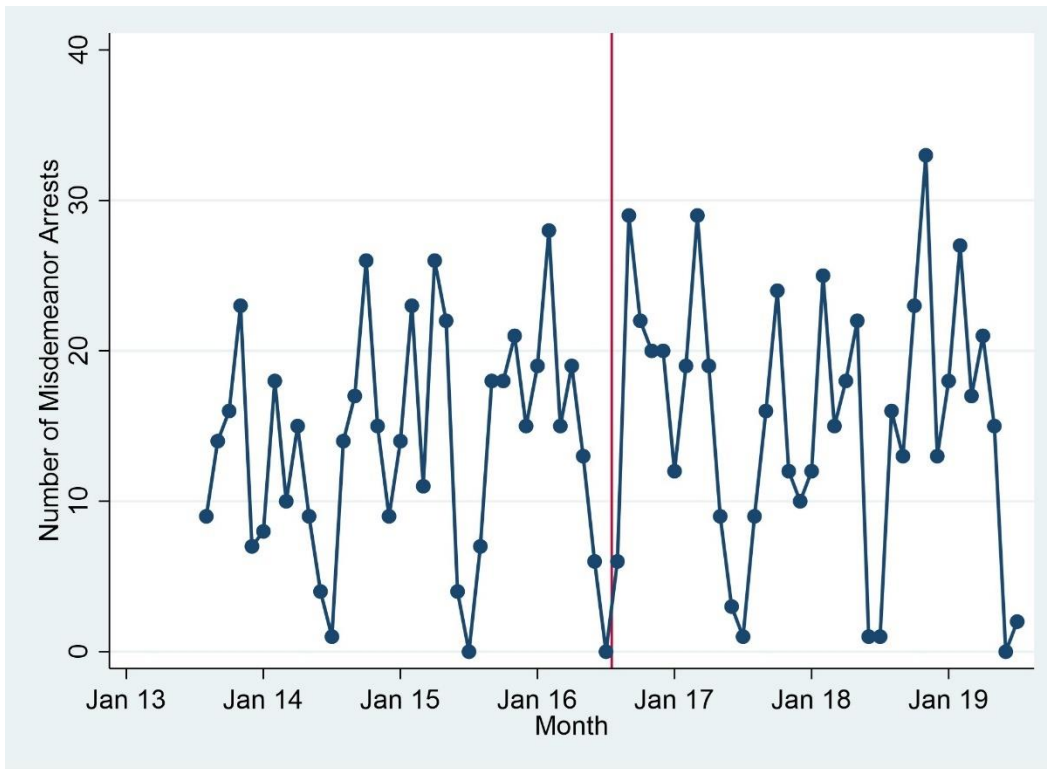


Figure 4: Number of School-Based Misdemeanor Arrests by Month (n = 1046)

The ACFs and PACFs mimicked those of the overall time series, confirming the presence of seasonality, but also suggesting the need to model an AR(2) process. Likewise, the Dickey-Fuller test ($Z(t) = -5.63, p < .001$) indicated that the series is stationary. Accordingly, an ARIMA(2,0,0)₁₂ model was estimated. All included terms were statistically significant, while the result of the Q -statistic test was not significant ($36.77, p = .34$), suggesting a good model fit. Further assessments of the model's residuals (ACFs, PACFs) supported model fit. Results of the final model indicate that, similar to the overall time series for arrests, the intervention did not have a statistically significant impact on school-based misdemeanor arrests

Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the monthly number of non-criminal arrests during the six-year period. There were 943 non-criminal arrests with 583 occurring pre-intervention, while 360 occurred post-intervention (a 38.25% decrease). Monthly non-criminal arrests ranged from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 36. The mean monthly number of non-criminal arrests was 13.09. The series is visually different from the previous three, as there appears to be a visible trend downwards. There is no abrupt shift in the series' trend in August 2016, rather, it appears as though the monthly number of non-criminal arrests was decreasing in the previous school year (2015-16). However, the presence of seasonality remains, with the summer months regularly experiencing minimal to no arrests.

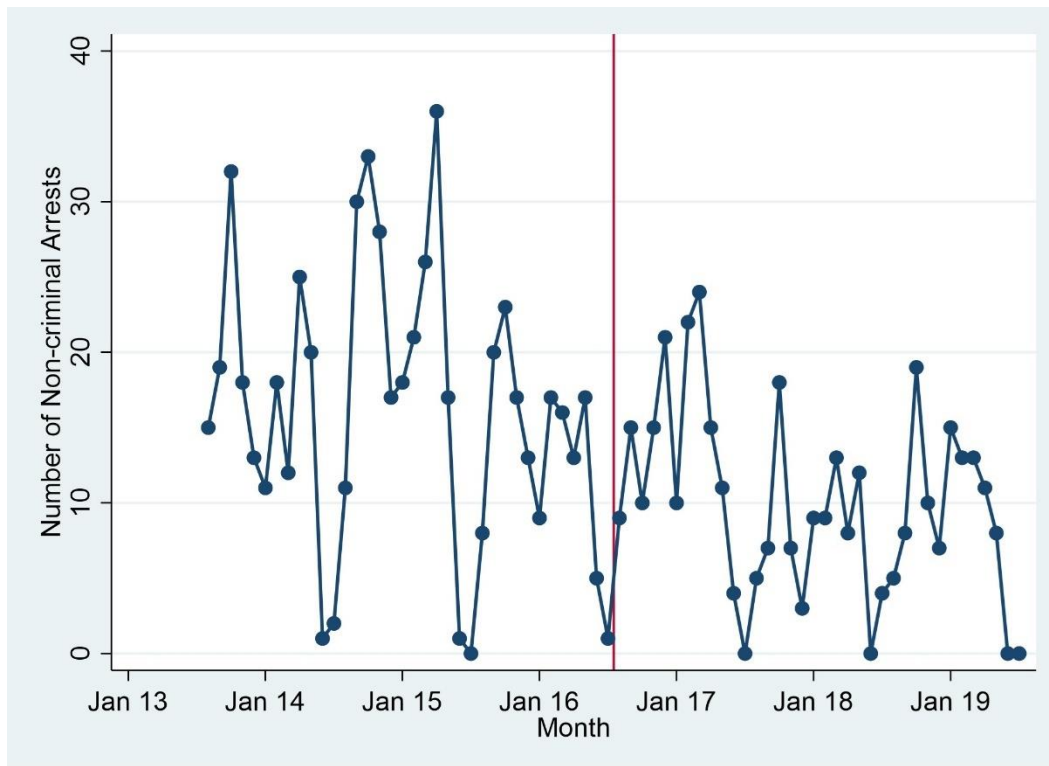


Figure 5: Number of School-Based Non-Criminal Arrests by Month (n = 943)

Results of the ARIMA models for non-criminal arrests are presented in Table 3. The ACFs and PACFs for the series once again suggested an AR(2) or MA(1) process, with the first lag of the ACFs being non-zero, and the first two lags of the PACFs being non-zero. Results of the Dickey-Fuller test ($Z(t) = -4.28, p < .001$) suggested that a unit root was *not* present. This was also suggested by results of the KPSS test (test statistic at each lag were less than the critical values) and the Phillips-Perron test for a unit root ($Z(\rho) = -29.79, Z(t) = -4.21, p < .001$). However, these tests are in direct conflict with the line graph providing visual support for a downward trend needing to be modeled (i.e., inclusion of $d = 1$).

The researcher initially modeled ARIMA (2,0,0)₁₂, ARIMA(0,0,1)₁₂, ARIMA(1,0,0)₁₂, however model residuals indicated an ill fit for all three models.¹⁹ Guidance provided by McDowall and colleagues (2019) that such problems may be due to the model needing to be differenced, plus the line graph demonstrating a downward trend, led the researcher to estimate an ARIMA(2,1,0)₁₂ model. Results showed that the second AR term was not statistically significant, and thus, a different model was needed. The researcher subsequently removed the second AR term and estimated an ARIMA(1,1,0)₁₂ model. Results demonstrated that all included components were statistically significant. The Q -statistic was not statistically significant (26.70, $p = .53$), and the ACFs and PACFs of the model's residuals supported appropriate model fit.

Lastly, the intervention term was added to the model. Neither the constant term (-1.30, $p = .10$), nor the intervention term (-3.02, $p = .12$) were statistically significant,

¹⁹ These models are not presented in the table but are available upon request.

meaning the implementation of the new SRO program did not have a statistically significant impact on school-based non-criminal arrests. With felony arrests experiencing a statistically significant impact, but misdemeanor and non-criminal offenses not significantly impacted, results do not provide support for H₂.

Regarding H₃, preliminary analyses of arrested students' age indicated that the variable was missing in 263 (10.23%) of cases. Of those cases where age is reported, only 36 (1.40%) cases involved a student aged 11 and under (elementary school aged students). Accordingly, ITSA is not possible. There were 17 students arrested pre-intervention, compared to 19 post-intervention (increase of 11.76%). Although the expansion of SROs was largely experienced in the elementary schools of Central County, there was no corresponding drastic increase in arrests of younger students, and H₃ is not supported.

Results of Analyses for School-Based Baker Act Apprehensions

Preliminary analyses of the school-based Baker Act apprehensions are reported in Table 4. There were 1455 school-based Baker Act apprehensions of juveniles in the county over the six-year period. The Central County Sheriff's Office was responsible for 58.2 percent of the apprehensions. Female students comprised 52.9 percent of apprehensions. A majority (67.2%) of Baker Act apprehensions involved White students. Apprehended juveniles ranged in age from 5 to 17-years-old, with a mean age of 13.05. This age is noticeably two years younger than the mean age of arrested students.

Table 4: School-Based Baker Act Apprehensions Pre- and Post-Intervention

	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention	Total
<i>Agency n (%)</i>			
Baxter Lake PD	16 (55.2%)	13 (44.8%)	29
Central County SO	363 (42.9%)	484 (57.1%)	847
Highland Creek PD	67 (72%)	26 (28%)	93
Lakeview PD	64 (42.1%)	88 (57.9%)	152
Nolan PD	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	5
Palm Hills PD	8 (53.3%)	7 (46.7%)	15
Santana PD	35 (36.5%)	61 (63.5%)	96
Windsor PD	65 (29.8%)	153 (70.2%)	218
<i>Age M (SD)</i>	13.19 (2.40)	12.95 (2.69)	13.05 (2.57)
<i>Race n (%)</i>			
White	408 (41.9%)	565 (58.1%)	973
Non-White	209 (44.0%)	266 (56.0%)	475
<i>Sex n (%)</i>			
Male	269 (39.3%)	415 (60.7%)	684
Female	350 (45.5%)	420 (54.5%)	770
<i>Total apprehensions n (%)</i>	619 (42.5%)	836 (57.5%)	1455

Note. The student's age is missing in two cases, sex in one case, and race in seven cases.

Unlike student arrests, school-based Baker Act apprehensions increased post-intervention. Specifically, there were 619 apprehensions pre-intervention, compared to

836 post- intervention, resulting in an increase of 35.1 percent. Table 4 demonstrates that five of the agencies apprehended more students post-intervention. As a reminder, Highland Creek PD's substantial decrease is unsurprising since they no longer had full-time SROs in their schools after the 2016-17 school year. Of note, much like their arrest numbers, Windsor PD experienced a large increase in apprehensions post-intervention of 135.4 percent.

Bivariate relationships were analyzed between when the apprehension occurred (pre- or post-intervention) and student demographic characteristics. Results from a *t*-test suggest that the mean age of apprehended students before ($M = 13.19$, $SD = 2.40$) the intervention is significantly greater than after ($M = 12.95$, $SD = 2.69$) the intervention [$t(1455) = 1.71$, $p < .05$], but the effect size is small (Cohen's $d = .09$). Results from a chi-square test indicated a statistically significant association between when the apprehension occurred and the student's sex [$\chi^2(1, N = 1554) = 5.56$, $p < .05$; Cramer's $V = .06$]. Apprehensions of male students increased by 54.3 percent after the intervention, while apprehensions of female students increased by 20 percent. Finally, a chi-square test suggested that there is no significant association between when the apprehension occurred and students' race [$\chi^2(2, N = 1448) = .56$, $p = .46$]. White students and non-White students experienced increases in Baker Act apprehensions post-intervention of 38.48 percent and 27.27 percent respectively.

The dependent variable of interest for the time series analysis was plotted into a line graph for visual inspection, displayed in Figure 6. The monthly number of Baker Act apprehensions ranged from zero to 51 with a mean of 20.21. A 12-month seasonality is apparent with few to no apprehensions occurring in the summer months of June and July.

There is a discernible trend upward, but it appears as though this trend was present prior to the intervention in August 2016, as there is no abrupt shift in the line's trend during that time.

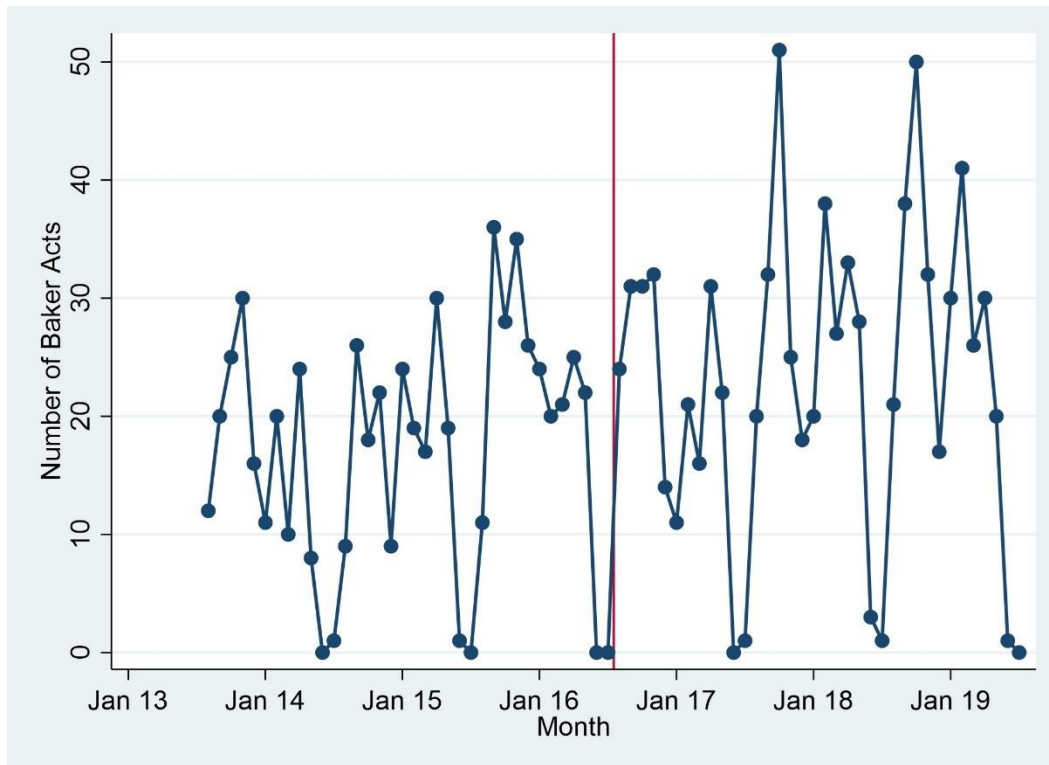


Figure 6: Number of School-Based Baker Act Apprehensions by Month (N = 1455)

Preliminary tests were conducted to identify the appropriate model to estimate. The ACFs and PACFs confirmed the presence of 12-month seasonality in the series, and recommended either a MA(1) or AR(2) process. Once again, results of the Dickey-Fuller and KPSS tests suggested that the series is stationary. However, the visible upward trend in the line graph, and recommendations in the literature imply the need to include $d = 1$ in the model in order to difference the series and account for the trend.

Results from the three estimated models are presented in Table 5. First, an ARIMA(2,1,0)₁₂ model was estimated. The second-order AR term was not statistically significant. Next, ARIMA(0,1,1)₁₂ was estimated. All included terms were statistically significant. The *Q*-statistic was not statistically significant (36.36, *p* = .13), indicating an appropriate model had been achieved. Further assessments of the residuals (ACFs, PACFs) supported a sufficient model. Subsequently, the intervention term was introduced to the model. Results show that the intervention term is not statistically significant (-3.13, *p* = .22), suggesting that the intervention in August 2016 did not significantly impact the monthly number of school-based Baker Act apprehensions. Rather, it appears as though the number was steadily increasing prior to the intervention, and H₄ is not supported.

Table 5: Time Series Analyses for Monthly School-Based Baker Act Apprehensions (N = 1455)

	ARIMA(2,1,0) ₁₂	ARIMA(0,1,1) ₁₂	ARIMA(0,1,1) ₁₂ with intervention
Constant	2.16*** (.62)	2.23*** (.58)	2.98** (.87)
AR(1)	-.45** (.17)	-	-
AR(2)	-.27 (.15)	-	-
MA(1)	-	-.48** (.18)	-.46* (.19)
<i>Q</i> -statistic	-	36.36	-
Intervention	-	-	-3.13 (2.55)

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. ARIMA(p,d,q) models are presented where p = autoregressive (AR) process, d = integrated process, and q = moving average (MA) process.

p* < .05 *p* < .01 ****p* < .001

To address the sub-hypothesis of a significant impact to elementary school aged students, data needed to be disaggregated to compare the monthly number of Baker Act

apprehensions for younger students to older students. The number of students falling into each age category of 5-years-old to 17-years-old pre- and post-intervention is displayed in Table 6. A greater number of students aged 11 and under were apprehended over the six-year period ($n = 379$) when compared to arrests for the same age group ($n = 36$). Students aged 11 and under comprised 26 percent of the apprehensions over the time period of interest, and thus, *were* a substantial portion of all apprehensions. However, this number continues to be too low to feasibly engage in ITSA due to a lack of variation, with many of the monthly observations falling between zero and five. Descriptively, it is important to note that the post-intervention percentage increase in apprehensions for students aged 11 and under was 75 percent, while the increase for students aged 12-through 17-years-old was 24 percent, which provides preliminary support for H₅.

Table 6: Ages of Apprehended Juvenile Students Pre- and Post-Intervention

Age of student	Pre-intervention Apprehensions (<i>n</i>)	Post-intervention Apprehensions (<i>n</i>)	Total (<i>n</i>)	Cumulative percent
5-years-old	2	0	2	0.1%
6-years-old	2	8	10	0.8%
7-years-old	8	17	25	2.5%
8-years-old	13	29	42	5.4%
9-years-old	17	55	72	10.4%
10-years-old	32	57	89	16.5%
11-years-old	64	75	139	26.1%
12-years-old	99	82	181	38.5%
13-years-old	93	132	225	54.0%
14-years-old	89	113	202	67.9%
15-years-old	80	103	183	80.5%
16-years-old	71	91	162	91.7%
17-years-old	47	74	121	100.0%

Note. The individual's age was missing in two cases.

The results presented in this chapter do not provide support for four of the five hypotheses. Neither the full time series for school-based arrests nor Baker Act apprehensions were significantly impacted by the creation and implementation of Central County's newly integrated SRO program. The only statistically significant impact detected in the data was for felony school-based arrests, which experienced an increase post-intervention. However, important trends were identified in the data, such as a substantial decrease in arrests for non-criminal offenses, Baker Act apprehensions steadily increasing over the six-year time period, and a substantively significant increase in apprehensions of younger students. Unfortunately, sub-hypotheses regarding

elementary school aged students were unable to be statistically tested due to low numbers of such students appearing in both datasets, but especially for school-based arrests. The next chapter connects the quantitative results with the qualitative findings, discusses the implications of results, addresses the limitations of the current study, and finally, provides directions for future research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When the premise of this dissertation was initially conceived, the county under study was in the minority regarding their commitment to assign an SRO to every school in the county. At the time, there was an accumulating body of research questioning SROs' contribution to school safety, as well as a growing recognition and concern for the school-to-prison pipeline. However, there are several limitations to the body of SRO research, and this study sought to contribute to the school policing literature by addressing some of these limitations. This included the critical exclusion of SROs assigned to elementary schools in empirical research, a lack of data collected from the SROs' themselves to explore their responsibilities and activities, a paucity of research exploring SRO training, few longitudinal studies examining SROs' impact over time, a scant number of studies analyzing the relationship between SROs and school-based arrests, and no studies assessing school-based Baker Act apprehensions. The researcher designed this mixed methods dissertation to investigate this newly integrated and expanded SRO program in Central County, Florida to supply policymakers, SRO programs, and school communities with useful information to guide their decision-making surrounding law enforcement presence in the schools.

The qualitative strand aimed to answer two research questions. First, what are the responsibilities, duties, and/or roles of the SROs? Second, how are SROs prepared for undertaking these responsibilities? Objectives included exploring the personal and professional backgrounds of the SROs, investigating the training SROs complete as well as their perceptions of the training, identifying the activities of the SROs, examining the

SROs' perceptions of their roles and duties, and finally, exploring whether, and how, SROs' respond to student misbehavior and mental health issues. These objectives were met through the analysis of data collected via participant observations of SRO training requirements and interviews with the SROs and chain-of-command.

Qualitative findings demonstrated that the primary role of the SROs is safety and security. The contract with the school board, training completed by the SROs, and SROs' reported activities all emphasized safety and security functions. Moreover, the SROs' perceptions of their responsibilities indicated that their primary duty is maintaining the security of the school to keep the students and staff safe. A secondary role for the SROs was identified, with SROs indicating an expectation to engage in positive interactions with the school community. These positive interactions took different forms with SROs describing mentorship, building rapport, and acting as an agent for change. However, there was a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the execution of these roles and responsibilities, especially the issue of whether and how SROs are involved in student disciplinary matters. Additionally, interviews indicated that as a part of their responsibilities the SROs do respond to both student misbehavior and mental health problems, with the data suggesting that SROs' responses are influenced by other actors such as school administrators, parents, chain-of-command, and prosecutors.

SROs identified how their position can be distinguished from other law enforcement positions and indicated that not just anyone can work as an SRO, emphasizing the need for careful screening and selection. The SROs noted how personal characteristics such as being a parent, age, and law enforcement experience should all be considered in the SRO selection process. Furthermore, the ability to work in a school

context and effective communication skills were identified as being critical to the SRO position. Some SROs even suggested that a thorough vetting of officers for these factors is more important than completion of specialized training. Nevertheless, the SROs in Central County were required to complete certain training programs, which were described in Chapter 5. Field notes from the participant observations of these training requirements and the interviews with the SROs provided evidence that there were some issues with training, including an inefficient use of training time, lack of participant engagement, ineffective instruction and classroom management, and omission of critical topics relevant to the SRO position, especially youth mental health and ESE students.

The quantitative strand analyzed whether the expansion of SROs affected the number of school-based arrests and school-based Baker Act apprehensions of juvenile students. Results of ITSA indicated that the integration and expansion of the county's SRO program in August 2016 did not have an abrupt, statistically significant impact on overall student arrests. Contrary to the proffered hypothesis, arrests *decreased* after the intervention. Disaggregating the data by offense type showed that arrests for both felony and misdemeanor offenses increased after the intervention, while arrests for non-criminal offenses decreased. ITSA for the disaggregated time series revealed that contrary to the stated hypothesis, the intervention significantly impacted felony arrests, but not arrests for misdemeanor or non-criminal offenses.

Regarding school-based Baker Act apprehensions, there was an increase after the intervention, but results of ITSA showed that the intervention did not have an abrupt, statistically significant impact. Rather, it appears that such apprehensions had been steadily increasing prior to August 2016, and thus, the corresponding hypothesis was not

supported. However, apprehensions of students aged 11 and under did increase by 75 percent after the intervention. The following section merges the two strands to compare findings and discuss the extent to which they converge or diverge.

Integration of the Qualitative and Quantitative Strands

In a convergent mixed methods design, although data collection and analyses for the strands occur separately, findings from the two strands should ultimately be merged for further analyses and interpretation. This section integrates the two strands of this dissertation to draw comparisons, thereby providing a more robust understanding of the findings than could be achieved by either strand alone. Overall, the integration of the two strands revealed that the findings from the qualitative strand are congruent with the results from the quantitative strand, providing some insights for the results.

School-Based Arrests

Results from the statistical analyses demonstrated that the intervention did not have a statistically significant impact on the monthly number of all school-based arrests of juvenile students. Instead, it appears that total monthly arrest numbers were somewhat stable throughout the six-year period. The qualitative data lend support for this finding. First, as described previously, the middle and high schools in Central County all had an SRO presence prior to the intervention, meaning that the part of the intervention addressing SRO expansion was primarily experienced at the elementary school level. Interviews with the SROs assigned to elementary schools overwhelmingly indicated that these SROs do not arrest students. Out of the 18 SROs indicating that they had not arrested a student at their assigned school, 17 were assigned to elementary schools.

Importantly, a minority of SROs assigned to elementary schools did indicate having arrested a student, however, it was suggested that such incidents were extremely rare and circumstance specific. For example, SRO CB described the situation leading to a felony arrest for battery on a teacher where they felt as though they had no choice but to arrest the student:

The student threw his desk, his whole, one of these desks [pointed to desk], lifted it, threw it at the teacher, and as she turned and dodged the desk, he tackled her. He's taller than her, bigger than her, tackled her, put her in a reverse chokehold, was strangling her, while strangling her he rammed her into the chalkboard and was holding the back of her hair ramming her forehead against the chalkboard, yelling, "I'm going to rip your throat out! I'm going to kill you!"

Due to the serious nature of the incident and the teacher's request for charges, SRO CB indicated that an arrest was necessary, but they also noted the atypical occurrence of such an incident within their elementary school telling the researcher that "arrest is a last resort as I don't want to put these kids in jail." This means that even with a handful of arrests occurring in the elementary schools, an equilibrium was maintained in that the same SROs arresting students prior to the intervention, were mostly the ones arresting students after the intervention. So, although "safety and security" was consistently expressed as the primary responsibility of the SROs across school level and types, this did not necessarily translate to formal actions (i.e., arrests) when responding to student misbehavior.

However, results from the quantitative analyses did demonstrate some differences based on the law enforcement agency of the arresting officer, revealing that four of the agencies had a greater number of school-based arrests after the intervention. This increase was substantial in some cases such as Lakeview Police Department experiencing

an increase of 97.1 percent and Windsor Police Department with an increase of 162.8 percent. Interviews were conducted with SROs from both agencies, but unfortunately, not as many as the researcher had hoped. Participation rates for both agencies were less than 50 percent, with approximately 43 percent of the Lakeview SROs agreeing to participate in an interview, and only 27 percent of Windsor SROs. Accordingly, drawing comparisons is difficult.

Nevertheless, the qualitative data provide some information allowing for cautious comparisons to be drawn between the perceptions and actions of the SROs employed by these two municipalities and those serving the sheriff, but also what may be critical differences in supervision. First, all but one of the interviewed SROs assigned to middle and high schools reported that they had arrested students, however, most expressed a reluctance to do so or some indication of using arrest as a “last resort.” As indicated in the qualitative findings, this was especially true of SROs assigned to elementary schools who seemed to readily embrace the identified secondary role of engaging in positive interactions. Interestingly, the SROs assigned to the high schools in Lakeview and Windsor expressed no such hesitation surrounding arresting students and indicated that they were frequently doing so. One of these SROs also discussed being heavily involved in disciplinary matters, so much so that they engaged in writing referrals. These SROs were also not present during the FDLE Basic SRO course where Sgt. KL discussed the SROs needing to avoid the criminalization of student misconduct.

Further, as discussed in Chapter 5, there were no policies in place regarding school-based arrests and it was made clear to the researcher that at the time of data collection, the SROs in Central County had a great deal of discretion when deciding

whether to arrest students. Although the Student Code of Conduct discussed in Chapter 5 describes zero-tolerance offenses, these only relate to school administrators' responses to student misconduct. Yet, SROs suggested the existence of zero-tolerance offenses for which they always arrested students. This was evident in the interviews with some of the SROs in Lakeview and Windsor, but especially those working in the high schools. Specifically, weapon possession, drug possession, and fights were mentioned as zero-tolerance offenses. SRO MR, a Windsor SRO, stated: "At the high schools, they have zero tolerance for fights. In the middle school, zero tolerance for fights. So, if somebody fights, we get involved and they go to [the juvenile detention facility]." They then indicated that the week prior there "was a huge fight" in the high school and they "took all of them to jail." This resulted in seven students being arrested with no consideration for factors such as who initiated the fight or extent of involvement. Similarly, SRO SV, a Lakeview SRO, described a situation where they arrested a student with a knife in their car that was parked in the school parking lot. SRO SV recognized that school administrators were upset with them for arresting the student because they were a "straight A kid" with "no criminal history." SRO SV claimed to have "no choice." Thus, discrepancies in school-based arrest numbers may have arisen in Central County due to the SROs creating and enforcing their own zero-tolerance policies.

Importantly, although the school board entered into an agreement with the sheriff's office to create the SSU and appoint the Captain of the SSU as the district's Public Safety and Security Manager, the municipal SROs continued to have their own chain-of-command within their law enforcement agencies. This means that although the creation and formalization of the SSU in August 2016 resulted in the integration of all

SRO programs in the county for purposes of uniform policies, procedures, and training, the municipal SROs' direct supervisors were not a part of the SSU. Such a situation allows for discrepancies in whether and how supervisors enforce the mandates of the contracts, as well as the expectations for subordinate SROs. For example, all SROs in the county were present for the Wraparound training sessions observed by the researcher in 2017 and 2018. During these training sessions, the Lieutenant of the SSU discussed the need to track the number of arrests occurring at schools because "they want to make sure that they are avoiding arrest as much as possible." (Field note, 8/7/17). Relatedly, as mentioned above, Sgt. KL emphasized avoiding the criminalization of student misbehavior. Never in attendance during any of the observed training sessions were the direct supervisors of the municipal SROs. Accordingly, it was SSU (i.e., sheriff's office) chain-of-command pushing the SROs to avoid formal responses to student misbehavior, and it is unclear whether direct supervisors of the SROs employed by the municipal law enforcement agencies were aware of this goal and/or emphasized it to their SROs. However, such a situation provides a plausible explanation for why SROs employed by the sheriff had less school-based arrests of juveniles after the intervention, while SROs from four of the municipal agencies increased their arrests.

Results from the quantitative analyses also demonstrated differences based on the type of offense. There was an abrupt, statistically significant increase in arrests for felony offenses post-intervention. There are some findings allowing for speculation as to why this increase was experienced. One is the presentation made by the prosecutor during the Wraparound training in August 2017. As described in Chapter 5, it was implied by the prosecutor that there had been an increase in charges related to cell phone thefts in the

previous school year, which they announced to the SROs would not be formally processed and to stop sending them such charges. At the time, the threshold for felony larceny in Florida was \$300, an amount easily reached by the cost of most smart phones. This means felony larceny charges for cell phone theft may have been a contributing factor.

Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 5, batteries are one of the most common offenses SROs respond to with formal action. When a battery occurs against a school employee, or against the SRO when attempting an arrest, the battery is elevated to a felony. During an interview with one of the SROs, they mentioned a meeting that was held at some point during the 2016-17 school year with school board employees, all SROs, and SSU chain-of-command addressing what was perceived by the school district as the overuse of arrest against students, but especially ESE students. This was brought up in relation to the interviewed SRO arresting ESE students for battery against a teacher. Several other SROs mentioned arresting students for battery on school staff. For example, SRO RL noted: “The only felony arrest I’ve had here, I had a battery on a school employee and the school employee wished to press charges, and we don’t have much discretion. I had probable cause, a video, admission, and injuries.” Thus, there seemed to be some recognition of problematic arrests that were addressed during the first year of the SSU, and it appears that some of these arrests were felonies where SROs reported having less discretion, but additionally, the elevated seriousness may have been due to the school context (i.e., school staff as alleged victims).

All interviews of SROs were completed during the 2017-18 school year. Inspection of the line graph for felony arrests in Chapter 6 shows a rather large spike in

felony arrests occurring the following school year, especially in January 2019. Since there were no interviews corresponding to this particular time period, the researcher is unable to directly connect the qualitative data collected in 2017 and 2018 to this increase in 2019. However, due to another research project involving the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, the researcher was made aware that this spike in felony arrests was experienced across the entire state of Florida²⁰, due to Florida statutes making the possession of cannabis or THC concentrate a third-degree felony²¹. With the increasing popularity of e-cigarettes and vaping among high school students during the time period under study (Johnston et al., 2018), this statute had a direct impact on juvenile arrests. The researcher was able to find corresponding local news reports where Central County school officials warned parents and students that the SROs would be arresting students caught with THC concentrate and the fact that such possession is a felony offense. It is unclear whether the SSU or the school district was behind this push, but as noted in Chapter 3, and supported by the findings of this dissertation, officers are more likely to arrest when encountered with a felony offense. Further, an important theme extracted from the data was that school officials were influential to SRO decision-making in that they acted as gatekeepers but also provided evidence and additional information making arrests easier. This was especially the case in possession of marijuana cases, meaning the spike in arrests for a new felony marijuana possession charge is unsurprising.

²⁰ Five-year trend data in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice's Delinquency in Schools dashboard reflects this by selecting "felony drug violations" in the "offenses" dropdown menu. <https://www.djj.state.fl.us/research/reports-and-data/interactive-data-reports/delinquency-in-schools/school-delinquency-profile>

²¹ Florida Stat. § 893.03(1)(c) identifies cannabis concentrate as a schedule I narcotic, while Florida Stat. § 893.13(6)(b) makes possession of cannabis concentrate a felony in the third degree.

Accordingly, the continued increase in felony arrests post-intervention appears to be partially explained by the enforcement of Florida statutes making possession of THC concentrate used for vaping purposes a felony offense.

Lastly, there appeared to be a steady decline in the number of arrests for non-criminal offenses throughout the six-year period. These offenses were mostly related to violations of probation. The *School Survey on Crime and Safety* does not inquire about violations of probation, and the studies examining school-based arrests reviewed in Chapter 2 did not appear to include these offenses in their analyses (e.g., Owens, 2017; Theriot, 2009). However, results from the quantitative analyses demonstrate that such offenses *should* be considered when examining school-based arrests as there were 943 non-criminal arrests of juveniles occurring in the schools over the six-year period. This means such arrests occurred more frequently than arrests for felonies ($n = 573$) and were almost as common as misdemeanor arrests ($n = 1046$).

It was clear during interviews with the SROs that arrests for violation of probation are common because of the presence of the SRO within the school and the ability of the JPOs and SROs to efficiently share information regarding students on probation and their behaviors. Importantly, students on probation could be violated for receiving a disciplinary referral, truancy, tardiness, or other behaviors that would not typically lead to an arrest. Although not required to include much detail in their description of the charges, the qualitative variable in the arrest data describing the charge shows many instances of students being violated for reasons related to school discipline.

This finding was corroborated in the interviews with SROs currently or previously assigned to Odyssey Alternative School²², and was also mentioned by SROs assigned to high schools. SRO CT mentioned that during their time at Odyssey “a majority” of arrests were for violation of probation because “over half the school is on probation.” SRO CT also described how when they were at Odyssey, they “could arrest probably six people a day if I really wanted to.” Relatedly, SRO HD was also previously assigned to Odyssey and discussed how the probation status of students was considered when responding to student misbehavior. They noted: “If the kids did something that merited a referral and they were on probation, that’s when I have to get involved and make an arrest for a violation.” They further described how the administrators were not privy to who was on probation and would rely on them for such information creating concerns for the SRO regarding improperly influencing the school administrators’ disciplinary decisions:

Because I at first let them know who was on probation, and I started realizing not to do that because it seemed like that kind of influenced their decisions on some of the kids. I didn’t think that was right, so I kept it to myself. I would even ask them, “How many referrals has he gotten? What were they for?” So, I wanted to know what [they] did to try to correct this behavior, and if we’ve given them too many chances, okay, it’s time to violate them.

An influential factor SROs consider during arrest decision-making is the probation status of students. For example, SRO KG discussed that most of the arrests occurring at their school were for probation violations and stated that they “would call the probation officer” to let them know when a student on probation received a referral, so

²² Alternative placement in the county for K-12 students who have been removed from their assigned, traditional school due to criminal/delinquent behavior.

that the JPO would either come out to the school to “hook a GPS monitor” on the student or request that they arrest for a violation. SRO AS and SRO SV both described JPOs calling them to check on students at their high schools. Accordingly, the number of arrests for violation of probation appears to be dependent on individual SROs and whether they share information with JPOs, want to violate students on probation when a school disciplinary matter arises, and how closely individual JPOs may monitor the youth under their supervision.

This is where the fifth theme identified in Chapter 5 is critical. It is clear from the data that in some of the schools in Central County, arrests *could* have occurred with much more frequency, especially for minor offenses such as violations of probation due to school infractions. SROs who are inflexible, do not have the patience to interact with students, and adopt a punitive approach within the school could easily drive an increase in arrest rates. However, with the creation of the SSU it appears that SRO selection was more thoughtful, which may have contributed to the experienced decrease in arrests for non-criminal offenses, while also not contributing to an explosion in misdemeanor arrests. Since schools such as Odyssey were staffed by an SRO employed by the sheriff during the time period under study, it is plausible that the combination of the SSU chain-of-command pushing for SROs to not criminalize student misbehavior, and better selection of SROs who were not seeking to repeatedly arrest students for violation of probation, may have contributed to the observed decreases in arrests for non-criminal offenses post-intervention.

School-Based Baker Act Apprehensions

Results from quantitative analyses demonstrated that Baker Act apprehensions are commonly occurring events in Central County schools with 1455 such apprehensions over the six-year period. Although ITSA indicated that the intervention did not have a statistically significant impact on the monthly number of these apprehensions, results demonstrated a 35 percent increase in school-based Baker Act apprehensions of juveniles post-intervention. These results were originally unsurprising since statewide data indicate that Baker Act apprehensions of children and adolescents have increased by 152 percent since 2001 (Christy et al., 2020). However, one unexpected finding is that the most recent report available indicates that the overall number of Baker Act apprehensions of youth under the age of 18 in Central County *decreased* during the time period of this study (2013-14 fiscal year through the 2018-19 fiscal year) by 9 percent (Christy et al., 2020). So, although results of ITSA showed no abrupt, significant impact on Baker Act apprehensions post-intervention, the large discrepancy between school-based apprehensions and overall apprehensions in the county provides preliminary support for the argument that SROs are substantially impacting these numbers.

Another interesting result was that apprehensions were more common among younger students when compared to arrest numbers. The mean age for school-based Baker Act apprehensions was 13.05, while the mean age for arrests was 15.10. This means arrests are a more common phenomenon for SROs assigned to high schools, while SROs assigned to all three school levels engage in Baker Act apprehensions.

The qualitative data support the increase in Baker Act apprehensions experienced post-intervention. For example, of the 40 interviewed SROs, 34 had apprehended a

student under Baker Act procedures at their current school, spanning all grade levels and types of schools. A few factors were identified in the qualitative findings providing some explanations for the increasing use of Baker Act apprehensions. First, apparent from the CIT training observed by the researcher is that the threshold for initiating a Baker Act apprehension is quite low, but further, there is no accountability if/when a Baker Act apprehension is inappropriate or unnecessary. Field notes from training observations indicate that participants believed that the only requirement to apprehend an individual under the Baker Act is the individual stating they are going to kill or harm themselves, and the training appeared to reinforce this belief. For example, the following notes are from the first day of CIT training:

The actual Baker Act apparently distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary examinations. Sgt. SK emphasized that at the [Central County Sheriff's Office] there are no voluntary Baker Acts. She essentially described this policy as a "CYA" strategy. She mentioned that there is "no such thing as a bad Baker Act" and that officers "cannot be sued" or charged for implementing Baker Act procedures. She further explained that she would prefer that a person be Baker Acted that may have possibly been a borderline case, rather than not Baker Acting the individual and having them kill themselves or others. She noted that the media will fixate on the fact that law enforcement had been called before the incident occurred. (Field note, 7/31/17)

Thus, the SROs and other LEOs in attendance were being instructed to involuntarily apprehend individuals although the statute does allow for other methods of seeking an emergency mental health examination (e.g., voluntary examination, release to willing family member). Moreover, the instructor is suggesting that the officers should always err on the side of caution, not because it is in the best interest of the individual experiencing mental health issues, but to protect themselves and their agency.

Of critical note, at no point over the four days of CIT training did anyone cover the impact a Baker Act apprehension may have on the individual being apprehended. There was no discussion regarding the trauma individuals, but especially young children, may experience from being handcuffed and transported via a patrol vehicle while they are dealing with a mental health issue. Relatedly, there was no mention of the financial costs associated with Baker Act procedures, although the individual and health insurance companies will be forced to cover this involuntary medical examination. There was also no distinction made between behaviors arising from a mental illness (a criteria for apprehensions) versus behaviors stemming from developmental disorders. Also concerning was that there was no acknowledgement of the permanent record created when apprehending individuals under the Baker Act. Instead, training participants continued to be fed the narrative that there is no “bad Baker Act,” and thus, no critical thinking on the part of LEOs is required to initiate such apprehensions.

These findings from the CIT training were in direct conflict with what the SROs were told during the Wraparound training a week later. The following field note was discussed in Chapter 5, but bears repeating here:

[Sgt. AO] wants to make sure that [SROs] are verifying that students they are Baker Acting actually understand what they mean when they say things like “I want to kill myself,” especially those students in elementary and middle school. [They] said, “We need to use our discretion” and determine that they are not just repeating something they heard elsewhere. (Field note, 8/9/17)

The directly conflicting guidance provided by differing sergeants provides further support for the existence of ambiguity in the SRO position, one of the major identified themes in this dissertation. Discrepancies in Baker Act apprehensions may easily occur between schools depending on which training sessions SROs attended and who’s

instruction the SRO decides to adopt. Many of the SROs seemed to incorporate the guidance provided by Sgt. AO in their reported responses to students encountering mental health problems, especially the SROs assigned to elementary schools. However, since there was such a substantial increase in the percentage of younger students apprehended post-intervention, this guidance was most likely not considered in every case. During discussions of decision-making for Baker Act apprehension purposes, SROs also mentioned concerns over liability, the ease of apprehending individuals under the Baker Act, and the idea of students saying the “magic words” as being sufficient for apprehension purposes, aligning with what was expressed during the CIT training. For example, when discussing Baker Act apprehensions, SRO BH stated, “Sometimes you have to do what we have to do liability wise. You don’t want to take that chance.” After noting that they apprehend more students than arrest, SRO LF stated, “Do I think a lot of the kids mean it? No. But do I have a foolproof plan if they say something like that to say I felt comfortable and I can go home now? No.” These interviews suggest that liability is a reason for apprehending students.

The low threshold for Baker Act apprehensions (and thus the ease of initiating such procedures) was apparent from training observations as well as the interviews with the SROs. During the YMHFA training, the instructor asked the SROs how they deal with youth suffering from mental health issues: “One [SRO] stated that they don’t interact with the kids in crisis. Once they say they are going to harm themselves or someone else ‘they’re going for a ride,’ alluding to a Baker Act.” (Field note, 8/6/18). During the training, SROs continued to suggest that if a student says the “magic words” they are not going to assess them, they are going to apprehend them and transport to the

Baker Act receiving facility. These comments and discussions were so prevalent that the researcher made the following notation: “It seems that the [SROs] are conditioned to Baker Act youth if there is *any* indication or mere utterance that the youth may harm themselves.” (Field note, 8/6/18).

These findings align with some interviews. For example, SRO ME indicated that if a student says the “golden words,” then school administrators do not want to “incur the liability,” and immediately involve the SRO with the expectation that they will apprehend the student. Similarly, SRO MR acknowledged the “very low criteria” of the Baker Act, and stated, “I heard them say it. Whether they meant it or not, we can’t take that chance.” Accordingly, the perceived low threshold required for Baker Act apprehensions, concerns surrounding liability, and training that overemphasizes these issues while ignoring other critical concerns, may all be contributing factors to the steady increase in Baker Act apprehensions.

Furthermore, the qualitative data suggest another factor possibly contributing to this steady increase in school-based Baker Act apprehensions. Several SROs mentioned the lack of mental health professionals in the schools, with some indicating that this results in their being the default responder when such problems arise. As noted in previous chapters, the lack of mental health support in the schools is a nationwide problem, with estimates from the 2015-16 school year indicating that 14 million students attended schools with a police presence, but no counselor, nurse, social worker, or psychologist (Whitaker et al., 2019). These numbers are projected to have worsened as states such as Florida devoted millions of more dollars to expanding the presence of school police after the shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School. This means

that although teachers or school administrators may prefer to send students experiencing mental health problems to a licensed clinical social worker or a school psychologist, this is not a possibility in many schools. The SROs may be an expedient solution for school administrators since they do have the powers provided under the Baker Act, and one of the themes identified in Chapter 5 was that school administrators act as gatekeepers and refer students experiencing a possible mental health problem to the SRO.

Importantly, SROs are not trained mental health professionals, and some recognize their limitations to responding to youth mental health problems. One of the most common responses when asked what the SROs needed more training in was Baker Act apprehensions of youth and related mental health issues. When discussing the prevalence of mental health problems in their high school, SRO EP claimed that these issues “take a good 80% of our day a lot of times.” They also described how determining whether a student meets the criteria is “difficult” and how they “need a doctorate in psychology to be able to function some days here.” Interviews with SROs indicated that none of the elementary schools in Central County had full-time mental health professionals on staff at the time of data collection. Instead, it appears that there were a handful of school psychologists each assigned to several elementary schools so that they may only be on each campus once a week. SRO KS discussed this problem in relation to their own work:

[The psychologist] is not on campus full time. We don't have a behavioral specialist. So, it's left to our administration to pick up those roles. Our guidance counselors are inundated with a slew of other things that sometimes [student mental health problems] get fluffed off as ODD, or on the spectrum, or this or that, or EBD. Sometimes these kids just need to sit down and talk to somebody, provide counseling more frequently to these kids, someone to talk to. It's difficult when you've got your school counselor who is doing 500 things, but yet you've

got a kid that really needs to talk to her, but she's tied up in a meeting. I do try to talk to the kids to the best of my abilities, but prime example, I have a kid whose father passed away, and he kept wanting to talk to me, which I have no issue with, but I couldn't give him the tools he needed to properly deal with the situation. I could only make suggestions and whatnot. I'm not a therapist.

Both SRO EP and SRO KS recognized that they are not specially trained mental health professionals yet are frequently the individuals having to respond to student mental health problems. SROs' minimal mental health training, plus an overreliance on them by school personnel due to a lack of mental health professionals, may be contributing to an increase in Baker Act apprehensions. As noted by SROs EP and KS, SROs are not therapists or doctors and may not know how to appropriately respond to students dealing with mental health crises, some of which may be temporary and adequately addressed through community-based resources rather than a Baker Act apprehension.

Accordingly, the findings from the qualitative data are congruent with the results of the quantitative analyses. Overall, arrests did not increase post-intervention, which is supported by the qualitative findings demonstrating that the SROs assigned to elementary schools typically do not respond formally to student misconduct. Possible explanations in the qualitative data for the increase in felony arrests and the corresponding decrease in arrests for non-criminal offenses were also explored, but generally show that the discretion provided to individual SROs may have a substantial influence on arrest rates. Lastly, the steady increase in school-based Baker Act apprehensions revealed in the quantitative data are supported by qualitative findings suggesting an overreliance on SROs to respond to student mental health issues, conflicting guidance provided during training sessions, and an understanding of Baker Act criteria that allows for easily made determinations.

Implications of the Findings

The results and findings provided in the section above and in Chapters 5 and 6 suggest several implications for the body of research examining school policing and the school-to-prison pipeline, but also theoretical contributions. There are also many implications to be drawn for policymakers, school policing programs, and school districts using SROs. This dissertation commenced data collection approximately 11 months after the implementation of the new SRO program. This means that there were growing pains, or a possible “resocialization” process (Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020) being experienced at the time. There may have also been a filtering out of SROs during the first year or two when discovering they were not a good fit for the position. Since data collection occurred in 2017 and 2018, Central County has instituted some important changes and taken great strides to improve their responses to youth, such as the implementation of a mobile crisis response team, adoption of more mental health training, and requiring parental approval for a Baker Act apprehension. Accordingly, implications discussed in this section may not be directly applicable to Central County, however, they are important considerations for other SRO programs.

In Central County, the primary role of the SROs was safety and security, and in many cases, this was the only role identified by SROs during interviews. Descriptions of the SROs’ responsibilities and activities indicated that “safety and security” encompassed both the law enforcer and emergency manager role described in the models for SRO role adoption (NASRO, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). Additionally, only SROs assigned to elementary schools had a recognized formal educator role. The contract between the school board and the law enforcement agencies did not delineate any other

formal roles, although interviews suggested that some SROs engaged in a secondary role of developing positive relationships with the school community. How the SROs went about this secondary role varied with some specifically mentioning mentoring, while others described “building rapport” or “building relationships.” There were also some SROs who envisioned this secondary role as an opportunity to change negative perceptions surrounding policing. The prominence of this secondary role during interviews with the SROs assigned to elementary schools provides a possible explanation for why there was no significant increase in overall arrests, especially of younger students.

These findings coincide with previous studies demonstrating that the law enforcer role of SROs is the most prominent (Coon & Travis, 2007, 2012; Hunt et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2016; Rhodes, 2019), but also that many SROs do not engage in any teaching (Kelly & Swezey, 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). The qualitative findings are also congruent with other research indicating that although there may not be recognition of a formal mentor/counselor role, SROs report engaging in “relationship building” or informal counseling (Barnes, 2016; Schlosser, 2016). The results from this study and those coming before it beg the question of why NASRO and their triad model continues to be mentioned and/or pushed as the ultimate authority on SRO role adoption. School policing researchers seem to have used the triad model for guidance when developing surveys and analyzing results, *but why?* NASRO’s website is clear that they developed the triad model, but do not provide any empirical support or reasoning for its existence or why they claim it is the “gold standard in school-based policing” (see <https://www.nasro.org/>). As discussed in Chapter 2, NASRO provides training that has

not been evaluated or discussed in the empirical literature, and they also appear to function as a quasi-lobbying or advocacy organization on behalf of SROs, since much of their work focuses on media appearances. They are not a research organization, membership is voluntary, and they do not have any authority over SROs and/or the agencies employing them. It seems that at this time enough evidence has been supplied demonstrating the need for scholars to return to the actual source by collecting data from SROs themselves, especially through the use of qualitative methods and systematic social observation techniques, to inquire as to the roles, responsibilities, and activities of SROs.

Of critical note is the continued existence of the “educator” role in the triad model. In Central County, the SROs assigned to middle, high, and alternative schools did not have a formal educator role and indicated during interviews that they did not teach. One high school SRO even reported that when presentations were requested by teachers on special topics, they would seek out other LEOs with the requisite knowledge to come to the class and give the guest presentation. These findings were unsurprising seeing as prior research shows that many SROs do not teach, but also if they do teach, a minimal amount of time is spent on such activities (Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; Kelly & Swezey, 2015; Kupchik, 2010; May & Higgins, 2011).

The notion of SROs as educators may be a holdover from the D.A.R.E. program of the 1980s and 1990s. However, at this point, it is well-known that D.A.R.E. was an expensive failure (Lynam et al., 1999; West & O’Neal, 2004). Yet, Central County adopted the Strive for Safety curriculum for their SROs to teach in the elementary schools, and it is unclear if or how the program addresses or improved the known problems with D.A.R.E., as at the time of data collection there were no publicly available

evaluations of the curriculum. If school districts and their SRO programs are going to continue to adopt a formal educator role for SROs, they need to ensure that SROs are properly prepared for this task. Teaching a classroom full of fifth graders is not an easy task that individuals can just be inserted into without proper training and guidance, an important factor that should be considered by SRO programs when deciding whether an educator role will be a part of their program.

This discussion also points to the findings of this dissertation demonstrating that SROs assigned to elementary schools have differing responsibilities (e.g., teaching) and reported engaging in different activities when compared to the SROs assigned to middle and high schools. SROs assigned to high schools were much more active when it came to formally responding to crime and delinquency, but also encountered more safety concerns such as possible weapons on campus or threats being made on social media. SROs claiming that the position is, or can be, “boring” were all assigned to an elementary school. It was also the SROs assigned to elementary schools who emphasized the secondary role for SROs of engaging in positive interactions with the students and greater school community. Indeed, SRO TP went as far as to claim that the SROs assigned to elementary schools “cannot work the high school level” due to the substantial differences in the positions.

These distinctions have implications for both research and school policing programs. First, as noted in Chapter 2, Florida alone had SROs assigned to over 1,800 elementary schools in the 2018-19 school year. The differences demonstrated in this dissertation, plus the increasing presence of SROs in elementary schools means that scholars should stop excluding this population from their studies of school policing

programs. Second, is the issue of selection and training for the SRO position. If school districts and their related SRO programs expect the responsibilities and activities of SROs to differ among school levels, they should tailor their selection criteria and their required training to those expectations. For example, the SROs assigned to elementary schools indicated much more engagement with the broader school community by assisting with PTA functions, fundraising for the school, leading the safety patrol program, helping in the cafeteria, etc. If a possible candidate has no interest in such work, they should not be assigned to an elementary school. In another example, child custody issues were mentioned as problematic and an area requiring more training by the SROs assigned to elementary schools, but SROs assigned to other school levels never mentioned this topic. The researcher noted little to no distinction being made to the varying SRO assignments during the observed training sessions, meaning that training appeared to assume that all SROs engaged in the same activities and were tasked with the same responsibilities. The interviews provide evidence that this was not the case in Central County.

Three of the publications produced by the national assessment of SRO programs supported by the U.S. Department of Justice in the early 2000s were introduced and referenced a great deal in Chapter 2 (Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005). Although published 12 years prior to data collection for the current study, findings continue to be pertinent and useful for SRO programs. The researchers provided eight essential criteria that should be considered for SRO candidates, which align with the findings of this study. The *SRO Program Guide* produced from the assessment states that “the qualifications and the personality of the SRO are likely to make or break the program,” so candidates should: like kids and be

able to work with them; have “the right demeanor and ‘people skills,’ including good communication skills”; have “experience as a patrol officer”; have the ability to work independently; must be “willing to work very hard”; “is—or can become—an effective teacher”; and have “above average integrity” (Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005, p. 47). These criteria mostly mirror the discussion of the identified theme in Chapter 5 that not just any LEO can be an SRO, making screening and selection critical. The *SRO Program Guide* also provides guidance for how to screen for these criteria including sample interview questions. The identified selection criteria and screening procedures should be adopted by SRO programs across the country, but it is unknown whether the findings from the national assessment were well disseminated and considered when creating new programs. The publications are all publicly available on the U.S. Department of Justice’s website, so school districts and law enforcement agencies do have easy access to them.

There is also the problem identified in this dissertation that finding individuals who meet these criteria can be difficult if law enforcement agencies are short-staffed. Both the SROs and sergeants indicated that the SSU had been encountering issues filling SRO positions due to a lack of applications, but also applicants not being a “good fit.” This means that SRO programs may want to consider instituting incentives to make the SRO position more tempting for those who may be considering the switch, and to make the applicant pool more competitive.

Chapter 5 identified several problems with the training SROs were required to complete that should be considered by school policing programs and school districts. SROs not completing specialized training for their position is a problem frequently identified and discussed in the literature (Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Martinez-Prather et al.,

2016; Strategies for Youth, 2019). Unlike these SRO programs, Central County can be lauded for incorporating training requirements into their contracts and actively scheduling such training. However, the findings from this study suggest that SRO programs need to give proper consideration to the time devoted to training, content of required training, and the selection of instructors and presenters.

First, hosting a training session for simply the sake of stating the SROs completed specialized training is not an efficient use of time and resources. As has already been noted, every law enforcement agency in the county was short-staffed when data was collected in 2017 and 2018. Further, a commonly identified complaint with the SRO position was the inability to use their paid time off (PTO) since they were essentially prohibited from using it when school is in session. This restricted the SROs to only using their accrued PTO during holiday breaks, spring break, and summer. However, if training sessions are always scheduled when school is not in session, the SSU was further restricting the SROs' ability to use their PTO. These factors mean that if the training is not useful or helpful to the SRO position, the SROs may have been better serving the community by assisting other units or allowing them some time for rest and relaxation prior to a new school year commencing. SRO programs should carefully consider how much training is needed, but also when it should be scheduled. For example, training programs that are accessed online and are self-paced, may be an avenue to explore to not constantly encroach on SROs' vacation time, but also allow for the SROs to assist other units during scheduled school breaks. Teacher workdays and weather make-up days are also possibilities for scheduling training sessions that can occur in a single day.

Second, although a training program may already be in existence, it does not automatically mean that the content will be pertinent to the SRO position or the context of the particular school district. In the current study, the FDLE Basic SRO course, CIT training, and YMHFA training all at first glance seemed to be directly applicable to the SRO position. However, there was a great deal of unrelated information reviewed as well as critical topics that were omitted. When deciding upon the required training for SROs, school policing programs should be seeking out evidence-based training, while also reviewing training curricula to ensure compatibility with the needs and expectations of their SRO program. Although many SRO programs may be implemented or expanded in response to fears surrounding events such as school shootings, the observations and interviews from this dissertation suggest that a hyperfocus on worst-case scenarios comes at the expense of preparation for the everyday scenarios the SROs will encounter. As noted, much of the training observed in 2017 and 2018 heavily emphasized safety and security topics, especially the Wraparound trainings where a great deal of time was spent on critical incident responses. This meant that topics identified by the SROs themselves as problematic to their daily activities and responsibilities, such as ESE students and responding to youth mental health issues, were not adequately covered. School districts and school policing programs should collect information from their SROs and school administrators regarding the problems they are encountering and adapt their training requirements to address these known issues.

The issue of training content is also related to the need for prepared and knowledgeable instructors. For example, in this study, it was clear that the FDLE Basic SRO course provided a minimal outline that is supposed to be supplemented by the

instructor. Yet, this did not occur in the observed training, but explains why the course came nowhere near the supposed 40 hours. The instructor was a sergeant of the SSU and informed the researcher that they did not know they were responsible for instructing the course until the week prior, leaving little opportunity for them to adequately prepare and supplement. The FDLE Basic SRO course would have provided an ideal opportunity to incorporate school administrators, ESE specialists, and/or school psychologists as presenters, to tailor the curriculum to Central County schools, but also ensure that the critical topics the SROs will frequently be encountering are covered.

Unlike many SRO programs across the country (Counts et al., 2018; Musu-Gillette et al., 2018), Central County did have a contract in place between the law enforcement agencies and the school board at the time of data collection. Scholars' arguments regarding the need for MOUs (e.g., Kim & Geronimo, 2010) assume that the relevant individuals are aware of the contents. The findings from this study demonstrate the futility of contracts or MOUs if no one reads or abides by them. Aligning with the results of other studies (Curran et al., 2019; Thurau & Wald, 2010), the SROs in Central County were not well-versed in the contents of the contract, with an SRO during one interview being completely unaware of its existence. Further, one of the sergeants of the SSU seemed to ignore that the contract explicitly prohibited SRO involvement in discipline. There were also complaints from some SROs that the school administrators and teachers seemed to be unaware of the contract which could create conflict, a problem identified in other studies of SROs (Barnes, 2016; Coon & Travis, 2007; Finn, Shively, et al., 2005; Glenn et al., 2019).

A contract assists the school district and school policing programs by outlining the expected roles, responsibilities, and duties of SROs thereby alleviating issues with role ambiguity or conflicting expectations among school personnel and SROs. As discussed in Chapter 2, the national assessment of SRO programs found that the failure to explicitly define and delineate the roles and responsibilities of the SRO in detail was the most common and “destructive mistake” made by the SRO programs (Finn, Shively, et al., 2005, p. 23). If the SROs are unclear regarding the expectations for their position, role ambiguity arises. Sheffer’s (1987) research conducted over 30 years ago also identified role ambiguity as a problem when evaluating the Boise SRO program. These issues continued to be identified in the current dissertation, once again leaving one to ponder whether empirical research is being disseminated to, and translated for, practitioners.

It is up to the upper-level management of both the school district and law enforcement agencies to ensure that the contents of contracts or MOUs are disseminated to all impacted parties, and that an opportunity is provided for responding to questions and concerns. All parties need to ensure that administrators, teachers, other school staff, SROs, and chain-of-command are on the same page regarding what is expected of the SRO. There was some indication during interviews that school administrators and/or teachers would improperly request that SROs intervene in disciplinary matters, a finding aligning with other studies of SROs (Barnes, 2016; Glenn et al., 2019). An SRO supervisor having little to no experience as an SRO and not spending much time on their subordinates’ campuses were findings of this study, with other research providing evidence that such circumstances may be common (Clark, 2011; Finn, Shively et al.,

2005; Thureau & Wald, 2010). This means it cannot be automatically expected that SRO supervisors are well-versed and knowledgeable surrounding the SRO role. These issues could be ameliorated through proper distribution and discussion of executed contracts.

The reference to upper-level management introduces another important implication of this dissertation. The disparities between the SROs employed by the sheriff's office and those employed by the municipal police departments brings up the issue of whether there should be a single, unified chain-of-command supervising the SROs in the county. At the time of data collection, there was an observed obvious tension between the two populations, with SROs employed by the sheriff suggesting that they were held to higher standards and were subjected to differing expectations than municipal SROs. There was some evidence of this during discussions of certain mandates in the contract, where Windsor Police Department SROs had a completely different interpretation compared to what was reviewed in training and by other SROs during interviews.

Moreover, as discussed above, there was some identified variation based on law enforcement agency in school-based Baker Act apprehensions and arrests of students. One possible explanation offered for the variation in school-based arrests was individual SROs appearing to institute their own zero-tolerance policies or adopting school administrators' preferences for zero-tolerance policies, an issue also observed by Kupchik (2010) in his ethnographic study of four high schools. This means students attending one school could be automatically arrested for an offense such as fighting, but solely receive school discipline for the same offense at a neighboring school in the same county. The contract at the time did not explicitly provide for countywide zero-tolerance

policies that SROs were expected to follow, instead leaving arrest to their discretion. Although students' race and ethnicity were not a focus of this study, it is important to note that the SROs expressing the existence of a zero-tolerance policy for fighting belonged to the municipal police department serving the schools with the greatest percentages of Black students, which could at least partially explain why Black students are disproportionately represented in the arrest data in this study. By allowing SROs, and possibly school administrators, to arbitrarily implement their own zero-tolerance policies, SRO programs and schools may contribute to the well-studied phenomenon of disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system.

If policing is going to continue to be a part of the school environment one wonders whether there may be value in the creation of school district police forces, such as those commonly found in Texas (McKenna et al., 2016). Although Central County attempted to streamline their policies, procedures, and training for all SROs in the county, there continued to be a disjunction due to several law enforcement agencies being involved. Research has yet to draw comparisons between school district police forces and more traditional SRO programming to understand the pros and cons for school districts considering adopting either option.

The findings and implications surrounding training and MOUs also demonstrate how SRO programs do not exist in a vacuum. Brown and colleagues (2020) noted how school policing programs merge two “organizational silos,” however, this dissertation shows that an assessment of SRO programming requires a more expansive understanding of who is involved in matters related to school policing. Much of the research on school policing tends to focus on the SROs or school administrators, and occasionally, students.

Interviews with the SROs indicated that although school administrators and students are heavily influential to the SRO position, guidance counselors, school psychologists, teachers, the PTA, security guards, parents, school board executives, law enforcement chain-of-command, janitors, cafeteria workers, road patrol, juvenile probation officers, school social workers, prosecutors, and even the media, were all mentioned as being important, or in some way influential, to how SROs go about their job. As a result, the findings in this study show that a solitary focus on SROs as contributing directly to the school-to-prison pipeline needs to be revisited if school administrators and other school personnel are acting as gatekeepers between student misconduct and the SRO. Recent research has started to incorporate some of these other actors into studies of school policing programs (e.g., White & McKenna, 2020; Viano et al., 2021), but a truly comprehensive understanding of SRO programs requires more scholars to include these other individuals in their research designs.

The substantial influence of some of these other individuals on SRO decision-making introduces the theoretical implications of this study. SROs identified factors aligning with Black's General Theory of Arrest and Wolf's (2014) prior study of SRO decision-making. Unsurprisingly important to arrest decision-making was evidence and the seriousness of the offense. It was also clear from the interviews that the SROs were generally mobilized by citizens, particularly school administrators, rather than their own initiative when incidents end in arrest.

Where there are some misalignments is the importance of age and parents. SROs seemed to be readily willing to arrest high school students but expressed much hesitation to arrest students in elementary schools. This is consistent with previous research

suggesting that there may be a “true juvenile offender” (Mears et al., 2014) or “youth discount” (Bryson & Peck, 2021) for purposes of juvenile justice system processing, with younger juveniles receiving the benefit of informal responses to their behavior. This also supports the proposition in Chapter 3 that school context would be important to arrest decision-making.

Bonner (2015) and Wordes and Bynum (1995) previously identified parents as being influential in arrest decision-making, which was suggested by some SROs in the current study as well. Parents of the accused and their reaction to the SRO were described as important, as the SROs would assess their demeanor and whether they believed the parents would adequately punish the student at home. Additionally, parents of the alleged victim, rather than the victim themselves, were identified as influential to arrest decision-making as the SROs indicated that they felt obligated to arrest when requested. Importantly, Black’s (Black, 1971; Black & Reiss, 1970) and Wolf’s (2014) studies are silent regarding parental influence.

Previous research into LEOs’ responses to citizens experiencing a mental health crisis shows that the presence or availability of family members is important (Bonovitz & Bonovitz, 1981; Matthews, 1980; Wood et al., 2021). The findings of this study lend further support for this proposition. SROs expressed that parents and their cooperation are critical in the decision whether to initiate a Baker Act apprehension. SROs also discussed how they preferred that mental health counselors or school psychologists respond to mental health crises, so that they are only involved if absolutely necessary. This finding supports the assertion in Chapter 3 regarding shared authority and how SROs would defer to licensed mental health professionals. However, this was not

universally endorsed, as several SROs indicated that if Baker Act criteria are met or students say the “magic words,” concerns surrounding liability supersede other considerations.

The findings also support the assertions that the overarching context of being in a school, the authority shared with other individuals in a school setting, and the primary clientele the SRO is engaging with all contribute to differences in decision-making when comparing SROs to patrol officers. The SROs acknowledged the “gentler atmosphere” of the school context and the need to consider the rules and laws only applicable in the school setting. The grade level of the school and the age of the students are important, as SROs did not typically respond with formal actions when assigned to an elementary school. The same could not be said by SROs assigned to high schools, as well as some assigned to middle schools. There was not much mention in the interviews regarding school administrators or teachers requesting arrests as was proposed when discussing the sharing of authority. However, there was suggestion of this occurring for Baker Act apprehensions. In general, the findings of this dissertation show the need for research replicating the systematic social observation studies of the past, but conducted with SROs in the school, to better explore SRO decision-making, particularly how SRO responses occur in real time.

This study also shows the necessity of collecting data when implementing or expanding an SRO program. School districts and their SRO programs should collaborate to collect data on SROs activities as well as the outcomes for students. School districts are diverting funds to expand SRO programs, yet there does not seem to be corresponding accountability for any possible benefits arising (e.g., increases in feelings

of safety) or any of the potentially damaging negative consequences (e.g., criminalization of student misbehavior). Furthermore, the findings show how more than just student arrest numbers need to be collected and analyzed. In Central County, the number of Baker Act apprehensions over the six-year period was non-trivial and impacted younger students more than arrests. If other states have similar legislation in place, researchers and policymakers need to start investigating emergency mental health apprehensions of youth as a possible collateral consequence of adopting SROs in their schools.

Since SRO programs do involve the merging of separate “organizational silos,” accurate and comprehensive data collection may be complicated by differing data sets, methods of collection, and laws guiding student records (e.g., FERPA). However, if school districts and SRO programs want to make claims surrounding the impact of their SROs, student and situational characteristics need to be included when analyzing and reporting student outcomes. For example, although Central County has a large Hispanic population, student ethnicity was not collected. Further, 10 percent of the arrest data was missing the student’s age. Additionally, the literature and this dissertation show that SROs and school administrators are regularly responding to incidents involving ESE students (Diliberti et al., 2019; May et al., 2012), yet this characteristic is not being collected in the arrest or Baker Act apprehension data. To truly be transparent regarding the effects of SRO expansion, school districts and SRO programs should reach an agreement supporting collaborative data collection and analyses.

Importantly, four of the five hypotheses in the quantitative strand of this study were not supported. Although there was a statistically significant impact on school-based felony arrests, overall, there was no abrupt, statistically significant increase in either

arrests or Baker Act apprehensions in Central County after the creation of the SSU and expansion of SROs. The researcher was unable to disaggregate apprehended students by age to engage in ITSA, but there is preliminary support for the hypothesis of an increase in the number of younger students apprehended under Baker Act procedures after the intervention. Advocates of school policing programs may interpret these results as providing support for the argument that SROs do not contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, or as a persuasive assertion for policymakers to continue expanding school policing in other jurisdictions. It is extremely encouraging that the SROs in Central County were not entering elementary schools and immediately responding to student misbehavior with official legal action. However, there continues to be the question of whether the arrests being made by the SROs in middle and high schools were necessary. The findings of this dissertation suggest that individual SROs are inappropriately inserting themselves into school disciplinary matters and also creating their own zero-tolerance policies, meaning arrests in Central County were dependent on both the attitudes of school administrators and those of the SRO assigned to the school. A critical example in the qualitative data were SROs' descriptions of arrests for violation of probation, especially those tied to infractions of school rules. These considerations further reinforce the need for a thorough MOU or contract, as well as comprehensive SRO training or orientation that is unambiguous and consistent.

Lastly, although ITSA did not reveal a statistically significant impact of the SSU on Baker Act apprehensions, there was a steady increase in their numbers over the six-year period. This result coincides with the qualitative findings demonstrating that youth mental health issues and resulting Baker Act apprehensions are a frequent problem for

SROs, with many reporting that they felt unprepared and/or unqualified to be responding. This begs the question of whether the hundreds of millions of dollars state and local officials have diverted to increasing the presence of SROs across Florida may be better spent investing in a permanent and accessible mental health infrastructure within the state's public schools. This is especially pertinent when considering what benefits are derived from assigning SROs to elementary schools. If school districts and SRO programs are not measuring or providing evidence for how SROs may improve school safety or security, can we say that this goal is being achieved and outweighs negative collateral consequences? These are critical questions policymakers and taxpayers need to be asking when school districts are considering implementing or expanding their SRO program.

Methodological Limitations

There are methodological issues present in both the quantitative and qualitative strands of this study. The researcher attempted to minimize validity threats and increase the credibility of the conclusions drawn from the qualitative data. First, rich, descriptive data obtained from repeated observations and interviews assist in ruling out validity threats. The researcher's ability to take notes due to the classroom setting of the training observations means that field notes were extremely detailed, and there was no overreliance on the researcher's memory. Verbatim transcripts from the interviews also ensured rich data were being used in the current study. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to conduct member checks with interview participants.

Reactivity is a well-recognized threat to the validity of qualitative research and consists of the effect a researcher has on the setting or individuals being studied (Maxwell, 2013). It is possible that during observations, knowing that the researcher was present may have resulted in participants acting differently than they would have if the researcher was not present. Similarly, during interviews, participants may not have been as candid in their responses due to speaking with an outside researcher and the conversation being audio recorded. The sustained presence of the researcher over a four-week period of observations and then during interviews throughout the school year, assisted in minimizing reactivity as the participants became acclimated to her presence.

Regarding the quantitative strand, Shadish and associates (2002) have identified the threats to internal validity that are typically encountered in ITSA designs, with the major threat in such designs being history. History represents the possibility that outside forces other than the investigated intervention impacted the dependent variables during the time period under study. The researcher tracked critical events occurring throughout the study in an Excel spreadsheet for purposes of examining the specific time points during the quantitative analyses. School closures due to a hurricane in September 2017 may have reduced the number of school-based arrests and Baker Act apprehensions occurring during the month. Most importantly, the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February 2018 is a plausible effect-causing event, however, the major mandates created by the resulting MSD Act (e.g., SROs, school district police, or guardian in every school) were already in place in Central County. Additionally, visual inspection of the various time series did not suggest massive shifts in trends in February

or March 2018 in immediate response to the incident, but neither in August 2018 when the MSD Act took effect.

Since the quantitative strand involves time series data, the population of interest (SROs) fluctuated in both number and composition during the six-year period, meaning there is unaccounted for variation in the analyses. The fluctuation in the number of SROs is due to several factors occurring during the relevant time period including the creation of the SSU and its implementation in August 2016, new schools opening, the use of “extra” or “floating” SROs to assist with coverage, and charter schools requesting to be a part of the collaboration with the SSU. The number of SROs serving the district also increased after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as the SSU adopted the commission’s recommendation of one SRO per every 1000 students at the high school level. Accordingly, by the last school year (2018-19) included in the various ITSA, almost every high school in the district was assigned at least two SROs, with the largest high school being assigned four SROs. Lastly, SRO turnover was identified by the SSU chain-of-command as an on-going problem, meaning that the composition of the population constantly changed as individuals left SRO positions and new individuals undertook SRO assignments.

Since the quantitative analyses relied on secondary data, there are important variables missing that the researcher was unable to examine or include in analyses. The sheriff did not start collecting the name of the school where the incident occurred until 2017. This means that the researcher was unable to disaggregate the data by type of school (elementary, middle, high, or alternative school) to assess whether there was a differential impact of the intervention. Further, although the county has a substantial

Hispanic population (22.5%), the sheriff does not collect information on a juvenile's ethnicity in their arrest reports, resulting in a juvenile's ethnicity not being included in the analyses. Relatedly, since the data are being obtained from the juvenile services division of the sheriff's office, the data does not include school-based arrests or Baker Act apprehensions of students aged 18 or older. Thus, the results from this study likely underreport arrests and Baker Act apprehensions occurring in schools, since high school students can be aged 18 or older.

Additionally, the researcher was unable to create a rate for the dependent variables included in the ITSA. The monthly enrollment of students in the school district over the six-year period is not publicly available. Thus, creating a rate based on student enrollment was not possible. Furthermore, the school district only publicly posts the academic calendar for August through May of each school year. Through informal discussions with teachers employed in the school district, interviews with the SROs, and the monthly numbers of arrests and Baker Act apprehensions demonstrating that both may occur in June or July, the researcher is aware that summer school occurs at some of the district's schools and would need to be considered for purposes of creating a rate based on school days each month. Accordingly, the researcher was unable to create a rate based on the number of days each month students were expected to be in attendance.

Due to the small numbers of students aged 11 and under experiencing school-based arrests or Baker Act apprehensions, testing two of the proffered hypotheses was not feasible. As disappointing as this may be for research purposes, this is a good result practically speaking. For every case represented in the data, there is an actual young person experiencing the juvenile justice system, and the fact that the intervention did not

result in a massive wave of very young students being forced into the school-to-prison pipeline is a good thing for students, their families, and society.

This study solely considers one county (and school district) in the state of Florida. Of note, the county may be unique in some regards as the sheriff is a statewide leader in advocating for mental health reforms in policing. Furthermore, the county has received Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grants to fund youth mental health initiatives since 2007. Although the use of SROs is a national phenomenon, the differing policies, laws, and contexts of other school districts means that some of these findings may not be generalizable to other SRO programs or to jurisdictions considering the implementation or expansion of SRO programs. Accordingly, application of the results of this study should be considered in light of the context and descriptions provided in the final four chapters.

Directions for Future Research

As school districts across the country proceed to ponder the cancellation and/or expansion of school policing programs, research will continue to be needed to inform this decision-making. First and foremost, replication of this study is needed. If possible, scholars should be analyzing *both* referrals to law enforcement in response to school-based incidents, and the formal actions taken by the SRO. For example, in this study, there is no doubt that there was an automatic increase in law enforcement involvement in student incidents in the elementary schools due to the expansion of the SRO program. Interviews with SROs assigned to the elementary schools provide evidence that many are involved in disciplinary matters and are frequently consulted by school administrators.

However, the coinciding quantitative analyses demonstrate no abrupt, statistically significant increase in school-based arrests. This means that although there may have been a substantial increase in SRO involvement, this did not automatically result in an increase in formal actions taken against students. Yet, major national datasets, such as the *School Survey on Crime and Safety*, measure only referrals and not arrests. The National Center for Education Statistics (the administrator of the survey) should amend their data collection efforts to include arrests, citations, notices to appear, and other possible formal actions taken by the SRO assigned to the school being surveyed. Most beneficial would be a supplementary survey completed by the SRO themselves, rather than the school administrator. The current study also demonstrates that involuntary commitment apprehensions are occurring in schools (at least in Florida), and this action should also be investigated when collecting data on the activities of SROs.

The MSD Act provides another known intervention for analyzing the impact of SROs on school-based arrests and Baker Act apprehensions. In collaboration with other scholars, the researcher will be replicating the quantitative strand of this study at the state level using the implementation of the MSD Act's mandate requiring the placement of an SRO, school safety officer, or school guardians in August 2018. The study will also examine the impact of the MSD Act on each of Florida's 67 counties to investigate whether there was a differential effect of the mandate. Since there are thousands of elementary schools in Florida, this future study should be able to build on the findings of this dissertation by including a larger population of younger students and thereby examine the possible effects of adding an SRO to elementary schools. This future research endeavor will provide an assessment of the impact of a statewide policy on

student outcomes that could be informative to other states considering the necessity of school policing programs.

Although the current study (and the subsequent statewide study) includes a known time point where SRO presence was greatly expanded in a school district, there was not a true counterfactual, a limitation of much of the research assessing SRO impact. This is regularly due to SROs having been present in many schools or school districts for decades, especially at the high school level. For example, in this study, SROs had been present in some of the county's high schools since the 1980s. However, with cities or school districts cancelling SRO programs across the country, the opportunity may be ripe to use such cancellations as an intervention for analyzing school-based arrests and other related outcomes. Researchers should collaborate with these school districts and their related police departments to engage in interrupted time series analysis using the date of removal of SROs as their intervention point to determine the impact on school-based arrests, but also involuntary commitment apprehensions (if applicable in the state). Such an effort could provide the first studies with a true counterfactual to better understand SROs' impact on student outcomes.

Knowing that SROs have been in many school districts for decades means that scholars should request and analyze datasets involving a greater span of time when available. A limitation of the current study was only assessing a "snapshot" of school-based arrests and apprehensions by solely analyzing six years of data, although it is known that SROs were present in some of the high schools since the 1980s with additional implementation in other grade levels during the 1990s and early 2000s. Similarly, the assignment of SROs to schools may have gradually increased in many

school districts, or were possibly implemented in stages, so that an examination of any effects requires a greater span of time. Analysts may also need to consider different statistical techniques and/or software packages to better detect any effects.

As noted in the implications section, additional comprehensive studies are needed to thoroughly understand the school-to-prison pipeline and the mechanisms “feeding” the pipeline. The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that SROs are not coming across student misbehavior and/or mental health problems on their own, and ultimately, their decision to arrest does not necessarily result in students being formally processed in the juvenile courts. There may be a lengthy chain of referrals and involvement in some schools, commencing when a teacher refers students to administrators for behaviors. At the discretion of administrators, SROs may become involved. Then, it is up to the individual SRO whether they initiate formal justice system actions in response. Further, there were indications provided in the interviews and training observations that even if SROs arrest students in response to their misbehavior, the prosecutors may not formally process the student in the juvenile courts. Accordingly, a singular focus on SROs as contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline is incomplete. Future research should broaden inquiries to include these other individuals and examine the multiple decision-making stages funneling a student into the pipeline. One strategy for accomplishing such efforts would be to collect school discipline referrals, formal actions taken by the SRO, court processing information, and the characteristics of misbehaving students. This would allow a researcher to assess the full scope of problematic behaviors in the school, while comparing which cases and students are ultimately subjected to the juvenile or criminal justice system, but also what happens to such students when they enter the justice system.

The assignment of an SRO to a school campus introduces the possibility of students' rights being jeopardized. In his evaluation of the Boise SRO program in the 1980s, sociologist Martin Scheffer brushed off concerns surrounding the over-policing of students and infringements on their rights by arguing: "As long as the police officer's role is not primarily defined as maintaining school security, then the image of the 'cops in the corridors' is quite likely to be erroneous if not completely irrelevant." (p. 77). Since the time of his evaluation, many studies (including this dissertation) demonstrate that enforcing the law, while maintaining the safety and security of school campuses, *is* the main focus of SRO programs. Of concern, there is some indication that SROs avoid the constraints of the Fourth and Fifth Amendments by working with school administrators during the investigation of incidents. This issue has been noted by other scholars as well (e.g., Bracy, 2010), but there is a lack of empirical and legal research assessing how this occurs and what this means for student outcomes.

As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, a reduction in violence and improvements to school safety are regularly touted as the benefits to adopting SROs (Burke, 2001; Hutchinson, 2013; NASRO, 2012; Umphrey, 2009). Relatedly, the most prominent and consistent theme identified in this dissertation is that the primary role of the SRO is safety and security. The question arises whether there is any empirical evidence that assigning an SRO to a school increases safety. This question was beyond the scope of the current study but is an area that needs to be explored further by both school districts and scholars. Similar to national data and trends (Diliberti et al., 2019), Central County did not appear to have problems with serious violent crime over the six-year period under study. Most school-based arrests of students (78%) were for misdemeanors and non-

criminal offenses. Furthermore, as described above, some of the felony arrests cannot be described as students posing a “danger” or for being violent if they are arrested for possessing a vaping pen with THC. However, there is support for the idea that the placement of an SRO may improve perceptions of safety (B. Brown, 2005; Chrusciel et al., 2015; May et al., 2004; McDevitt & Panniello, 2005; Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018), which could then contribute to a more positive school climate. Unfortunately, there is no consistent measurement of “school safety” in the empirical literature to assist in determining whether Central County’s SRO program (and others like it across the country) is effectively contributing to improved safety and security. Scholars and practitioners need to address this gap. If school districts are going to continue to divert resources to expand SRO programs on the basis that they “improve school safety,” they need to provide evidence that this is actually occurring. Similarly, scholars and advocates need to explore how we measure this goal. It seems unfair for advocacy organizations (e.g., ACLU, Advancement Project) to consistently support an anti-SRO stance when no efforts are being made to measure and weigh any possible benefits accruing from the presence of an SRO.

Finally, the researcher was unable to collect follow-up interviews with the SROs and sergeants due to time and resource constraints. Nevertheless, some contact has been maintained between the researcher and individuals associated with the SSU or other individuals employed by the Central County sheriff. The researcher was made aware of a great deal of turnover of SROs and sergeants since the interviews were originally collected. In some situations, the SROs have left law enforcement entirely, but some have transferred to other units within their agency. If SRO programs are spending a great deal

of time and resources to train SROs, it is important that such an investment not go to waste due to attrition. Moreover, if building and maintaining positive relationships with the broader school community is a goal of SRO programs, it seems it would be important to not be constantly replacing SROs. This is a topic that has been left unexplored in school policing research, and future studies should collect interviews with former SROs to investigate the reasons they leave the position.

Conclusion

This dissertation provides preliminary evidence that expanding an SRO program does not automatically result in an increase in school-based arrests. However, it also shows the importance of considering more than just arrest when studying the impact of SROs, as Baker Act apprehensions were occurring in non-trivial numbers and steadily increasing throughout the time period under study. Furthermore, the intervention especially impacted apprehensions of younger students. Baker Act apprehensions appeared to be more problematic for the SROs, yet this is the first study known to the researcher to explore this critical formal action. Once again, the ultimate question is whether students would have been arrested or apprehended if the SRO had not been present. This question continues to be difficult to answer without a true counterfactual, but the current study suggests that the presence of SROs in the schools *is* contributing to more Baker Act apprehensions of students, particularly for younger students.

Proper selection for the SRO position, specialized training for the issues SROs will regularly encounter, and a contract thoroughly defining and describing the roles and responsibilities of the SROs should be a part of every SRO program, as they can

ameliorate problems such as conflicts with administrators and ambiguity surrounding the expectations for the position. Although 30 years of research has suggested this, the findings of this study provide evidence that all three of these issues continue to be problematic. Responsibility falls on upper-level management of both SRO programs and school districts to ensure adoption and execution of these crucial items by, for example, adopting the recommendations set forth in resources such as the *SRO Program Guide* (Finn, Townsend, et al., 2005).

Lastly, the introduction to this dissertation noted that Kupchik (2010) has argued that no one seems to be asking the critical question of whether police officers ought to be in schools. The findings from this study suggest that, at this time, a straightforward response cannot be provided. The mixed methods nature of this study allows for a more comprehensive examination of an SRO program which many previous studies have not been able to provide, but it demonstrates the complicated and multi-faceted problem of “school safety” and responses to student behavior, whether it be delinquency or a mental health crisis. Much more than solely the presence of the SRO was contributing to the outcomes analyzed in this study, such as the influence of school administrators and parents, the training offered, and varying interpretations of school discipline involvement and Baker Act criteria. Coinciding with the expansion of SROs were also other safety and security efforts such as target hardening initiatives and the adoption of various software and apps. The conversations and interviews the researcher had with the Chief of the SSU and many of the SROs demonstrated altruistic, benevolent, and sincere intentions to protect the children of Central County.

However, it cannot be ignored that the researcher was told that the idea for the SSU and expansion into the elementary schools was conceptualized due to the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. Data collection for this study began in the summer of 2017, and since that time, mass casualty events continued to occur in the nation's schools. The first three were in Parkland, Florida in 2018, Santa Fe, Texas in 2018, and Oxford Township, Michigan in 2021, resulting in a total of 31 killed and many more injured. While revising this final chapter, the researcher has been witnessing events unfolding from another mass casualty shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, where 19 fourth graders and their two teachers were murdered, a situation eerily similar to the circumstances a decade prior at Sandy Hook. Importantly, all four of these schools were served by school policing programs. This leads to many questions beyond the scope of this dissertation, but policymakers, school communities, and taxpayers should rightfully ask for evidence that the over \$1 billion spent on school safety initiatives over the past decade, including SROs, are providing a return on their investment by keeping America's children safe at school.

**APPENDIX A:
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SROS**

Demographics

1. What's your age?
2. Are you married?
3. Do you have children?
 - a. [If Yes] Do your children attend Central County schools?
4. How long have you been working as an SRD / SRO?
5. How long have you been working for CCSO / [Municipality]?
6. What was your previous area of employment?
7. What is your highest level of education?
8. What is your race?
9. What is your ethnicity?
10. Is your current placement an elementary, middle, or high school?
 - a. Is this by choice?
 - b. Would you prefer to be elsewhere?
11. What is your current rank/title?

1. Recruitment

- 1a. What factors led you to become interested in a career in law enforcement?
- 1b. What factors led you to become interested in a career as an SRD/O?
- 1c. Before becoming an SRD/O, what type of experience did you have working with children?
- 1d. Tell me about the differences between your current job and your previous employment.

2. Training

2a. What training did you receive to become an SRD/O?

Probe: *What additional training outside of [agency] did you receive that was helpful for your job?*

2b. Do you feel that the training you received from [agency] prepared you for your role as an SRD/O?

2c. What are some areas that you think SRD/Os should receive more training in?

3. Responsibilities of SRD/Os

3a. In your own words, please explain what the responsibilities of an SRD/Os are?

3b. Describe a typical day at work during the school year.

Probe: *How do you spend the majority of your day while on duty?*

3c. What are your responsibilities when school is not in session?

Probe: *What are your responsibilities during vacation or holiday breaks?*

Probe: *What are your responsibilities after school hours?*

4. Perceptions of SRD/Os

4a. What were your perceptions of SRD/Os before becoming one yourself?

4b. How do you think other members of law enforcement currently perceive the role of an SRD/O?

4c. How do you think community members currently perceive the role of an SRD/O?

4d. How do you think school teachers currently perceive the role of a SRD/O?

4e. How do you think school administration currently perceive the role of an SRD/O?

4f. How do you think students in the school you are assigned to currently perceive SRD/Os?

Probe: *How do you think students in the school you are assigned to currently perceive other law enforcement officers (e.g., patrol)?*

4g. What factors influence law enforcement officers to (not) work as an SRD/O?

5. Disciplinary Issues

5a. How often are you involved in student disciplinary issues?

5b. What is the most common method you use for referring students to the juvenile justice system (arrest, civil citation, capias, diversion, transitional officer)?

5c. In your opinion, what do you think is the most common method other SRD/Os use to refer students to the juvenile justice system?

5d. What is the policy, if any, you need to follow when making the decision to refer a student to the juvenile justice system?

5e. What is the most common reason for referrals to the juvenile justice system?

5f. When deciding to arrest a student, what input do teachers provide you to aid in your decision-making?

5g. How would you describe your relationship with the administrators at your school?

5h. When deciding to arrest a student, what input do administrators provide you to aid in your decision-making?

5i. Have you encountered situations where administrators manipulate an incident so as to exclude you (Delay reporting incidents, change the wording of an incident, etc)?

5i1. [If yes] Describe the situation and how you handled it.

6. Baker Acts

6a. How often are you involved in Baker Acting students?

7. Job Stress/Satisfaction

7a. What are some of the difficulties you've encountered during your employment as a SRD/O?

7b. What have you found to be the most unexpected part of your job?

Probe: *What has surprised you the most?*

7c. Tell me about an experience or event that you felt completely unprepared for as a SRD/O.

7d. What parts of being an SRD/O have you found the most enjoyable?

7e. Describe a situation you've encountered as an SRD/O where you felt proud of the work you do.

8. Closing

8a. That completes the interview. At this time, is there anything else you would like to share with me that I may have missed?

8b. Do you have any questions for me?

**APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SERGEANTS**

Demographics

1. What's your age?
2. Are you married?
3. Do you have children?
 - a. [If Yes] Do your children attend Central County schools?
4. How long have you been working in the SSU?
5. How long have you been working for CCSO?
6. What was your previous area of employment?
7. What is your highest level of education?
8. What is your race?
9. What is your ethnicity?
10. What is your current rank/title?

1. Recruitment

- 1a. What factors led you to become interested in a career in law enforcement?
- 1b. What factors led you to become interested in the SSU?
- 1c. Before joining the SSU, did you have any experience working as a SRD/O?
 - 1c1. [If no] Before joining the SSU, what type of experience did you have working with children?
- 1d. Tell me about the differences between your current job and your previous employment.

2. Training

2a. What training, if any, did you receive to become a sergeant in the SSU?

Probe: *What additional training outside of [agency] did you receive that was helpful for your job?*

2b. Do you feel that the training you received from CCSO prepared you for your role as a sergeant in the SSU?

2c. What are some areas that you think SRD/Os should receive more training in?

3. Responsibilities

3a. In your own words, please explain what your responsibilities as a sergeant in the SSU are.

3b. Describe a typical day at work during the school year.

Probe: *How do you spend the majority of your day while on duty?*

3c. What are your responsibilities when school is not in session?

Probe: *What are your responsibilities during vacation or holiday breaks?*

Probe: *What are your responsibilities after school hours?*

4. Perceptions of SRD/Os

4a. What were your perceptions of SRD/Os before joining the SSU?

4b. How do you think other members of law enforcement currently perceive the role of a SRD/O?

4c. How do you think community members currently perceive the role of a SRD?

4d. How much contact do you have with school administrators and teachers?

4d1. Under what circumstances do you have contact?

Probe: Benefits of this contact?

4d2. How do you think administrators and/or teachers perceive the role of a SRD?

4e. How much contact do you have with students?

4e1. Under what circumstances do you have contact?

4e2. How do you think students perceive the role of a SRD?

4f. What factors influence law enforcement officers to (not) work as a SRD/O?

5. Disciplinary Issues

5a. To your knowledge, how often are the SRDs involved in student disciplinary issues?

5b. What is the most common method SRDs are using for referring students to the juvenile justice system (arrest, civil citation, capias, diversion, transitional officer)?

5c. What is the policy, if any, the SRDs need to follow when making the decision to refer a student to the juvenile justice system?

5d. What is the most common reason for referrals to the juvenile justice system?

5e. How often are you involved in disciplinary issues at your subordinates' schools?

5e1. What factors do you think influence your involvement in such issues?

5f. How often are you involved in Baker Acts at your subordinates' schools?

5f1. What factors do you think influence your involvement in such issues?

6. Job Stress/Satisfaction

6a. What are some of the difficulties you've encountered during your employment in the SSU?

6b. What have you found to be the most unexpected part of your job?

Probe: *What has surprised you the most?*

6c. Tell me about an experience or event that you felt completely unprepared for as a sergeant in the SSU.

6d. What parts of working for the SSU have you found the most enjoyable?

7. Closing

7a. That completes the interview. At this time, is there anything else you would like to share with me that I may have missed?

7b. Do you have any questions for me?

**APPENDIX C:
ANALYTICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CODES AND THEMES**

The following presents the analytical development of codes and the six categorical themes presented in Chapter 5. For ease, only codes and themes used to address the research questions and objectives in this dissertation are presented. Initial codes used in the development of each theme are presented alphabetically within each category first, followed by codes developed through further collapsing of initial codes.

Primary Role of the SRO is Safety and Security

Code	Definition
Baker Act session	Baker Acts were covered in training session
CAPS	Training sessions covering the Critical Aggression Prevention System
Completed active shooter	Have completed active shooter type trainings since becoming an SRO
Completed CIT	The SRO completed CIT
Completed CPR	Indicates they completed CPR training
Completed CPTED	SRO indicates that they completed CPTED training
Completed D.A.R.E.	Completed the DARE instructor training
Completed FDLE Advanced SRO	SRO indicates that they completed FDLE's Advanced SRO training
Completed FDLE Basic SRO	SRO indicates that they completed the FDLE Basic SRO training
Completed FDLE Intermediate SRO	SRO indicates that they completed FDLE's Intermediate SRO training
Completed firearms training	SROs being required to complete firearms training
Completed First Aid	SRO completed first aid training
Completed G.R.E.A.T.	Completed the GREAT instructor training
Completed hostage negotiation	Completed hostage negotiation training since becoming an SRO
Completed interrogation techniques	Indicates that they completed interview interrogation techniques
Completed narcotic investigations	Completed narcotic investigations training since becoming an SRO
Completed scenario-based training	SRO was required to complete scenario-based training
Completed sex crimes investigations training	Completed sex crimes investigations training since becoming an SRO
Completed Stop the Bleed training	Completed the Stop the Bleed training

Code	Definition
Completed truancy training	Completed training on truancy
Completed Wraparound training	SRO completed the Wraparound training with the county
Critical incident response	Training sessions covered topics related to responses to critical incidents
Domestic violence unit	Covered the domestic violence unit within the county and how they can assist with CIT follow-ups
Emergency manager responsibilities	Descriptions or examples of responsibilities of the SRO aligning with the emergency manager role
Facility tours	Training sessions that included touring Baker Act receiving facilities
FASRO	Session discusses or reviews items from the FASRO conference
General administrative issues	Training session covers general SRO administrative issues and updates
Law enforcement responsibilities	Discussions or descriptions of SROs' law enforcement responsibilities
Legal	Training session covered legal matters
Elder crimes unit	Training session covered the Elder Crimes Unit in the county
Purpose of SROs	Descriptions of the purposes of SROs and/or SRO program
Specialty courts	Training session covered a specialty court available in the county
State forensic hospitals	Content covering the state hospitals and individuals found NGRI

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Issuing traffic citations	Addressing traffic violations	Descriptions of the SRO addressing traffic violations occurring at or near the school	5
Educating parents about booster seats			
Responding to accidents in the parking lot			
Running vehicle tags			
Stopping parents for traffic violations			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Addressing truancy	Addressing truancy	Examples or descriptions of the SRO engaging in activities that address truancy as a part of their job	3
Looking for truants			
Escorting school social workers			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Sitting in during CPS interviews	Assisting with CPS investigations	Descriptions of the SRO assisting with or facilitating CPS investigations involving students at their school	2
Meeting with CPS			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Being a presence	Being a presence	Descriptions of the SRO attempting to deter misbehavior and/or criminal activities through their presence on campus	2
Positioning vehicle			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Being visible	Deterrence	Believes that their responsibilities include being a presence at the school to deter crime	2
Deterrence			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Checking emails	Completing administrative tasks	Descriptions or discussions of the SRO completing various administrative tasks as a part of their job	12
Checking student arrests			
Completing administrative tasks			
Completing paperwork			
Distributing keys			
Documenting incidents			
Ordering keys			
Reporting arrest numbers			
Requesting work order			
Tracking offenders of locked door policy			
Writing proposals			
Writing reports			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Arresting students	Formally responding to student misconduct	Descriptions of the SRO responding to student misconduct through formal justice system actions	7
Charging students			
Filing charges			
Issuing civil citations			
Referring student to diversion boot camp			
Referring student to transitional officer			
Making DHS reports			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Checking that students got rides home	Facilitating student arrival and dismissal	Descriptions of the myriad of ways the SROs assist with student arrival and dismissal	11
Crossing students at crosswalk			
Directing traffic			
Facilitating departure of school busses			
Facilitating student arrival			
Facilitating student pick up			
Helping with dismissal			
Helping with the car line			
Monitoring arrival and dismissal			
Monitoring walkers and bicycle riders			
Taking students home			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Testing panic tools	Preparing for critical events	Descriptions of the SRO engaging in activities to prepare for the possibility of critical safety events occurring at the school	6
Scheduling code red drills			
Practicing security tactics			
Participating in safety drills			
Prepping red bag			
Creating documents for substitutes			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Assisting with criminal investigations	Investigating incidents	Descriptions of the SRO engaging in activities related to investigating incidents involving students	10
Collecting witness statements			
Creating fake social media accounts			
Gathering information on students who make threats			
Interviewing students			
Investigating child abuse			
Investigating student reports			
Investigating suspicious incidents			
Investigating cell phone thefts			
Reviewing surveillance footage			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Handling anything criminal	Law enforcement	Describes their responsibilities as entailing law enforcement on the school campus	3
Law enforcement			
Respond to crimes			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Checking ID badges	Preventing trespassing	Descriptions of the SRO engaging in activities to prevent unauthorized individuals from trespassing onto campus	7
Checking vendors			
Confronting unauthorized visitors			
Escorting unauthorized visitors			
Making contact with visitors			
Preventing entry onto campus			
Sitting up front			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Being on call	Responding to calls	Description of SROs responding to calls for assistance from school personnel as a part of their job	4
Responding to calls			
Responding to calls from front office			
Responding to calls of video recording			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Responding to medical emergencies	Responding to emergencies	Descriptions of the SRO responding to emergencies occurring at their school as a part of their job	3
Responding to building emergencies			
Clearing school buildings			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Breaking up fights	Responding to possible criminal activity	Descriptions of SROs responding to criminal/delinquent behavior occurring at school	7
Responding to alcohol possession			
Responding to drug possession			
Responding to fights			
Responding to student weapon possession			
Responding to sexting			
Responding to problems with parents			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Baker Act students	Responding to student mental health problems	Descriptions or examples of the SRO engaging in activities related to students experiencing mental health problems	4
Responding to student mental health problems			
Suicide assessments			
Responding to student episodes with pets			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Neutralize threats to the school	Safety and security	Descriptions or discussions of SROs perceiving their roles and responsibilities to be one of maintaining safety and/or security	4
Preventing school shootings			
Safety and security			
Safety and security strategist			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Locking bike gate	Securing campus	Descriptions or examples of the SRO engaging in activities to physically secure the campus	7
Checking gates			
Conducting safety and security checks			
Locking down campus perimeter			
Locking gates			
Checking doors			
Unlocking bathrooms			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Monitoring hallways	Surveillance	Descriptions of the SRO engaging in surveillance activities at their school	8
Monitoring lunch periods			
Monitoring pat downs			
Monitoring recess			
Monitoring school from vehicle			
Monitoring surveillance cameras			
Patrolling campus			
Supervising parent sex offender			

The Secondary Role of the SRO Consists of Engaging in Positive Interactions

Code	Definition
Being a role model	SRO believes that their responsibilities include being a role model
Checking in with staff	Descriptions of the SRO checking in with the school's staff
Checking with aftercare	Descriptions or examples of the SRO checking in with their school's aftercare program
Contractual obligation to interact with students	Examples of the contract between the law enforcement agency and the school district requiring SRO interaction with students
Interacting with kids	SRO perceives one of their responsibilities to be interacting with the kids

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Attending football games	Attending special events	Descriptions or discussions of the SRO attending school-sponsored special events occurring outside of school hours or off-campus	6
Attending graduation			
Attending homecoming dance			
Attending prom			
Attending PTA events			
Chaperoning field trips			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Counselor	Being a counselor	SRO believes that their responsibilities include acting as a counselor	3
Have two jobs			
Influencing kids			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Liaison	Being a liaison	SRO perceives their responsibilities to include acting as a liaison between their law enforcement agency and the school community	2
Being a resource for parents			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Another adult leadership figure	Being a mentor	SRO indicates that serving as a mentor to students is a part of their responsibilities	3
Mentor			
You're like a parent			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Breaking down barriers	Breaking down barriers	SRO indicates that breaking down the anti-policing sentiments or negative perceptions of policing held by some students is a positive part of their job	4
Building bridges with students			
Changing student perceptions			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Building bridges	Building bridges	Believes their responsibilities entail changing the perception of school community members who may hold negative perceptions of the police	3
Bridging the gap			
Being an influence			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Build a rapport	Building relationships	Believes that their responsibilities include building relationships with the school community	3
Building relationships			
Building community relationships			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Bonds with students	Building relationships with students	SRO indicates that creating or building relationships with the students is a positive part of their job	2
Developing relationships with students			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Counseling students	Counseling students	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of SROs counseling students as a part of their job	2
Mediating issues between students			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Eat lunch with administrators	Friends with school personnel	Descriptions of relationships with school personnel indicating a friendship	3
Eat lunch with teachers			
Friends with administrators			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Good relationship	Good relationship with students	Indications or descriptions of the SRO having a good relationship with students	8
Great relationship			
Receives Christmas cards from students			
Receives Christmas gifts from students			
Receives fist bumps from students			
Receives high fives from students			
Receives hugs from students			
Positive relationships with students			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Assisting the principal	Helping school personnel	Descriptions of the SRO helping the school with various activities and tasks	6
Helping the front office			
Helping with fundraiser			
Helping with pat downs			
Helping with recess			
Walking students to class			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
CLEA	Law enforcement sponsored youth camps	Descriptions of the SROs working in law enforcement sponsored youth camps during school breaks	5
Young Cadets Program			
Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranch			
PAL camp			
JUMP			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Mentoring students	Mentoring students	Descriptions of the SROs mentoring students	2
Tutoring			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Extracurricular activities	Participating in student extracurricular activities	Descriptions or examples of the SROs participating in student extracurricular activities at their schools	5
Coaching sports			
Running ROTC program			
Running the safety patrol program			
Fundraising for safety patrol program			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Referring student to guidance counselor	Referring student to school counselors	Descriptions of the SRO referring students to school counselors	2
Referring students to counseling			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Helping students in the cafeteria	Positive interactions with students	Descriptions of the SROs engaging in activities outside of the triad model that provide for positive interactions with students	12
Eating lunch with students			
Arranging donations for families			
Playing sports with students			
Playing with students at recess			
Providing snacks			
Reading books to students			
Helping with PTA events			
Participating in Field Day			
Participating in Fun Run			
Participating in school festivals			
Participating in the Color Run			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Providing resources	Referring individuals to community resources	Descriptions of the SRO referring members of the school community to outside resources and services as a part of their job	6
Referring faculty to community agencies			
Referring parents to community agencies			
Referring parents to services			
Referring students to community agencies			
Referring students to pregnancy center			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
SRO should develop relationships with school personnel	Sergeants expect positive interaction	Sergeants indicate that they expect SROs to be engaging in positive interactions with the school community	5
SRO needs to be involved in the school			
SRO should be mentoring			
SROs should be engaging with students			
SROs should be role models			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Older students understand SRO role	Student perceptions vary by school level	Believes that the perceptions of students towards the SRO vary by grade/school level	4
Varies by school level			
Students love cops in elementary school			
No longer love the SRO in middle school			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Interacting with kids	Talking with students	Descriptions of the SRO talking with students at school as a part of their job	4
Talking with students			
Meeting with students			
Interfacing with students			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Advising parents	Speaking with parents	Descriptions of the SRO speaking with parents as a part of their job	11
Answering phone calls from parents			
Calling parents			
Contacting parent			
Counseling parents			
Holding conferences with parents			
Meeting with parent			
Mentoring parents			
Notifying parents of arrest			
Notifying parents of Baker Act			
Speaking with parents			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Visiting classrooms	Visiting classrooms	Descriptions of the SRO visiting classrooms as a part of their job	3
Visiting special education classroom			
Visiting specials classroom			

Ambiguity Exists Surrounding the Expectations for SROs' Roles

Code	Definition
Ambiguous	Describes their job or role as an SRO as ambiguous
CoC have too many subordinates	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of sergeants in the SSU supervising a large number of SROs
CoC were never SROs	SRO indicates issues stemming from members of the chain-of-command never having been SROs themselves
Concern about counselor role	Discussions surrounding concern over the counselor role and how much/whether counseling is the responsibility of the SRO
Concern about educator role	SROs' voicing concern over their educator role
Don't insert themselves into discipline	Sergeant indicates the SROs should not be escalating disciplinary matters by interjecting themselves when the school is handling it
Evaluation skepticism	SRO indicates skepticism over whether their direct supervisor can properly evaluate them
Involved in discipline every time	SRO describes being involved every time there is a disciplinary matter on their campus
Involvement in school discipline is prohibited	Descriptions of SROs being prohibited from engaging in school discipline
Required to be familiar with discipline	Examples of a contractual obligation to be familiar with school discipline
School personnel think SROs discipline	SRO believes that the school personnel think they are present for discipline purposes
Sergeant has no SRO experience	Indicates that they had no experience as an SRO prior to becoming a sergeant in the SSU
SROs don't write referrals	Indicates that they do not write referrals for student misbehavior
SROs' involvement in discipline	Sergeant's perceptions on SROs' involvement in school discipline
Who supervises the SRO	Although the contract states the SRO is supervised by law enforcement chain-of-command, indications of contradictory information or confusion regarding who supervises or directs the activities of the SRO
Will escort students	When discussing discipline SRO indicates that they will escort students to class
Will remove misbehaving students	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the SRO responding to disciplinary issues by removing misbehaving students from their classroom/lunchroom

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Creating contracts with students	Assisting with school discipline	Descriptions of the SRO assisting with school disciplinary matters	5
Helping discipline office			
Removing misbehaving student			
Responding to bullying			
Writing discipline referrals			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Balancing the power struggle	Balancing expectations	Descriptions or discussions of balancing the expectations of school administrators and their own law enforcement agency	2
Principal rules the school			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
100% of salary covered by charter school	Contradicting non-school board employment	Descriptions or indications blurring the distinction of the SRO not being an employee of the school board	3
Contradicting non-school board employment			
'School officials' for some purposes			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Different contracts for different agencies	Differing expectations by agency	Indications of how the involvement of several law enforcement agencies in the SRO program may contribute to ambiguity in the expectations for SROs	2
Different chain-of-command			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Daily involvement	Frequently involved in discipline	Descriptions of the SRO being frequently involved in school disciplinary matters	3
Involved very often			
Pretty involved			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
If a child has eloped	Involved in discipline if a safety issue	SRO is involved in disciplinary matters if it concerns a safety issue	4
If a safety issue			
If student is being unsafe			
Observing discipline			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
If law enforcement issue	Involved in discipline if law enforcement issue	SRO indicates that they get involved in disciplinary matters when the incident involves a law enforcement issue	4
If law is broken			
Only if a police matter			
Only if criminal			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Involve themselves in discipline	Involve themselves in discipline	Descriptions of the SRO involving themselves in school discipline	6
SRO's discretion			
Writes referrals			
If they see something happening			
Does not dole out discipline but is involved			
Teaching students accountability			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Never involved	Not involved in discipline	SRO indicates that they are not involved in school discipline	3
Not involved in discipline			
Stay out of discipline			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
CCSO policy prohibits	Policy prohibits involvement in discipline	SRO indicates that policy prohibits them from getting involved in student discipline	2
School policy prohibits			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
1%	Rarely involved in discipline	Descriptions of rare involvement in school disciplinary matters	7
Almost never involved			
Minimal involvement			
Not really involved			
Rarely involved			
Seldom involved			
Try not to get involved			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Contradict contract	School personnel lack understanding of SRO role	Discussions of problems arising from school personnel not being familiar with, or misunderstanding, the SRO role as set forth in the contract between the school board and law enforcement agencies	5
Need training on contract with school board			
Need training on SRO role (school administrators)			
Need training on SRO role (teachers)			
Think SROs work for them			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Want SRO to arrest more	School wants SRO to respond to misbehavior	Descriptions of school personnel wanting the SRO involved in responding to student misbehavior	4
Want SRO to be more aggressive			
Want SRO to arrest students			
Try to get SRO involved in discipline			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Not employed by school board	SRO is not employed by school board	Descriptions or indications making it clear that the SRO is not an employee of the school board	2
Not a school official			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Counseling misbehaving students	SROs' involvement in discipline	Sergeant's perceptions on SROs' involvement in school discipline	6
Involved if there is a posing threat			
Involved in law enforcement matters			
Involvement in discipline varies			
Let school handle			
Should not be involved in discipline			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Feel like an administrator	Tasks outside of SRO role	Discussions, descriptions, or examples of school administrators involving the SRO in responsibilities that fall outside the scope of their role	3
Divergence in expectations			
Tasks outside of SRO role			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Failing to reduce ambiguity	Training does not reduce ambiguity	Examples or descriptions of a lack of training to clarify and support SRO roles	2
Lack of training for SRO position			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Confusion over contract	Unclear expectations for the SRO	Discussions, descriptions, or examples of the expectations for the SRO's roles, duties, and responsibilities being unclear	10
Expectations are unclear			
Lack of consensus bullying			
Lack of consensus customizing Strive			
Lack of consensus employee badges			
Lack of consensus faculty meetings			
Lack of consensus recording incidents			
Lack of consensus social media			
Making Baker Act determinations			
Provided with contradicting information			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Counsels misbehaving students	Will talk to students in trouble	SRO indicates that they talk with students being disciplined to discuss their behaviors	3
Will talk to students in trouble			
Receives list of students with behavioral problems			

SROs' Responses to Student Behavior is Influenced by Other Actors

Code	Definition
Administrators act as a filter	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of how the administrators act as a filter for SRO responses to student misbehavior. This means that the administrators typically are the first to receive complaints or reports of student misbehavior, and then they decide whether or not to involve the SRO.
Administrators request arrest	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of school administrators requesting the arrest of students
Age of student for BAs	Descriptions or discussions of the age of the student being considered for Baker Acts
Baker Act criteria	Descriptions or discussions of how the SROs consider BA criteria in their decision-making
Circumvention through observing searches	SROs being present while school officials search students
Contacted by SROs for BA guidance	Sergeant indicates that they are involved in Baker Acts because the SROs call them for guidance
Get assistance for BA decision	SRO gets assistance or support from other individuals in their Baker Act decision-making
Guidance from state attorney	SRO seeks guidance from the state attorney for decision-making
Has not had any Baker Acts	Indicates that they have not Baker Acted any students
Has not made any arrests	SRO indicates that they have not arrested any students
Magic words	The SRO indicates that if a student says anything that matches BA criteria they will BA
Matrix determines SRO involvement in discipline	Descriptions or discussions of the student code of conduct book (or matrix) guiding school administrator's decisions as to whether or not to involve the SRO in disciplinary matters
School delays reporting incident to SRO	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of school administrators purposely delaying reporting an incident to the SRO
Sergeant provides guidance	Sergeant provides guidance to SROs
Shifts decision-making to prosecutor	Descriptions or examples of SROs shifting decision-making responsibility to the state attorney
Student demeanor	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the SRO considering the student's demeanor when responding to misbehavior

Code	Definition
Use civil citation for parent accountability	Descriptions of the SRO deciding to issue a civil citation so that parents or guardians are held accountable
Verifying student intent to harm themselves	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of SROs needing to verify whether the student understand what they mean when they say things "I want to kill myself" before commencing Baker Act procedures
Violation of probation	SRO arrested students for violation of probation
Weapon possession	SRO has arrested/referred students for weapon possession

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Don't initiate the discipline	Administrators involve SRO in discipline	Descriptions of the SRO being involved in discipline at the request of school administrators	6
Assist admin by their presence			
If administration requests			
Certain situations			
Pulled in by administrators			
Team effort			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Age of student	Age of student	Descriptions or discussions of how the age of a student may be considered when responding to student misconduct	2
Grade level matters			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Talk to doctor	Already in treatment	SRO considers whether the student is already in treatment when responding to a mental health issue	2
Already in treatment			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Will speak to intake officers	Attempt to influence court processing	SRO indicates that they will speak to the relevant J/CJS actors about the student they arrested in order to influence their decision-making regarding whether to further process the case in court	2
Speaks with state attorney			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Jail as a last resort	Arrest as a last resort	Indications that the SRO tries to avoid arresting students unless necessary	7
Arrest as a last resort			
Don't want to arrest students			
Not in the schools to arrest students			
Try not to arrest students			
Avoids formal responses			
Use graduated sanctions			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Sharing statements	Circumvention by working with school officials	Descriptions or discussions of how SROs may circumvent the constitutional rights of students by working with school officials during investigations	2
Sitting in during school officials' investigations			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Battery	Battery	SRO referred students to the justice system for battery	7
Battery on LEO			
Battery on school employee			
Battery on staff			
Battery on student			
Battery on teacher			
Aggravated battery with a weapon			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Work with administrators	Collaborate with school personnel for MH issues	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the SRO working with school personnel when responding to student mental health problems	5
Work with counselors			
Work with guidance counselor			
Work with school staff			
Influence of guidance counselor for Baker Acts			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Disorderly conduct	Disruptive behavior	SRO referred students to the C/JJS due to disruptive behavior	3
Disruption of a school function			
Disruptive behavior			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Addressing bullying with stalking charges	Criminalizing typical misbehavior	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of how typical student misbehavior may be criminalized by the SRO	7
Criminalizing through arrest			
Criminalizing through civil citation			
Disruption of school activities			
Engaging in net-widening			
Use disorderly conduct statute			
Using affray for school fights			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Disagreement over Baker Act	Disagreement over SRO decision-making	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of school administrators disagreeing with the SRO's response to incidents	4
Disagreement over student arrest			
Get angry when SRO calls abuse hotline			
Want to be notified first			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Drugs	Drugs	SRO referred students to the C/JJS for drugs	2
Marijuana possession			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Affray	Fighting	SRO referred students to the justice system for fighting on campus	2
Fighting			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
ESE student	ESE student	Discussions or indications that the SRO considers the student's disability/special education status when responding to misbehavior	2
Showing an ESE student had the right mind			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Guidance from chain-of-command	Guidance from other LEOs	Descriptions or discussions of the SRO contacting other LEOs to inform decision-making	5
Guidance from Chief FE			
Guidance from CPT JT			
Involve crimes against children			
Call other SROs			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Impact on life	Impact on student's life	SRO indicates they opt for diversion-type programs so that students have a second chance and aren't permanently impacted by the arrest	2
Give student opportunity for redemption			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Juvenile probation shares with SRO	Information sharing with probation	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the SRO sharing information with students' probation officers and vice versa	2
Share discipline issues with JPO			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Get student records from secretary	Information sharing with school	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the SRO sharing information about students with school personnel and vice versa	6
Information sharing among school staff			
Notification of arrests for felony or violence			
Notification of outside arrests			
School shares information for investigations			
Sharing probation status with school			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Administrators are an initial filter	Initial screening by school personnel for MH issues	SRO indicates that school personnel will involve the SRO if necessary, acting as a filter between students experiencing mental health issues and the SRO's involvement for BA purposes	2
Counselor acts as a filter			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Work with parent	Involve parents for MH issues	SRO indicates that they get the parent involved when responding to student mental health issues	4
Work with parents first			
Get parent involved			
Get background information before Baker Acting			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Work with parents	Involve parents when responding to misconduct	Descriptions of the SRO involving the parents of students when responding to misconduct	4
Use conferences with parents			
Parent involvement			
Parent cooperation			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Observing student questioning	Observing school investigations	Descriptions of the SRO observing school personnel's investigations into student misconduct	2
Observing student searches			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Probation requests	Probation status of student	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of how a student's probation status may influence the SRO's response to misconduct	2
Probation status of students			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Delusional	Parents are in denial	Descriptions or discussions of parents being in denial regarding their child's misbehavior	4
Making excuses			
Not my kid			
Think school is out to get their kid			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Missing signs of mental health problems	Parents aren't dealing with mental health problems	Descriptions or discussions of parents not dealing with their child's mental health problems	2
Not dealing with mental health problems			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Talk to parents for borderline cases	Parent's demeanor	SRO indicates that the parent's attitude, demeanor, and/or response to their child's mental health issue influences SRO decision-making	6
Resistance from parent			
Parents in denial of mental health issues			
Parents don't want to BA			
Parents didn't do anything			
Parents aren't taking responsibility			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Extra-legal leeway	Reduced burden of proof for student searches	Descriptions of how school officials have a reduced burden of proof for purposes of engaging in a search of a student	2
Reduced burden of proof for student searches			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Don't allow SRO to confiscate contraband	School interferes in criminal matters	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of school personnel interfering in criminal matters	6
Forgetting			
Interfere with arrests			
Interfere with investigations			
Refusing to hand over evidence			
Interfering with SRO response to misconduct			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Minimizing rape	School minimizes serious incidents	SRO encountering instances of school administrators minimizing serious incidents occurring at school	3
Minimizing student weapon possession			
Care too much about PR			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Abusing loopholes in code of conduct	School is not reporting incidents	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of school personnel not informing the SRO of incidents occurring at school or involving students at their school that the SRO believes they should be involved in	13
Hiding incidents involving teachers			
Instructing teachers not to report abuse to SRO			
Not informing SRO of criminal incidents			
Not informing SRO of disciplinary issue			
Not informing SRO of fights			
Not informing SRO of potential BA			
Not informing SRO of searches			
Not informing SRO of stolen property			
Not informing SRO of student weapon possession			
Selective disclosure			
Not keeping SRO informed of CPS cases			
Not making mandatory reports			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Guidance counselors' inclusion in Baker Acts	School misunderstands BA requirements	Problems surrounding school personnel's misunderstandings of the Baker Act requirements	3
Don't understand BA criteria			
Reliance on SRO for Baker Acts			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Access school database	School provides information	Discussions or descriptions of how the school provides the SRO with information needed for investigations and decision-making	3
Requests students' discipline record			
School provides information			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
School's response	School's response to misconduct	SRO indicates that the school is able to sufficiently respond to student misconduct, so that the SRO does not have to be involved formally	3
School can handle			
Preference for school discipline			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Injuries	Seriousness of incident	SRO indicates that they consider the severity or seriousness of the incident in their decision-making	2
Seriousness of incident			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Try to get kids into trouble	School tries to get kids into trouble	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of school personnel attempting to get students into trouble	3
Provoke students			
Manipulating students during interviews			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Need mental health counselors	School staffing problems	Descriptions or discussions of the schools not being appropriately staffed	4
Not enough guidance counselors			
Not enough security officers			
Staffing problems			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Helping the SROs	Sergeant supports the SROs	Descriptions of the sergeants supporting the SROs as a part of their responsibilities	5
Mentoring SROs			
Assist SROs with decision-making			
Being available to support the SRO			
Ensuring SROs have the resources they need			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
SRO's discretion	SRO discretion	Descriptions of the SROs having discretion when responding to student misconduct	4
Discretion of the SRO			
SSU does not have an arrest policy			
No policy regarding student arrest			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Influence of the state attorney	State attorney does not pursue	Descriptions or discussions of offenses that the state attorney will not pursue, which in turn may influence SRO decision-making when responding to student misconduct	2
State attorney does not pursue			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Student has been in trouble before	Student's behavioral history	Discussions or descriptions of the student's behavioral history (or lack of) influencing SRO decision-making when responding to the student's misconduct	5
Good kid			
Student lacks prior record			
SRO's history with student			
Student's background			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Theft	Theft	SRO referred student to the justice system for theft	2
Stealing cell phones			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Type of offense	Type of offense	Descriptions or discussions of how the type of offense influences SRO decision-making when responding to student misconduct	4
Witnessing misdemeanor			
Felony limits discretion			
Three strikes for bullying			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
ROTC to respond to misbehavior	Use alternatives to arrest	SRO indicates that they use an alternative to physical arrest when responding to student misconduct	3
Mentoring instead			
Use alternatives to arrest			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Use civil citation	Use diversion programs	SRO indicates that they request the use of the county's diversion programs in response to the arrest of a student	4
Use civil citation for drug offenses			
Use diversionary programs			
Use CAJ program			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Record on BWC	Use video footage	Descriptions of the SRO using video footage when responding to student misconduct	3
Use surveillance footage			
Video evidence			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Parent requests a report	Victim's wishes	Indications that the victim's (and/or their parents') wishes influence SRO decision-making when responding to student misconduct	6
Parent requests charges			
Parents do not want to involve SRO			
Parents don't want to prosecute			
Victim decides			
Victim's wishes			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Guidance from ESE head	Work with school personnel	Descriptions or discussions of the SRO working with their school personnel to determine responses to student misbehavior	4
Teacher supports arrest decision			
Will consider administrators' opinions			
Work with administrators			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Had no choice	Zero-tolerance offenses	SRO indicates that there are zero-tolerance offenses for which they automatically arrest students	2
Zero-tolerance offenses			

Distinguishing SROs from Other Officers

Code	Definition
Being a parent	Discussions, descriptions, or indications that being a parent was helpful preparation for the SRO position
Being in one place	A major difference with patrol-type positions is that everything occurs in one place (the school), whereas on patrol there is a lot of driving around and going to different calls
Life experience makes them good at their job	SRO describes their specific life experiences making them good at their job as an SRO
More community oriented	Describes the SRO position as more community oriented compared to patrol
Need a thick skin	Believes that the SRO position requires a thick skin
Needing to filter around students	Descriptions or discussions of having to filter what you can and can't say around students
Sergeant's ideal SRO	The characteristics the sergeant believes makes an ideal SRO
Should not be a dumping ground	Descriptions or discussions of how SRO positions should not be the dumping ground for old or bad LEOs
SROs should not be ordered to take position	Descriptions of the understanding that SROs should not be ordered into the SRO position

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Additional school policies	Additional school policies	SRO indicates that a difference from other LEO positions is that there are additional school-related policies and procedures they follow	4
More informal responses			
Must consider disability status			
Slower case processing			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Amount of work	Amount of work	SRO describes being surprised by the amount of work the position entails	3
How busy it is			
Tasked with a lot			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Municipality LEOs apply for position	Apply for SRO position	Descriptions of needing to apply for the SRO position to be selected	2
Sheriff's deputies apply for position			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
More experience rather than training	Better selection rather than training	Descriptions of the need for better selection of SROs rather than additional training requirements	4
More screening than training			
More vetting than training			
Personality rather than training			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Building relationships	Building relationships as an SRO	SRO indicates that a difference with previous LEO positions is the ability to build relationships and connections with students and school staff	2
Connection			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Interviews as a formality	Deputies interview for SRO position	Descriptions or examples of the sheriff's deputies needing to participate in an interview to be selected for an SRO position	2
Sheriff's deputies must interview			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Age considerations	Criteria that should be considered	SROs' perceptions of the criteria that should be considered for SRO selection	7
Need to be picky			
Need to shadow an SRO			
Recruiting family-minded individuals			
Should have LEO experience			
Need SRO experience before alternative school assignment			
Examine applicants' past evaluations			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Gentler atmosphere	Gentler atmosphere	Believes the SRO position involves a gentler atmosphere than patrol positions	3
Patrol is more aggressive			
More social work			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
How you talk to kids	How you talk to people as an SRO	SRO indicates that there are differences in how they talk to people on the street compared to how they talk to people in the school	2
How you talk to people			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Can't hand off problems	Greater involvement in cases	SRO describes a greater involvement in cases compared to patrol	6
Greater involvement in cases			
Long term involvement			
Open and close own cases			
More responsibility			
Care about outcomes			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Elementary SROs can't work in a high school	High school SROs are the busiest	Perception that SROs assigned to high schools are the busiest SROs	5
Elementary SROs don't do much			
Elementary SROs don't make arrests			
Middle school SROs Baker Act more than elementary			
Middle school SROs don't arrest as much			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
More proactive policing	More proactive policing as an SRO	Indicate that they are able to engage in more proactive policing as an SRO	3
Patrol is reactive			
Prevention rather than enforcement			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Clientele	Interacting with kids all day	SRO indicates that a major difference with previous LEO positions is interacting mostly with kids all day	5
Dealing with kids all day			
Don't deal with juveniles that much			
More interactions with kids			
Don't interact with people			
Must like kids			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Has a child with a disability	Lived experience	SROs' descriptions of lived experiences that may assist them when interacting with special student populations	3
Has a child with mental illness			
Personal experience with mental illness			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
No screening	No screening	Perception that individuals are not being properly screened for the SRO position	2
Screening is important			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Do everything yourself	On your own as an SRO	A difference with prior LEO positions is that the SRO is on their own at the school	4
Lack of interaction with other officers			
Lack of interference from other officers			
On your own			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Amount of interaction is challenging	Need to be able to interact with school community	Perception that the SRO position requires individuals who are able to constantly interact and communicate with the various members of the school community	12
Need to be a good communicator			
Need to know how to interact with kids			
Need to know how to talk to people			
Need to learn to work with admin			
Takes a people person			
Overwhelming			
Unique balance			
Need to be flexible			
Kids deserve an excited adult			
Investment in school community			
Can't be afraid of bodily fluids			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Requires patience	Requires patience	Descriptions of the SRO position requiring patience to deal with kids	2
Not for everyone			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Weren't screened appropriately	Some should not be SROs	Descriptions or examples of SROs believing that some of their fellow SROs should not be in the position	4
Lack people skills			
Have no business being SROs			
SROs for the schedule			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Young SROs are too gung-ho	Some SROs are overzealous	Expresses concern that other SROs may be overzealous in their approach and/or responses to incidents	3
Too quick to Baker Act			
Should've stayed on patrol			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Patrol was boring	SROs are busier	Describes the SRO position as busier than other LEO positions	4
SROs are busy			
Must be able to multitask			
More work			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
More police matters in high school	SRO position varies by school level	Descriptions of some of the differences in the SRO position based on school level assignment	4
Middle school is the hardest to work			
Middle school is busier than elementary			
Elementary assignment is more community-oriented			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Have to be patient	Tolerate more as an SRO	SRO indicates that they tolerate more as an SRO than they did on patrol positions, because they are dealing with kids	2
Tolerate more			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Fast paced	Very busy	Descriptions or discussions of SROs being very busy due to the many responsibilities and activities they engage in	3
Lots of work			
Very busy			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Calls all day	Types of calls	SRO indicates that the volume and types of calls they respond to are different in the SRO position	8
Calls for service are different			
Less responding to crime			
Types of calls			
Not constantly receiving calls for service			
Something new each day			
Less surprises			
School specific activities			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Have to be more personable	Work with same people every day as an SRO	Indicate that interactions are affected by the SRO position requiring that they work with the same people every day	2
Work with same people every day			

Training Could be Improved to Meet the Needs of the SROs

Code	Definition
Agency is short staffed	Descriptions or discussions of the SRO's agency encountering staffing shortages
Annoyed	SROs appearing visibly annoyed during training sessions
Contract requirements	The training required under the contract with the school board
Has completed their own MH research	Discussions of the SRO using information gathered from their own research to assist in decision-making
Mental health training	Sergeant believes that they need continued mental health and crisis training
Need more critical feedback	Examples during training sessions where more critical feedback could have been provided to the SROs
No mental health training	The SRO indicates that they have not completed any type of mental health training
Not paying attention	Descriptions or examples of the supervisors not paying attention to the training while in attendance
Not prepared to participate	Descriptions or examples of the SROs not being adequately prepared enough to participate in the training
Number of mental health crises	Sergeant expresses surprise at the number of student mental health crises they encounter in the schools
Outdated training material	Examples of the training using material or covering content that is outdated
Poor presentation	Descriptions of training sessions suffering from a poor presentation
Repetitive	Training sessions overlap and the same material or information is repeated
Sergeant is surprised by ages of BAs	Sergeant indicates surprise at the young age of some Baker Acts
Special education students	Discussions or descriptions of SROs indicating that training on special education students is needed
Supervisors not participating	Descriptions or examples of supervisors being present during training sessions but not participating
Surprised by counselor role	Did not expect to act as a counselor
Talking during training	SROs are talking to each other during the training sessions when they should be paying attention to the instructor or completing an activity/task
Training is boring	Descriptions or examples of the training sessions being boring
Training is not taken seriously	The perception that the SROs did not take the training seriously
Unprepared instructors	The instructor of a training session appeared unprepared to teach the course/session

Code	Definition
Wasting time	Descriptions or examples of time being wasted during training sessions

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Missing pertinent caselaw	Absence of important information	Observations or examples of important information that should be covered in training, but were not	2
Not covering important topics			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Difficult to keep LEOs focused	Acknowledges poor behavior of other SROs	SRO acknowledges the poor behaviors of other SROs during training course(s)	2
Embarrassed by behavior of others			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Child custody issues	Child custody issues	Training is needed to familiarize the SROs on child custody issues and their related court orders	2
Court orders			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Could always use more	Could use more training	SRO believes that they could use more training in the SRO position	2
Would like quarterly active shooter training			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
CIT needed more juvenile focus	Criticisms of training	SROs' critiques surrounding the training completed for the SRO position	11
Didn't learn much			
Strive for Safety training needs to cover graduation			
Instructors weren't good			
Not as helpful as hoped for			
Not tailored for SROs			
Subpar training materials			
Too much wasted time			
Training is lacking			
Training is pointless			
Won't remember the information			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Abusing their disability status	Dealing with ESE students	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the challenges arising from dealing with special education students	5
Baker acting ESE students			
Dealing with special education students			
No accountability for ESE students			
Out of control ESE students			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Did not prepare for juggling dynamics	Did not prepare for SRO role	Believes that they did not receive adequate preparation/training for the SRO role	8
Did not prepare for SRO role			
Did not receive proper training			
Prepares only for LEO role			
Would have liked better training			
Had to self-train			
Felt unqualified for SRO position			
Expectations not clearly defined			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Difficulties of dealing with administration	Difficulties of dealing with administration	Indicates that the difficulties associated with dealing with school administrators was an unexpected part of the job	2
Terrible administrator			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Inappropriate comments	Inappropriate comments	Descriptions or examples of inappropriate comments made by SROs during training	3
Sarcasm			
Sexism			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Insufficient expansion	Insufficient expansion	Descriptions or examples of where the training content and/or activities needed to be expanded upon	2
Missed opportunity for application of material			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Juvenile justice system processing	Juvenile legal topics	Descriptions of the need for preparation or training regarding juvenile law and/or the policies and procedures related to dealing with juveniles in the legal system	4
Juvenile law			
Legal topics			
Policies and procedures for dealing with juveniles			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Lack of classroom management	Lack of classroom management	Descriptions of the lack of someone managing the classroom/participants to keep SRO behaviors in check	3
Supervisors not assisting with classroom management			
Lack of accountability for SRO behaviors			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Autistic students	Lack of knowledge surrounding ESE students	SRO describes a lack of knowledge surrounding ESE student populations and/or related procedures prior to the SRO position	3
Integration of ESE students			
Responding to student meltdowns			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Abuses disability status of child	Parents exploit disability status	Descriptions or examples of SROs perceiving parents as exploiting the policies, laws, and procedures related to students with disabilities	3
Excusing misbehavior due to disability			
Want SRO to abide by school plans			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Lack of interest	Participants not engaging	Descriptions or examples of SROs not participating or engaging in the training	4
Looking at cell phones			
Participants not engaging			
Refusal to participate			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Problems teaching Strive	Problems teaching Strive	Descriptions or instances of SROs encountering problems with teaching the Strive for Safety program in their school	4
Strive scheduling			
Don't want to participate in Strive			
Have concerns with Strive curriculum			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Serving as a witness in ESE classroom	Responding to incidents involving ESE students	Descriptions of the SRO responding to incidents involving special education students	5
Responding to special education classroom			
Recording student outbursts			
Checking on students at home			
Witnessing child restraint			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Contract with school board	School roles	Believes that training is needed on the expectations surrounding the SROs' and school administrators' roles within the schools	3
Role within the school			
School administration			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Removal of students	Schools can't remove students	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the difficulties of having a problematic student removed from the school	2
Executives don't follow their own policies			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Demonstrates stigma towards mental illness	Stigma towards special student populations	SRO demonstrates stigmatizing views, beliefs, and/or attitudes towards students in special populations	6
Crack babies			
Don't believe mental health diagnoses			
Doubts ESE statuses			
Doubts severity of diagnosis			
Trivializes student crises			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Cutting	Student mental health issues	Descriptions, discussions, or examples of the SROs needing to deal with student mental health issues	3
Lack coping skills			
Mental health issues			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Disrespect of students	Students' deviant behaviors	SRO indicates they were surprised or unprepared for the deviant behaviors of students	6
Chaotic student fights			
Drug use in middle school			
Sexually active students			
Student sexting			
Student engagement in serious crime			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Student mental health issues	Surprised by student MH issues	SRO describes being surprised by the student mental health issues they've encountered	3
Number of Baker Acts			
More Baker Acts in elementary			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Session does not appear applicable	Training is not useful	Descriptions of topics covered or parts of SRO training that did not appear to be useful for SRO purposes	2
Training is not useful			

Initial codes	Collapsed code	Definition	Total number of initial codes
Youth mental health	Youth mental health training	SRO believes that training covering youth mental health topics is needed	3
Developmental psychology			
Baker Acts			

**APPENDIX D:
IRB APPROVAL**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138
To: Melanie Frances Palacios Soderstrom
Date: July 12, 2017

Dear Researcher:

On 07/12/2017 the IRB approved the following human participant research until 07/11/2018 inclusive:

Type of Review: UCF Initial Review Submission Form
Expedited Review
Project Title: ██████████ County School Resource Officer Project
Investigator: Melanie Frances Palacios Soderstrom
IRB Number: SBE-17-13186
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 07/11/2018, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:



Signature applied by Gillian Amy Mary Morien on 07/12/2017 03:42:21 PM EDT

IRE Coordinator



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

September 10, 2021

Dear [Melanie Soderstrom](#):

On 9/10/2021, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Interrupted Time Series Analyses of School-Based Arrests and Involuntary Commitment Apprehensions in a Florida County
Investigator:	Melanie Soderstrom
IRB ID:	STUDY00003400
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRB Requested Data Description.docx, Category: Other; • Soderstrom HRP-250-FORM 8.26.21.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations.

IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human in which the organization is engaged, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination. You can create a modification by clicking **Create Modification / CR** within the study.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

UCF IRB

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