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**FEELING SAFE AND SECURE: ANALYSIS OF  
THE CHICO POLICE DEPARTMENTS SCHOOL  
RESOURCE PROGRAM THROUGH THE  
TEACHERS EXPERIENCE**

Williams, Michael S.

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**FEELING SAFE AND SECURE: ANALYSIS OF THE  
CHICO POLICE DEPARTMENT'S SCHOOL RESOURCE  
PROGRAM THROUGH THE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE**

by

Michael S. Williams

December 2022

Co-Advisors:

Patrick E. Miller (contractor)  
Kathryn J. Aten

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**FEELING SAFE AND SECURE: ANALYSIS OF THE CHICO POLICE  
DEPARTMENT'S SCHOOL RESOURCE PROGRAM THROUGH THE  
TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines perceptions of the Chico Police Department's (CPD) School Resource Officer (SRO) Program through the lens of middle school and high school teachers in the rural Chico Unified School District (CUSD) and explores the program's role in preparing teachers to respond to school violence and teachers' perceptions of school violence and the program's efficacy in reducing violence on campus. This thesis presents a qualitative, thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with teachers at CUSD high schools and middle schools. The interviews revealed that teachers' perceptions of violence on campus ebb and flow with the national narrative and affect their feelings of physical and psychological safety and, sometimes, the view that violence on campus is inevitable. Thus, the presence of an SRO improves their perspective of safety, provides opportunities to mentor students, and serves as a conduit for information sharing. Even though teachers' overall perception of SROs is positive, teachers cited a lack of visibility, deficient communication, incompetence, laziness, and a lack of transparency as concerns. These themes from the teachers' interviews led to the following recommendations for the CPD: include teachers in safety plans, clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of SROs, establish a consistent SRO presence on campus, conduct safety tabletop exercises, and develop a mentoring program for students.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BJHS	Bidwell Junior High School
CHS	Chico High School
CJHS	Chico Junior High School
CPD	Chico Police Department
CUSD	Chico Unified School District
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
FHS	Fairview High School
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NSW	New South Wales
PVHS	Pleasant Valley High School
SRO	school resource officer

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many years, school violence has been a major concern for school administrators and local law enforcement.<sup>1</sup> As a result of school violence, teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate, leaving schools scrambling for educators.<sup>2</sup> To mitigate school violence, police departments throughout the United States have implemented school resource officer (SRO) programs.<sup>3</sup> The role of the SRO is multi-dimensional and, at times, complex. SROs serve as informal counselors, educators, public health advocates, mentors, and law enforcers. As law enforcers, SROs patrol campuses, respond to crimes in progress on and off campus, make arrests, issue citations, and develop emergency response plans.<sup>4</sup> The aim of the SRO concept is to reduce and prevent violence while bridging and developing relationships with students.<sup>5</sup>

School violence can occur anywhere, at any time. Communities in either a metropolitan or rural setting can be affected by violence, as illustrated in Parkland, Florida, and Uvalde, Texas. Following these horrific events, the role of SROs and their effectiveness have been called into question. Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Association claim SROs create a pipeline-to-prison scenario, targeting minority

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<sup>1</sup> Chongmin Na and Denise C. Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors,” *Justice Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2013): 619–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754>.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Brown, “The Role of Teachers in School Safety” (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2008), ProQuest.

<sup>3</sup> Denise C. Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers on School Crime and Responses to School Crime,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 19, no. 3 (August 2020): 905–40, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12512>.

<sup>4</sup> Na and Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools.”

<sup>5</sup> Frank J. Mielke, Jeremy Phillips, and Beth Sanborn, *Measuring the Strategic Fit of the School Resource Officer with Law Enforcement (Leaders), the Education System, the Community and Other Interested Parties: Section I—Survey Results* (Hoover, AL: National Association of School Resource Officers, 2021).



communities and at-risk youth.<sup>6</sup> Others claim that SROs are critical to school safety and prevent violence on campus.<sup>7</sup>

Campus safety is a holistic approach, with input from law enforcement, teachers, school district administrators, and school staff.<sup>8</sup> Often, teachers feel that they are not included in the school safety ecosystem and that their roles are limited.<sup>9</sup> However, teachers do play an integral role in school safety and can provide valuable insight on troubled youth or at-risk students. The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of the Chico Police Department's (CPD) SRO program through the lens of middle school and high school teachers in the Chico Unified School District (CUSD). This study examined the extent to which the CPD's SRO program is preparing teachers working in a rural community to respond to school violence, as well as teachers' views of school violence nationally and their assessment of the CPD program's efficacy in reducing violence on campus. The research questions presented in this study were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the CPD's SROs?
3. What are teachers' assessments of how effectively the SRO program prepares them to handle violence on campus?

Semi-structured interviews of 28 CUSD teachers made manifest several key categories and themes relating to the three research questions. First, teachers feel that after any major event, school violence and safety are a focal point. Also, the CPD's SRO program has had an overall positive effect in preparing teachers for violence on campus. For example, teachers expressed that the presence of SROs on campus makes them feel

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<sup>6</sup> Paul J. Hirschfield, "Preparing for Prison?: The Criminalization of School Discipline in the USA," *Theoretical Criminology* 12, no. 1 (February 2008): 79–101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480607085795>.

<sup>7</sup> Mielke, Phillips, and Sanborn, *Measuring the Strategic Fit of the School Resource Officer*.

<sup>8</sup> John Mayfield, "Parents' Perceptions on the Impact That SROs Have on School Safety" (PhD diss., Walden University, 2021), <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10597>.

<sup>9</sup> Christy Anthony, "A Quantitative Descriptive Study of Teachers' Perceptions of School Safety" (PhD diss., Northcentral University, 2021).

safe because SROs have training and experience to confront violence on campus. Furthermore, teachers feel that the SRO's ability to communicate with students, build relationships, and show strong connectedness to their schools fosters trust between students and the officers. On the other hand, some teachers expressed concern about the lack of visibility of the SROs on campus, the lack of communication with teachers, and the ambiguity surrounding SROs' roles and responsibilities. These concerns have caused some teachers to question the effectiveness of SROs in preparing them for violence.

Understanding CUSD teachers' perceptions of violence, the extent to which the SRO program has prepared teachers for violence on campus, and teachers' assessments of the SRO program in creating a safe school environment is vital to program success and to the overall ecosystem of school safety. While the SRO is a key figure in school safety, ensuring the safety of students, teachers, and staff requires a holistic approach and multi-level engagement with the school community. In sum, while participants welcome the presence of SROs, teachers' assessments of their preparedness for violence because of SROs vary considerably. They feel there is little they can do to prevent violence on campus, but they want an SRO present to intervene and take enforcement action.

Based on the perceptions expressed in the interviews, recommendations were developed to improve the CPD's SRO program. The recommendations include improving communication between teachers and SROs, increasing the visibility of SROs on campus, training teachers on emergency response, gathering and sharing intelligence with educators, and developing a turnover unit.

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## I. VIOLENCE AND SAFETY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Roughly 8 percent of teachers leave their profession annually because they feel unsafe in schools.<sup>1</sup> Teachers are usually the first to address aggressive behavior among students, and they may have to intervene during violent encounters on campus if security personnel or school resource officers (SROs)—specifically trained, armed police officers, employed by local police departments and sheriff’s offices—are not available.<sup>2</sup> Teachers are often not included in school safety planning or operations despite their critical role in violence prevention and intervention. Typically, their contribution is limited to serving on committees alongside school administrators to address safety issues, which results in a narrow view of school security that fails to include input from all staff members.<sup>3</sup> Teachers, however, are critically important to the safety ecosystem of schools and should be included in the development of school safety plans.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, teachers are essential to campus safety, and collaboration between teachers and SROs is imperative to the safety of students and the reduction of violence on campus.

The past several decades have brought significant safety reforms to public schools across the United States.<sup>5</sup> As reported by John Mayfield, school safety is “a comprehensive ecosystem of planning, teamwork, training, data analysis, evaluation, and feedback from key stakeholders.”<sup>6</sup> Two categorical views describe school safety—the “broad view” and the “narrow view.”<sup>7</sup> The state of students’ physical and psychological well-being on campus represents the broad view of school safety. In contrast, crimes such as homicide,

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Brown, “The Role of Teachers in School Safety” (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2008), ProQuest.

<sup>2</sup> Brown.

<sup>3</sup> Brown.

<sup>4</sup> Christy Anthony, “A Quantitative Descriptive Study of Teachers’ Perceptions of School Safety” (PhD diss., Northcentral University, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Nicole L. Bracy, “Student Perceptions of High-Security School Environments,” *Youth & Society* 43, no. 1 (March 2011): 365–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10365082>.

<sup>6</sup> John Mayfield, “Parents’ Perceptions on the Impact That SROs Have on School Safety” (PhD diss., Walden University, 2021), 17, <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10597>.

<sup>7</sup> Mayfield, 17.

robbery, and battery define the narrow view.<sup>8</sup> To maintain campus safety, 70 percent of schools have implemented security strategies, which include installing high-tech security cameras, implementing strict campus rules, and assigning SROs.<sup>9</sup>

The SRO serves as the prime actor in school safety, and according to Gottfredson et al., “SROs serve to educate students, teachers, staff and parents; serve as informal counselors; and enforce the law.”<sup>10</sup> Additionally, SROs educate parents, students, faculty, and staff on current crime trends occurring on campus.<sup>11</sup> As informal counselors, SROs work with students by referring them to social, legal, and public health services while social, legal, and public health services participate in community outreach.<sup>12</sup> As law enforcers, SROs patrol campuses, respond to crime in progress on and off campus, make arrests, issue citations, and develop emergency response plans.<sup>13</sup> SROs act as all-purpose school safety prevention and intervention resources as needed.

Nationally, schools have been relying on SROs to reduce campus violence and improve students’ safety for nearly 40 years.<sup>14</sup> However, in a 2015 survey conducted by Godbe Research, 58 percent of parents reported having no SROs on their children’s campuses.<sup>15</sup> Typically, only 30 percent of primary schools have at least one SRO on campus while larger schools with higher enrollment are more likely to benefit from such an officer.<sup>16</sup> Musu-Gillette et al. found that middle schools with a population greater than 1,000 students were 84 percent more likely to have an SRO present.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, as

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<sup>8</sup> Bracy, “Student Perceptions of High-Security School Environments.”

<sup>9</sup> Bracy, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Denise C. Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers on School Crime and Responses to School Crime,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 19, no. 3 (August 2020): 907, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12512>.

<sup>11</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>12</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>13</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>14</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>15</sup> Lauren Musu-Gillette et al., *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2017* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018036.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Musu-Gillette et al., 9.

<sup>17</sup> Musu-Gillette et al., 11.

Gillette et al. explain, the presence of SROs on campuses across the nation rose from 54 percent in 1999 to nearly 70 percent in 2015.<sup>18</sup>

Schools are increasingly relying on SROs, and most principals and teachers believe SROs can prevent criminal activity and student misbehavior, thus enhancing campus safety.<sup>19</sup> However, some research has reported concern about SROs' behavior and their lack of training, education, and mental health awareness. Pigott, Stearns, and Khey emphasize school administrators' increasing concerns that SROs subject students to harsh treatment, especially in minority communities. Furthermore, uniformed officers have been known to use "heavy-handed" tactics on students.<sup>20</sup> The ease with which videos of arrests can be posted on social media can cause anxiety among students and school administrators, lowering their confidence in SROs and leading them to question the effectiveness of these officers.<sup>21</sup> Following such incidents, some school and community leaders have argued that SROs may threaten school safety rather than improve it.<sup>22</sup>

Publicized incidents of SROs using a heavy-handed approach in making arrests on campuses have inspired a media narrative depicting SROs as ineffective and advancing the argument that school administrators should handle punishment.<sup>23</sup> The mere presence of officers on campus causes some to argue that SROs are creating a "school-to-prison pipeline" scenario—primarily in minority schools that have a zero-tolerance disciplinary policy.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunate incidents have caused some police agencies and school districts to

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<sup>18</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of School Resource Officers," 907.

<sup>19</sup> Ben Brown and Wm. Reed Benedict, "Classroom Cops, What Do the Students Think? A Case Study of Student Perceptions of School Police and Security Officers Conducted in a Hispanic Community," *International Journal of Police Science & Management* 7, no. 4 (December 2005): 264–85, <https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2005.7.4.264>.

<sup>20</sup> Christina Pigott, Ami E. Stearns, and David N. Khey, "School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline: Discovering Trends of Expulsions in Public Schools," *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 43, no. 1 (March 2018): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9412-8>.

<sup>21</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph B. Ryan et al., "The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers," *Intervention in School and Clinic* 53, no. 3 (January 2018): 188–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451217702108>.

<sup>23</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, "School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline."

<sup>24</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, 121.



ban SRO programs altogether.<sup>25</sup> However, research suggests that the reduction of school violence can be attributed to SROs; thus, their removal from campus may leave these schools vulnerable.<sup>26</sup>

Negative media narratives and calls or actions to curtail SRO programs in response to isolated events illustrate the need for a holistic school safety approach involving key stakeholders.<sup>27</sup> SRO programs are critical to the community-oriented policing model many police agencies adopt and are a vital resource for school safety. However, improving SRO programs and meeting community expectations require an understanding of teachers' perceptions of school violence and SRO programs. In a study regarding the public's perception of the Anchorage (Alaska) Police Department's SRO program, Brad Myrstol found that police performance improved significantly when officers understood the public's attitudes and perceptions.<sup>28</sup> Myrstol advises,

In an era of community policing wherein the police are expected to fully engage the public as partners in the development of organizational priorities and practices, it is no longer sufficient for police departments to look inward when evaluating their performance; appraisals of organizational performance must include the judgments of external constituencies.<sup>29</sup>

As of this writing, significant literature has addressed teachers' perceptions of SROs in urban environments, but limited research has examined rural teachers' perceptions of SROs. For this reason, an understanding of rural teachers' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about violence on campus and SRO programs requires further study.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, an assessment of teachers' perspectives on how SROs can effectively prepare them for violent events can inform school safety planning and facilitate teacher

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<sup>25</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin W. Fisher and Deanna N. Devlin, "School Crime and the Patterns of Roles of School Resource Officers: Evidence from a National Longitudinal Study," *Crime & Delinquency* 66, no. 11 (October 2020): 1606–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128719875702>.

<sup>27</sup> Ryan et al., "The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers."

<sup>28</sup> Brad A. Myrstol, "Public Perceptions of School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs," *Western Criminology Review* 12, no. 3 (November 2011): 22, EBSCO.

<sup>29</sup> Myrstol, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Sherri Kanner, "Staff Preparedness Perceptions When Confronting Violent Incidents in School: A Qualitative Inquiry" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2015), ProQuest.

involvement in safety plans. Such insights would support overall school safety by complementing the discussion of proactive and preventive measures of criminal justice.<sup>31</sup>

**A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the Chico Police Department SROs?
3. What are teachers' assessments of how effectively the SRO program prepares them to handle violence on campus?

**B. RESEARCH DESIGN AND CONTRIBUTION**

Research suggests that police officer presence is important to student safety on campus and an environment that allows education. Although the likelihood of being victimized on school campus is relatively low, many school districts now rely on SROs on campus to provide safety for students and teachers. A better understanding of teachers' perceptions of violence and SRO programs can guide leaders in shaping and improving SRO programs to better meet the safety needs of school communities. To that end, this thesis presents a qualitative, thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with teachers at three rural high schools and four rural middle schools in the Chico Unified School District, providing an in-depth account and examination of teachers' perceptions of the district's SRO program.

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<sup>31</sup> Kanner.

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## II. THE SRO AND SCHOOL SAFETY CHALLENGES

Contrary to public perception, schools are relatively safe environments, and the likelihood of being victimized on school grounds is rare.<sup>32</sup> As reported by Small and Tetrick, and cited by Garcia, students are more likely to be victims of crime away from campus than they are during school hours.<sup>33</sup> However, the rising toll of mass violence on campuses across the United States has created a call for the presence of SROs and the creation of safety plans to prevent future tragedies. SROs have made a lasting impact by reducing school violence and mentoring youth across the nation.<sup>34</sup> This chapter provides a brief history of SROs in the United States and their role in ensuring the safety of students, teachers, and school facilities. Additionally, this chapter discusses safety challenges in schools, including major violent incidents on campuses across the nation, particularly the effect of these violent incidents on relationships among SROs, students, teachers, and parents.

### A. THE SRO'S ROLE ON CAMPUS

The role of SROs has changed dramatically since these officers were first introduced in schools in the 1950s. Initially only a law enforcement officer, an SRO is now a mentor as well, and the SRO's role has taken on distinct characteristics based on the needs of individual communities and the philosophies of school districts nationwide. This section discusses the origins of the SRO, the role of recognized professional organizations, and the connection to philosophies of community policing.

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<sup>32</sup> Crystal A. Garcia, "School Safety Technology in America: Current Use and Perceived Effectiveness," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 14, no. 1 (March 2003): 30–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403402250716>.

<sup>33</sup> Garcia, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Frank J. Mielke, Jeremy Phillips, and Beth Sanborn, *Measuring the Strategic Fit of the School Resource Officer with Law Enforcement (Leaders), the Education System, the Community and Other Interested Parties: Section I—Survey Results* (Hoover, AL: National Association of School Resource Officers, 2021).

In the 1950s, police officers were first introduced at schools in Flint, Michigan, in an effort to reduce crime on campus.<sup>35</sup> As communities learned about the effectiveness of SROs programs, many school districts and police departments piloted SRO programs to reduce crime on campuses and improve community relations.<sup>36</sup> The role of SROs in Michigan in the 1950s was quite different from that of SROs in the Southern states in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, SROs were used in Southern schools to address racial tensions and race-related issues.<sup>37</sup> The initial intent of SROs was to create a safer school environment and to enforce school policies; however, since then, the roles and responsibilities of SROs have expanded.<sup>38</sup>

Since the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings, law enforcement agencies across the country have expanded the roles of SROs.<sup>39</sup> Currently, half of all public schools have a school-based policing model that includes the presence of an SRO.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 19,000 police officers nationally are working today in an SRO capacity with specific goals for educating students.<sup>41</sup> The goals of the SRO program include

1. Educating students about drug use prevention and safety;
2. Developing community justice initiatives for students;
3. Training students in restorative justice and conflict resolution skills; and
4. Preventing crime and the use of illegal drugs.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ida M. Johnson, "School Violence," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 27, no. 2 (March 1999): 173–92, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0047-2352\(98\)00049-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0047-2352(98)00049-X).

<sup>36</sup> Garcia, "School Safety Technology in America."

<sup>37</sup> Julie Kiernan Coon and Lawrence F. Travis III, "The Role of Police in Public Schools: A Comparison of Principal and Police Reports of Activities in Schools," *Police Practice & Research* 13, no. 1 (February 2012): 15–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2011.589570>.

<sup>38</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of School Resource Officers."

<sup>39</sup> Nathan James and Gail McCallion, *School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools*, CRS Report No. R43126 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), ProQuest.

<sup>40</sup> Coon and Travis, "The Role of Police in Public Schools," 16.

<sup>41</sup> Ryan et al., "The Growing Concerns Regarding School Resource Officers," 189.

<sup>42</sup> Coon and Travis, "The Role of Police in Public Schools," 17–19.

An SRO, a sworn law enforcement officer, is a law-related counselor who builds connectedness, prevents violence on campus, and works closely with other police agencies and community programs, keeping them informed about issues related to crime on campus.<sup>43</sup> SROs also confiscate illegal drugs and weapons that are found on campus through legal searches, and they train administrators and staff members to handle violent students and violent situations at school.<sup>44</sup>

Currently, SROs around the country are members of a professional organization called the National Association of School Resource Officers. As part of its mission, the association developed the Triad Model of SRO policing, “which specifies three main roles: educator, informal counselor, and law enforcer.”<sup>45</sup> Crime trends, drug use, bullying, and traffic concerns constitute some of the topics SROs may address with parents, students, and staff.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, as part of their role as informal counselors, SROs are encouraged to provide counseling sessions, establish rapport with students and be available to talk with them, and refer students to social, legal aid, and public health services.<sup>47</sup> Last, according to Gottfredson et al., “SROs’ responsibilities as law enforcers may include patrolling the school, handling calls for police services, making arrests, issuing citations, and developing emergency response plans.”<sup>48</sup>

SRO programs are a visible manifestation of the community-oriented policing philosophies adopted by many police departments. As SRO programs spread across the country from 2000 to 2009, juvenile arrests plummeted by 17 percent and violent crime by

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<sup>43</sup> Kanner, “Staff Preparedness Perceptions.”

<sup>44</sup> Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers.”

<sup>45</sup> Alexis Stern and Anthony Petrosino, “What Do We Know about the Effects of School-Based Law Enforcement on School Safety?” (San Francisco: WestEd, 2018), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED595727>.

<sup>46</sup> Valerie H. Hunt et al., “An Examination of the Characteristics and Perceptions of School Resource Officers in Rural and Urban Oklahoma Schools,” *Journal of Rural Social Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2019): 1–24, <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jrss/vol34/iss2/1/>.

<sup>47</sup> Chongmin Na and Denise C. Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors,” *Justice Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2013): 619–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754>.

<sup>48</sup> Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers,” 907.

13 percent.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in communities with SRO programs, property crime decreased by 19 percent.<sup>50</sup> In a 2009 analysis of schools in the Southwestern United States, Matthew T. Theriot noted that among the 13 middle schools and high schools that had SROs between 2003 and 2006, the presence of an SRO led to a 52.3 percent reduction in crime and a 72.9 percent decrease in weapons possession.<sup>51</sup> A study of 16 Massachusetts police chiefs by Gottfredson et al. found that placing SROs in schools reduced the number of arrests over time because of the relationships the SROs built with teachers, students, and staff.<sup>52</sup>

## **B. SAFETY CHALLENGES IN SCHOOLS**

School violence has shocked American society and the educational system throughout the country. Parents, teachers, and school administrators have been plagued by fears that they cannot adequately safeguard children from campus violence and mass shootings.<sup>53</sup> This section presents a brief history of school violence, provides data on the type of violence occurring in high schools and secondary schools, and discusses the impact that school violence has had on the nation and on local communities.

### **1. Major Violent Incidents**

School safety and mass casualty incidents have dominated conversations among police administrators, school administrators, and parents since the events at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, more than 20 years ago. In the intervening years, extreme incidents of school violence have been widely publicized and are fresh reminders to current teachers that school safety is a major concern. The police's role in campus safety and the unintended consequences of these shooting have raised questioned from teachers

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<sup>49</sup> Gottfredson et al., 907.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew T. Theriot, "School Resource Officers and the Criminalization of Student Behavior," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 37, no. 3 (May 2009): 285, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2009.04.008>.

<sup>51</sup> Theriot, 286.

<sup>52</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of School Resource Officers."

<sup>53</sup> Antonis Katsiyannis, Denise K. Whitford, and Robin Parks Ennis, "Historical Examination of United States Intentional Mass School Shootings in the 20th and 21st Centuries: Implications for Students, Schools, and Society," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 27, no. 8 (July 2018): 2562–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1096-2>.

about how safe their schools are.<sup>54</sup> On April 20, 1999, students Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris committed one of the most violent school mass shootings in American history at the time with their attack in Littleton, which resulted in the deaths of 12 students and one teacher.<sup>55</sup> After the massacre, police and school administrators questioned why the attack occurred, with the focus placed on the youths' mental health and family upbringing as potential motives.

Both Harris and Klebold grew up in Littleton, a suburban middle-class community, and the youths were involved in criminal activities before the shooting.<sup>56</sup> Both had been arrested for a series of offenses, including theft and hacking into the Columbine High School computer system, leading to criminal prosecution and mandated psychiatric counseling.<sup>57</sup> Both teens attended the required counseling sessions, which ended early because they exhibited signs of improvement.<sup>58</sup> However, Harris and Klebold began planning their attack soon after being cleared by mental health professionals.<sup>59</sup>

The urgency regarding school shootings among law enforcement, school administrators, and the public reached a fever pitch following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.<sup>60</sup> On December 14, 2012, over a span of 12 minutes, Adam Lanza killed 20 first-grade children and six school staff members.<sup>61</sup> When law enforcement responded, Lanza took his own life.<sup>62</sup> This massacre elevated the

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<sup>54</sup> Jeanine Henriques, "Perceptions of School Violence: School Personnel Views of Violent Behavior and Preparedness" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2010), ProQuest.

<sup>55</sup> Henriques.

<sup>56</sup> Henriques.

<sup>57</sup> Henriques.

<sup>58</sup> Henriques.

<sup>59</sup> Henriques.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Sendensky III, *Report of the State's Attorney for the Judicial District of Danbury on the Shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School and 36 Yogananda Street, Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012* (Danbury: Connecticut Division of Criminal Justice, 2013), <https://portal.ct.gov/DCJ/Latest-News/Sandy-Hook-Investigation/Danbury-States-Attorney-Releases-Report-on-Sandy-Hook-Investigation>.

<sup>61</sup> Sendensky.

<sup>62</sup> Sendensky.



conversation about gun control and mental health throughout the country, but despite some progress, another school attack occurred nearly five years later.

On February 14, 2018, a young gunman murdered 17 people and wounded 17 others in a rampage at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.<sup>63</sup> This massacre sparked concern over gun violence in general and school shootings in particular.<sup>64</sup> Prior to the shootings, former student Nikolas Cruz—who had been expelled from the high school the prior year—took an Uber to the campus, armed with an AR-15 rifle.<sup>65</sup> During the initial stages of the investigation, detectives learned about Cruz’s personal background, troubled upbringing, and multiple run-ins with law enforcement.<sup>66</sup> Six weeks before the shooting, someone close to Cruz warned the Federal Bureau of Investigation that Cruz owned a weapon, was acting erratically, had made concerning social media posts, and had expressed a desire to kill people in a school setting.<sup>67</sup> Agents never followed up on the tip, the agency said.

The violence has continued. For example, Salvador Ramos, a local 18-year-old in Uvalde, Texas, entered Robb Elementary School in May 2022 and fatally shot 19 students and two teachers.<sup>68</sup> Armed with an AR-15, Salvador Ramos began firing on teachers and fourth-grade students in Rooms 111 and 112.<sup>69</sup> A delayed police response and questionable tactics resulted in sustained loss of life. Even the presence of an SRO did not prevent Ramos from entering the campus and committing one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history.

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<sup>63</sup> Katsiyannis, Whitford, and Ennis, “Intentional Mass School Shootings.”

<sup>64</sup> Katsiyannis, Whitford, and Ennis.

<sup>65</sup> Jaclyn Schildkraut, Rebecca G. Cowan, and Tessa M. Mosher, “The Parkland Mass Shooting and the Path to Intended Violence: A Case Study of Missed Opportunities and Avenues for Future Prevention,” *Homicide Studies* (2022): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10887679211062518>.

<sup>66</sup> Schildkraut, Cowan, and Mosher.

<sup>67</sup> Schildkraut, Cowan, and Mosher, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center, *Robb Elementary School Attack Response Assessment and Recommendations* (San Marcos: Texas State University, 2022).

<sup>69</sup> Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center.

Unfortunately, school violence rages on, and innocent teachers and students continue to lose their lives. High school and middle school campuses are a hot bed of criminal activity, leaving America’s most vulnerable population at risk. The current trends of school violence are alarming to police and school administrators and leave them with questions about the safety of their schools.

## **2. Broader School Violence: Incidence and Trends**

High schools and secondary schools are generally safe environments, and the likelihood of being a victim of violence is relatively low. A 2020 report prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that violent crime and shootings on campuses are relatively rare events; however, when a major incident does occur, there are lasting effects on the surrounding community.<sup>70</sup> Violence creates fear and angst among parents, teachers, and school administrators and fuels perceptions that schools are dangerous. This subsection presents statistics and trends on school violence, including theft, bullying, assaults, and deaths, spanning 20 years and discusses the relationship among trends, campus safety, and the perception of violence on campus.

Most crimes on campus affect or involve pre-teens and teens from ages 12 to 18.<sup>71</sup> In 2019, this age group experienced 764,600 incidents of victimization on school grounds in the United States involving theft and violent assault.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, youths between 12 and 18 experienced approximately 509,300 acts of victimization away from school.<sup>73</sup> Incidents involving violence at school equate to 30 per 1,000 students compared 20 per 1,000 students off campus.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Vernoique Irwin et al., *Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2020*, NCES 2021–092/ NCJ 300772 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

<sup>71</sup> Irwin et al., 10.

<sup>72</sup> Irwin et al., 10.

<sup>73</sup> Irwin et al., 10.

<sup>74</sup> Irwin et al., 10.

Bullying is another form of student victimization. In their study, Irwin et al. reported bullying at a rate of 22 percent of students 12–18 years of age.<sup>75</sup> This number was somewhat lower than the 28 percent who had reported school bullying in 2009.<sup>76</sup> As shown in Figure 1, the data reveal that, overall, 25 percent of female students reported being bullied at school while the comparative number for males was 19 percent.<sup>77</sup> Race, age, and demographics were also documented.

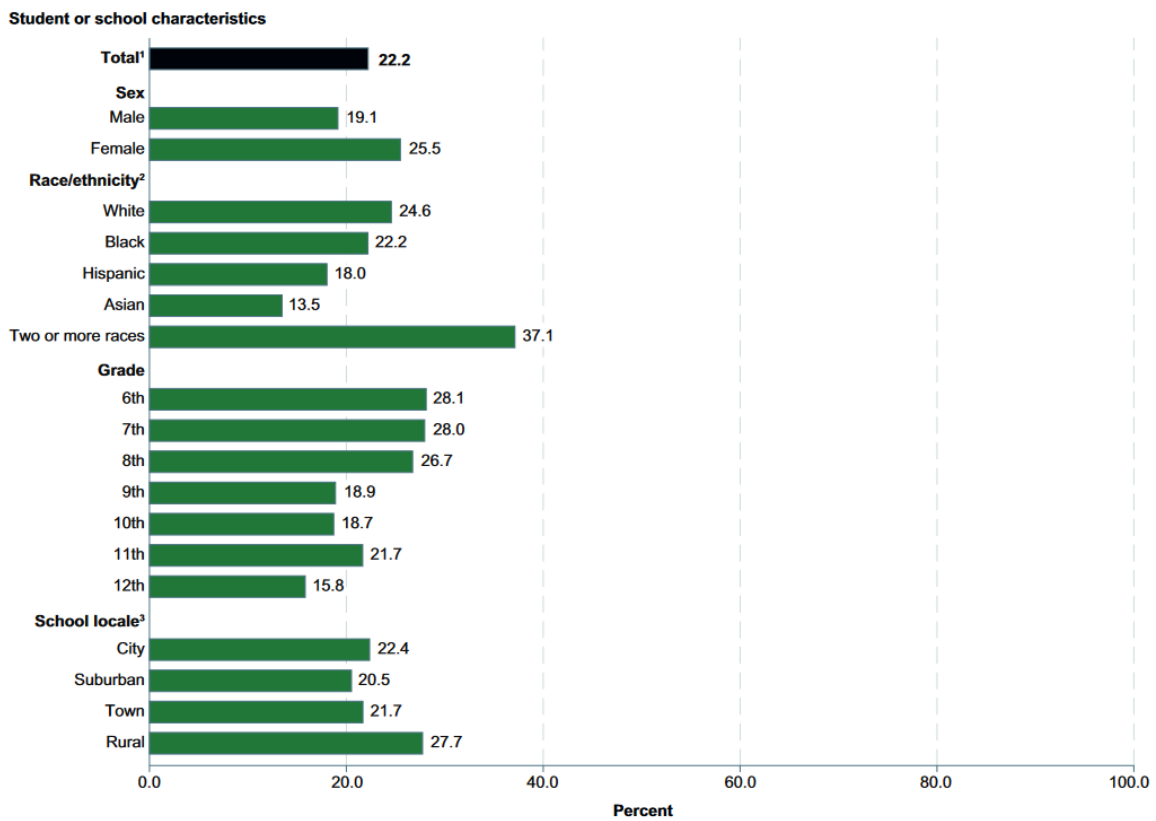


Figure 1. Students Ages 12–18 Who Reported Being Bullied at School<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Irwin et al., 7.

<sup>76</sup> Irwin et al.

<sup>77</sup> Irwin et al., 7.

<sup>78</sup> Source: Irwin et al., 8.

Students who have been bullied tend to experience high rates of anxiety and depression.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, research indicates that students are more likely to skip school, drop out, or attempt suicide because of being bullied at school. Additionally, as noted by Chouhy, Madero-Hernandez, and Turanovic, two-thirds of targeted shootings at schools are a result of bullying.<sup>80</sup>

In 2020, a national study of school violence and safety found that physical assaults and possession of weapons, drugs, and alcohol are signs of disorder in schools.<sup>81</sup> Data collected from the Youth Risk Behavioral Statistics Survey over the past 10 years examined how these issues have affected crime on campus. The survey queried students in grades 9–12 about their experiences with weapons, drugs or alcohol, and assault, as well as collected the gender identity, race, ethnicity, and grade level of the students. The analysis revealed that 31 percent of survey respondents in 2009 had been involved in a physical fight during the preceding 12 months, compared to 22 percent in 2019 (see Figure 2).<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the study found that more male students than female students had been involved in fighting within the past 12 months.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cecilia Chouhy, Arelys Madero-Hernandez, and Jillian J. Turanovic, “The Extent, Nature, and Consequences of School Victimization: A Review of Surveys and Recent Research,” *Victims & Offenders* 12, no. 6 (2017): 823–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2017.1307296>.

<sup>80</sup> Chouhy, Madero-Hernandez, and Turanovic, 834.

<sup>81</sup> Irwin et al., *Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety*.

<sup>82</sup> Irwin et al., 12.

<sup>83</sup> Irwin et al., 11.

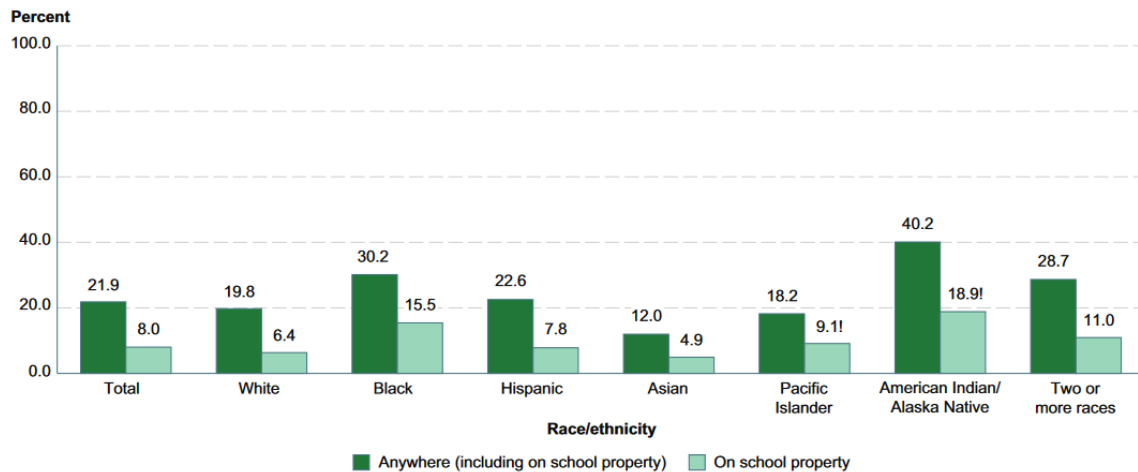


Figure 2. Percentage of Students in Grades 9–12 Involved in at Least One Physical Fight on Campus, 2009–2019<sup>84</sup>

School violence can result in death. During the 2017–2018 school year, the NCES reported “forty-six homicides, nine suicides, and one legal intervention death.”<sup>85</sup> In 2020, U.S. school systems reported 56 deaths related to school violence, with 35 resulting from homicide and eight from suicide.<sup>86</sup> Between 2000–2001 and 2019–2020, school shootings at public and private elementary and secondary schools produced annual casualties ranging from 11 to 75.<sup>87</sup> The peak of 75 shootings in 2019–2020 included 27 shootings with deaths, 48 shootings with injuries only, and 37 with no casualties (see Figure 3).<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, high schools suffered the brunt of non-fatal and fatal school shootings.<sup>89</sup> This violence has had an impact on teachers.

<sup>84</sup> Source: Irwin et al., 11.

<sup>85</sup> Irwin et al., 3.

<sup>86</sup> Irwin et al., 3.

<sup>87</sup> Irwin et al., 3.

<sup>88</sup> Irwin et al., 3.

<sup>89</sup> Irwin et al.

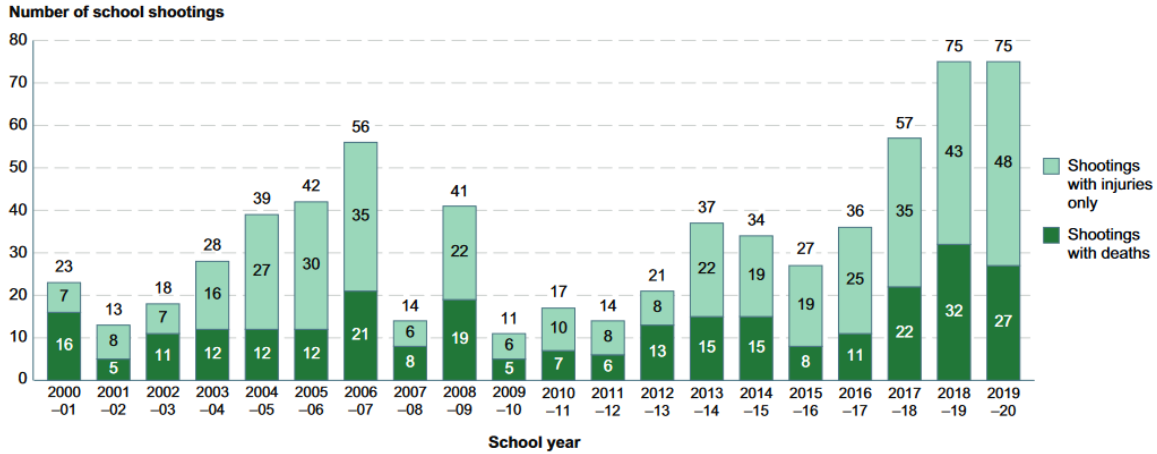


Figure 3. School Shooting Casualties at Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, 2000–2001 to 2019–2020<sup>90</sup>

### C. SUMMARY

The role of the SRO is vitally important in creating a campus that is safe for teachers, students, and staff. Statistics reveal that the relationships SROs build with students have a lasting impact on their lives. Although any incident of mass violence on a school campus strikes at the heart of communities, the presence of SROs can alleviate these tragedies. This chapter has provided a brief history of SROs in the United States and described their role in ensuring the safety of students, teachers, and school facilities. The following chapter presents the current scholarship and literature on the effectiveness of SROs in reducing crime, as well the theoretical background used in this study.

<sup>90</sup> Source: Irwin et al., 3.

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### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of SROs and their effectiveness in reducing crime are subject to debate. Some scholars argue that although SROs are a visual deterrent, their presence on campus does not necessarily prevent students from committing crimes. This literature review discusses how the role of an SRO is assessed, how an SRO's effectiveness in reducing crime is measured, and how SROs can develop students' connectedness to their schools, which helps reduce violence. Although SRO programs have been effective in some states, critics provide evidence that the officers' presence on campus creates a school-to-prison pipeline, particularly in inner-city schools. This literature review explores current research on teachers' perspectives regarding SRO programs on campus, such as how SROs handle discipline and what role the teachers should play in responding to school violence. Last, the literature review discusses Cohen and Felson's routine activities theory, which supports the importance of school security measures and the role of an SRO in reducing crime.

#### A. MEASURING SRO EFFECTIVENESS IN REDUCING CRIME

The literature is mixed regarding the effectiveness of SROs in reducing crime. Some research suggests that SROs have a psychological impact, providing the perception of school safety, while other literature suggests that they have a direct impact on school safety and the reduction of violence. This section discusses the effectiveness of SROs on campus as well as the concerns voiced by critics of SRO programs.

##### 1. Gauging Effectiveness

While some studies have examined the effectiveness of SROs in improving school safety, the results are mixed. Measuring the impact of SROs on violent crime has become more precise. Before 2010, findings varied greatly, and research designs could not adequately measure the effectiveness of SROs.<sup>91</sup> Gottfredson et al. note, "These studies primarily summarized variations due to selection artifacts and temporal fluctuations in

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<sup>91</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of School Resource Officers," 909.



outcomes that co-occurred with SRO placement.”<sup>92</sup> Na and Gottfredson, as well as Petrosino et al., reviewed the available research on SROs and found a lack of definitive evidence of SRO effectiveness in reducing violence on campus.<sup>93</sup>

Gottfredson et al. and Diliberti et al. have reviewed studies that examined the effectiveness of SROs in reducing crime on school campuses.<sup>94</sup> Gottfredson et al. examined two databases that published studies on school violence, the Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts and the Education Information Center Database.<sup>95</sup> They used several keywords in their searches—including “police in schools, school resource officers (SROs), SROs, and law enforcement in schools”—and then reviewed 13 studies and the empirical data assessing the effect of SROs on crime.<sup>96</sup> After concluding their data base search, Correa and Diliberti identified four additional published studies. As a result of their study, they concluded that the results are mixed regarding SROs’ effectiveness in reducing crime.<sup>97</sup> Variables such as student population, location of the school, community dynamics, community profile, and the SRO’s engagement in the school are associated with crime on campus.<sup>98</sup>

Pigott, Stearns, and Khey investigated the impact of SROs on the number of crimes reported on campus.<sup>99</sup> They studied two variables regarding crime on campus: having an SRO on campus and having no SRO on campus. The research examined numerous dynamics that affect crime—such as gang crimes, bullying, racial tensions, school

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<sup>92</sup> Gottfredson et al., 909.

<sup>93</sup> Na and Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools”; Anthony Petrosino et al., “What Works in Developing Nations to Get Children into School or Keep Them There?: A Systematic Review of Rigorous Impact Studies,” *Research on Social Work Practice* 25, no. 1 (January 2015): 44–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731514524837>.

<sup>94</sup> Melissa Diliberti et al., *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools: Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2017–18* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019061>; Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers.”

<sup>95</sup> Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers.”

<sup>96</sup> Gottfredson et al., 909.

<sup>97</sup> Diliberti et al., *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools*.

<sup>98</sup> Diliberti et al.

<sup>99</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, “School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline.”

connectedness, and high-crime communities—“that might have confounded the relationship between SRO presence and the school crime outcomes.”<sup>100</sup> Piggott, Stearns, and Khey’s studies have found that the implications of SROs on campuses are mixed—with some schools experiencing a reduction in violence while others little to no effect. Piggott, Stearns, and Khey, as well as Zhang, lack a baseline for school violence to gauge the implementation of SRO programs.<sup>101</sup> Current best practices in research and data analysis dictate using a control measure to ensure no other factor accounts for the study’s results.<sup>102</sup> In sum, it is impossible to say that crime reduction is associated with the placement of SROs or the SROs’ effectiveness.

A longitudinal sample from the School Survey on Crime and Safety provided the control basis for work by Gottfredson et al. and other scholars.<sup>103</sup> Related studies have gauged the impact of SROs in high- and low-crime schools, measuring crime trends before and after the presence of an SRO on campus.<sup>104</sup> The research found that SROs are more likely to be deployed at higher-crime schools, and the evidence suggests that the SROs’ presence on campus increases crime reporting of drug and weapon possession and violent crime.<sup>105</sup> Less clear, however, are the findings pertaining to more minor offenses.

While some scholars suggest that SROs reduce crime on campus and provide a sense of security for students, teachers, staff members, and parents, others doubt their overall effectiveness. Furthermore, scholars disagree on the effect of the SRO presence, arguing that these officers have only a psychological impact on campus safety. Likewise, some scholars believe that the SRO presence makes no difference in school safety. Summarizing the critics’ viewpoint, Na and Gottfredson suggest that “schools are

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<sup>100</sup> Piggott, Stearns, and Khey, 122.

<sup>101</sup> Piggott, Stearns, and Khey, “School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline”; Gary Zhang, “The Effects of a School Policing Program on Crime, Discipline, and Disorder: A Quasi-experimental Evaluation,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 44, no. 1 (February 2019): 45–62, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-018-9440-z>.

<sup>102</sup> Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers.”

<sup>103</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>104</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>105</sup> Na and Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools.”

relatively safe places” and “little evidence supports the conclusion that placing officers on campus increases school safety.”<sup>106</sup>

## 2. Critics of SROs

In a scathing 2019 report, the American Civil Liberties Union found that SROs do more harm than good to children and that SROs tend to violate the privacy rights of children, criminalize adolescent conduct, and discriminate against minority youth. Some critics of SRO programs suggest that on-campus policing is not driven by educational objectives but by law enforcement and the criminal justice system.<sup>107</sup> Critics argue that SROs have had little impact on declining crime trends because these trends preceded SRO placement in schools.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, there are some unintended consequences of SROs on campus, including harsh punishment for delinquent behavior.<sup>109</sup>

Some studies suggest students receive harsher punishments from SROs for infractions than school administrators would have handed down.<sup>110</sup> In fact, the research suggests the presence of SROs “increases the likelihood of student arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system.”<sup>111</sup> According to French-Marcelin Inger, and Cohn, in 1975, just 1 percent of schools nationwide had an SRO stationed on site whereas in 2017–2018, 61 percent of schools had SROs on campus.<sup>112</sup> However, compelling evidence suggests that SROs often enforce low-level crimes and arrest more youth, resulting in youth being susceptible to the criminal justice system. Furthermore, French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn argue that SROs do not protect schools from shootings or violence but actually intensify mistrust between minority groups and the police.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Na and Gottfredson, 646.

<sup>107</sup> Megan French-Marcelin, Sarah Hinger, and Kali Cohn, *Bullies in Blue: The Origins and Consequences of School Policing* (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 2017).

<sup>108</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn.

<sup>109</sup> Na and Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools.”

<sup>110</sup> Gottfredson et al., “Effects of School Resource Officers.”

<sup>111</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, “School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline,” 125.

<sup>112</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn, *Bullies in Blue*, 10.

<sup>113</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn.

As schools across the country adopt technologically advanced records management systems, school administrators and district leaders are entrusted with tremendous information about children. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), enacted in 1974, governs the privilege of recordings, academic records, video recordings, and disciplinary reports to parents.<sup>114</sup> These rights then transfer to the students when they turn 18 or continue their education beyond the high school level.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, it has been argued that police and school administrators often violate FERPA and the Fourth Amendment for unreasonable search and seizure when they share personal information about students.<sup>116</sup> Police in Lakewood, Colorado, seemed to violate the information-sharing restriction when they released the names of juveniles and their identifying information to a neighboring law enforcement jurisdiction. In another example, SROs commonly assist in gang member identification in local schools, and many argue that children are being mislabeled as gang members because of poor intelligence by law enforcement.<sup>117</sup>

Some scholars suggest that minority students are disproportionately suspected of involvement in criminal activity and that Black students are twice as likely to be referred to the criminal justice system as White students.<sup>118</sup> Statistics support arguments that minority students are targeted based on race and ethnicity.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, the Center for Public Integrity reported that approximately 26 percent of children referred to law enforcement in 2012–2013 had some sort of special needs or learning disabilities although they represented only 14 percent of the student population.<sup>120</sup> There is further concern that

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<sup>114</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn.

<sup>115</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn.

<sup>116</sup> Rita Verano and Veh Bezdikian, *Addressing School-Related Crime and Disorder* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0007-pub.pdf>.

<sup>117</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn, *Bullies in Blue*.

<sup>118</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, “School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline,” 122.

<sup>119</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn, *Bullies in Blue*.

<sup>120</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn, 22.

SROs who contact these students lack the training and experience to effectively navigate and police this population, thus misclassifying their behavior as criminal.<sup>121</sup>

### 3. Advocates of SROs: Connection and Campus Safety

The role and effectiveness of SROs cannot be judged on statistics alone. Crime prevention and crime reduction are nuanced challenges, and each community or school district has specific needs. While SROs might be assigned to schools with high crime rates, that does not paint the complete picture of what their role is on campus. Additionally, context makes a significant difference, and not all SRO programs are the same. For example, an SRO at an inner-city school might have a completely different role and responsibilities from those of a rural or suburban SRO. Moreover, most research suggests that SROs are more than just law enforcers.

Researchers agree that interactions between teachers and SROs have an essential influence on outcomes, further supporting the need for positive collaboration between these adults on campus. In their report, French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn suggest that law enforcement targeted at students should be a collaborative effort between officers and school administrators.<sup>122</sup> Past research has explained how SROs build strong connections with students; additionally, it has demonstrated SROs' impact on teachers' perspectives regarding how to reduce violence on campus. Although most research on teachers' attitudes has focused on urban settings, some studies of teachers in rural districts suggest that they have a drastically different outlook on school safety. Additionally, high school and middle school teachers have differing opinions regarding the SRO's role. Research has revealed that although middle school teachers want safe campuses, they are more concerned about alternative forms of discipline such as counseling, diversion programs, and probation.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> David May, Corrie Rice, and Kevin Minor, "An Examination of School Resource Officers' Attitudes Regarding Behavioral Issues among Students Receiving Special Education Services," *Current Issues in Education* 15, no. 3 (2012): 6.

<sup>122</sup> French-Marcelin, Hinger, and Cohn, *Bullies in Blue*.

<sup>123</sup> Brandon J. Wood and Eric Hampton, "The Influence of School Resource Officer Presence on Teacher Perceptions of School Safety and Security," *School Psychology Review* 50, no. 2–3 (2021): 360–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1844547>.

Students feel connected to their schools when they feel safe in the presence of trusted teachers and staff members.<sup>124</sup> The application of consistent rules and efforts to create school connectedness helps to achieve this climate.<sup>125</sup> As explained by Matthew Theriot, SROs contribute to school connectedness, which may reduce violence.<sup>126</sup> Theriot discusses several studies that support this finding, documenting the “relationship between greater school connectedness and less school violence.”<sup>127</sup> Theriot explains that school connectedness, also known as school bonding, is a multifaceted concept that entails students’ caring about and investing in their schools.<sup>128</sup> Connectedness derives from students’ feeling of belonging and association with the school as well as support from peer groups, teachers, and school staff, including SROs.<sup>129</sup>

Limited research about SROs on campus draws conflicting conclusions about whether officers prevent violence. Some argue that the mere presence of officers on campuses creates the perception that campuses and schools are safe.<sup>130</sup> Routine activities theory, a criminal theory developed by Cohen and Felson, explores why crime occurs and details the characteristics of a *motivated offender* and a *capable guardian*.<sup>131</sup> Cohen and Felson suggest that a juvenile crime cannot be committed without fulfilling three criteria: a “motivated offender,” a “suitable target,” and the “absence of [a] capable guardian.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Theriot, “School Resource Officers and the Criminalization of Student Behavior.”

<sup>125</sup> Matthew T. Theriot, “The Impact of School Resource Officer Interaction on Students’ Feelings about School and School Police,” *Crime & Delinquency* 62, no. 4 (April 2016): 446–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128713503526>.

<sup>126</sup> Theriot.

<sup>127</sup> Theriot, 446.

<sup>128</sup> Theriot, 447.

<sup>129</sup> Theriot, 446.

<sup>130</sup> Bracy, “Student Perceptions of High-Security School Environments.”

<sup>131</sup> SooHyun O and Pamela Wilcox, “Routine Activity Theory, Target Congruence, and School Context: A Multilevel Analysis of Teacher Victimization,” *Victims & Offenders* 13, no. 3 (2018): 349–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2017.1329174>.

<sup>132</sup> Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson, “Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach,” *American Sociological Review* 44, no. 4 (August 1979): 589, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094589>.

Here, the presence of an SRO on campus would obviate the third element required to commit a crime and thus deter a young would-be offender.

Despite substantial research on the perceptions of SRO programs through the lenses of administrators, parents, and students, few studies address the teachers' perceptions of the SROs' role in reducing and preventing violence on campus—especially in rural communities.<sup>133</sup> Additionally, available research draws conflicting conclusions about whether school shootings and school violence decrease because of SROs.<sup>134</sup> Consequently, these contradictory views and findings call SRO programs into question.

Some contend that this gap results from the studies' methodology. As argued by Streater, research into whether SROs prevent crime on campuses is “descriptive in nature.”<sup>135</sup> He suggests that these studies explore the perceptions of people involved in SRO programs rather than measure crime prevention rates on campus.<sup>136</sup> Streater contends that although SRO programs differ from community to community, school administrators' perceptions do not change in rural or urban settings.<sup>137</sup>

Wood and Hampton further support Streater's argument that teachers attribute a safe campus to the contributions of SROs.<sup>138</sup> For example, in studying teachers' perceptions of SRO effectiveness in reducing violence on campus, Wood and Hampton concluded that teachers believe SROs make the campus safer, especially as the number of SRO programs grows.<sup>139</sup> In a survey of 4,000 teachers, the researchers found that 63 percent of teachers endorsed this view of a safer campus, affirming that teachers perceive

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<sup>133</sup> Coon and Travis, “The Role of Police in Public Schools,” 15–30.

<sup>134</sup> David Audet dit Lapointe, “Teacher Perception of School Safety between Mississippi Secondary Schools with School Resource Officers and School Safety Officers” (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2016), ProQuest.

<sup>135</sup> David Warren Streater, “Urban and Rural Principals' Perceptions of School Resource Officers' Effect on School Climate” (PhD diss., Barry University, 2008), 80, ProQuest.

<sup>136</sup> Streater.

<sup>137</sup> Streater.

<sup>138</sup> Wood and Hampton, “The Influence of School Resource Officer Presence.”

<sup>139</sup> Wood and Hampton.

SROs to play a vital role in school safety.<sup>140</sup> In sum, Wood and Hampton found overwhelming support that teachers believe schools are not dangerous places and that SROs provide a feeling of safety and security.<sup>141</sup>

Despite research suggesting that SROs reduce campus violence, a body of evidence claims that SROs do not reduce violence in schools but exert only a psychological effect. Illustrating the psychological—yet often negative—impact, David Audet dit Lapointe states,

Examples of the conflicting evidence of the success of SROs in reducing school violence are apparent in literature. . . . [Even though] SROs in school may provide a psychological benefit for other stakeholders, their presence may pose a psychological threat to students, who may view police as a threat to their freedom.<sup>142</sup>

Overall, research can provide no overriding consensus regarding the role that SROs play in campus safety. Some argue that the mere presence of officers on campus creates the perception of security; however, others argue that officers undermine the sense of safety. These findings suggest that further research is needed to understand the perceptions of SRO programs.

## **B. THE ROLES OF TEACHERS AND SROS IN SCHOOL SAFETY**

Although research on the impact of SRO programs is mixed, to accomplish program goals, SROs must partner and collaborate with teachers. Understanding each other's role is necessary to foster collaboration. This section discusses research regarding the roles that teachers and SROs play in student discipline, the teacher's role in responding to violence, and the collaboration between SROs and teachers in responding to violence.

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<sup>140</sup> Wood and Hampton, 363.

<sup>141</sup> Wood and Hampton.

<sup>142</sup> Audet dit Lapointe, "Teacher Perception of School Safety," 9.



## 1. The SRO's Role in Discipline

The SRO is the primary actor in school safety and discipline—educating students, teachers, staff, and parents; serving as informal counselors; and enforcing the law.<sup>143</sup> As informal leaders within the schools, SROs often establish mentoring relationships, assist in legal aid, refer students to social services, and engage in community outreach programs.<sup>144</sup> As law enforcers and disciplinarians, SROs patrol campuses, respond to crimes in progress on and off campus, make arrests, issue citations, and develop emergency response plans.<sup>145</sup> An SRO acts as an all-purpose school safety officer and provides prevention and intervention as needed.

Although SROs are assigned to both rural and urban schools, school administrators in these diverse settings have distinct views of the SRO's role in campus discipline. In a study conducted at a rural Kentucky middle school, SROs who enforced a strict zero-tolerance philosophy successfully reduced school violence.<sup>146</sup> However, Pigott, Stearns, and Khey contend that this strict approach could create a school-to-prison pipeline, as is often seen in inner-city schools, because punishing students who commit minor offenses may introduce them to the criminal justice system, and heavy-handed enforcement by SROs can lead to mistrust among students, staff, administrators, and community members.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, as Wood and Hampton conclude, rural communities want the same school safety as their inner-city counterparts.<sup>148</sup> However, a study conducted by Hunt et al. finds that SROs in urban and rural school districts differ markedly in discipline and criminal enforcement.<sup>149</sup> Rural SROs and school administrators are concerned about gang activity, drug use, and violence, and they support strict enforcement of laws limited to these

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<sup>143</sup> Gottfredson et al., "Effects of School Resource Officers."

<sup>144</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>145</sup> Gottfredson et al.

<sup>146</sup> Rick Ruddell and David May, "Challenging Our Perceptions of Rural Policing: An Examination of School Resource Officers in Rural and Urban Kentucky Schools," *Kentucky Journal of School Safety* 1, no. 1 (January 2010): 5–18.

<sup>147</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, "School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline."

<sup>148</sup> Wood and Hampton, "The Influence of School Resource Officer Presence."

<sup>149</sup> Hunt et al., "Characteristics and Perceptions of School Resource Officers," 1–24.

activities.<sup>150</sup> On the other hand, urban school administrators are more concerned about students bringing weapons and drugs on campus than they are about heavy-handed enforcement tactics often seen in high schools, which can create a school-to-prison scenario.<sup>151</sup>

These contradictory views of strict discipline by SROs in rural and urban schools bear a closer look. Research demonstrates that views about discipline differ between types of schools, but few studies elaborate or explain what might influence these different perceptions. Further research is required to explain perceptions of discipline—and potentially the role of SROs—in different types of schools.

## **2. The Teachers' Role in Responding to Violence**

Teachers are often the first to respond to violence on campus and frequently take immediate enforcement action.<sup>152</sup> However, this reality can create frustration for teachers because they believe this responsibility rightly belongs to administrators, SROs, and campus security teams.<sup>153</sup> Teachers can play a supporting role with law enforcement to identify, respond to, and mitigate school violence; accordingly, Kanner argues that awareness is the first step in preventing school violence.<sup>154</sup> For example, teachers have close contact with students and are usually the first to respond to violence, yet many studies focus on the school administrators' perspectives of violence without exploring the teachers' viewpoint.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, scant research has examined teachers' perceptions of the role that SROs play when confronting violence on campus, especially in a rural environment.<sup>156</sup> Most research on school violence addresses the specific characteristics of

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<sup>150</sup> Ruddell and May, "Challenging Our Perceptions of Rural Policing."

<sup>151</sup> Pigott, Stearns, and Khey, "School Resource Officers and the School to Prison Pipeline."

<sup>152</sup> Kanner, "Staff Preparedness Perceptions."

<sup>153</sup> Kanner.

<sup>154</sup> Kanner.

<sup>155</sup> Kanner.

<sup>156</sup> Wood and Hampton, "The Influence of School Resource Officer Presence."

the offender rather than the nature of the aggression.<sup>157</sup> In contrast, the current study explores how SROs and administrators can better support each other while responding to violence on campus.

Overall, a gap in the literature concerns how teachers respond to violence on campus in rural versus urban communities. Specifically, it is unclear how teachers react to violence and what role the SROs have in school discipline. Furthermore, how SROs contribute to school connectedness and the reduction of violence on campus needs further exploration. This thesis helps to fill this gap. As explained earlier, more consistent connection and collaboration with teachers will improve safety on campus.

### **3. Challenges to Collaboration in Responding to Violence**

Police and school administrators in both rural and urban areas contest the proper role of the SRO position. As a result, tension between school and police administrators creates confusion among SROs and teachers. Coon and Travis assert that school personnel and police clash over the SRO's exact role.<sup>158</sup> They attribute the source of the conflict to school administrators' failure to understand the role of SROs and, as a result, their influence on the work that SROs undertake.<sup>159</sup> Thus, while school personnel may perceive the SRO to play the role of disciplinarian, SROs might avoid disciplinary practices because they perceive them as beyond their scope of responsibility. Conversely, school safety plans and crime prevention may be priorities for SROs but not for school personnel.<sup>160</sup> In this way, a discrepancy in the SRO's perceived role has real consequences for administrators, teachers, and students that have not been adequately explored.

Studies have examined front-line educators' perceptions and perspectives on how to respond to school violence, how well they feel they are prepared to respond to violence, and what they would do in the event of a violent incident. However, most of these studies

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<sup>157</sup> Kanner, "Staff Preparedness Perceptions."

<sup>158</sup> Coon and Travis, "The Role of Police in Public Schools."

<sup>159</sup> Coon and Travis.

<sup>160</sup> Susan Joyner, "School Violence: Female Teachers' Perceptions of the School Resource Officer's Role" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2015), ProQuest.

focus only on the viewpoints of administrators who lack regular contact with students. To date, no studies account for teachers' perceptions of SROs in preventing crime on campus.<sup>161</sup> This thesis addresses this gap in understanding by analyzing the perspectives of CUSD teachers on school violence, campus safety, and the CPD's SRO program.

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<sup>161</sup> Kanner, "Staff Preparedness Perceptions."

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## **IV. RESEARCH METHODS**

This qualitative study explores teachers' perceptions of the SRO's role and school safety at three high schools and four middle schools in the Chico Unified School District (CUSD). Chico, a city of nearly 110,000 people, is situated in the northern Sacramento Valley in Northern California, and its schools currently educate nearly 12,300 students. I conducted and analyzed semi-structured interviews focused on teachers' perceptions of safety and the role that SROs play in reducing violence on campus. This chapter discusses the research approach and analysis methods.

### **A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Several interests shaped my questions. I explored the teachers' perspectives on school safety, the role of the SRO in reducing violence on campus, and the SRO program's efficacy in preparing teachers to respond to violence. The next set of questions explored the teachers' experience with another school district relating to the research questions. This line of inquiry was important in comparing other SRO programs to Chico's program. The last series of questions explored the teachers' perspectives on school safety and the role of the SRO in reducing violence on campus. These series of questions were designed to understand the role and responsibilities of the SRO in building relationships with students, teachers, and staff while seeking teachers' perspectives on their knowledge of the SRO's daily role in fostering safety on campus. See Appendix A for a complete list of the interview questions.

#### **1. Demographics**

The first series of questions sought basic demographic information from the teachers involved. I wanted to see how long participants had been teaching to gain an understanding of their experience. I wanted to know each teacher's school because each Chico campus has a different culture and different student demographics. It was also important to understand whether the teachers had been exposed to certain SROs over a period. Next, I wanted to know whether the teachers had taught at other schools and in

other communities to determine any prior experience with SROs. Furthermore, obtaining age, gender, and racial information allowed me to determine whether my data set was diverse.

## **2. Prior Experience with SROs**

The next series of questions focused on the teachers' experience with SROs either in Chico or in another district. The purpose of these questions was to understand their knowledge of the SRO program and to hear their perspectives on and experiences with SROs. I wanted to learn about either positive or negative experiences that might influence how they feel about law enforcement or the SRO program. The questions also helped determine any significant incidents that might have altered their views of the program. Finally, I wanted to hear about SRO engagement with students and teachers and the outcomes of these experiences.

## **3. School Safety**

The next series of questions focused on school safety. The purpose was to understand the teachers' viewpoints on school violence nationally and its influence on whether they believe SROs are important to school safety. The questions were designed to spark a response about the dangers of school violence and see whether teachers think about violence daily. The questions were also designed to learn teachers' opinions about violence in Chico and beliefs about whether violence is a major issue on campuses in the district. I also wanted to obtain the teachers' perspectives about what being safe and, conversely, being unsafe on campus means to them. Furthermore, the questions were designed to elicit information about student behavior, SRO behavior, administrative behavior, and measures that schools take to make teachers feel safe on campus.

## **4. Physical Safety and Psychological Safety**

Both physical and psychological safety are critically important in teachers' perceptions of their own safety. Physical safety is the all-encompassing feeling of the teacher's physical well-being while psychological well-being refers to one's overall mental health, including self-actualization, positive relationships with others, self-acceptance,

autonomy, and personal growth.<sup>162</sup> I wanted to hear examples of how teachers' feelings of safety affect them on campus and whether these feelings influence their decision-making. Teachers' opinions about campus safety can influence whether they support an SRO program.

## **5. How Behavior Influences Safety**

The next series of questions focused on the human factors that affect feelings of safety. The questions sought to understand the teachers' perspectives regarding whether students, teachers, administrators, or SROs affect the feeling of safety. Although teachers may have a perception of safety at school, students who are violent can influence these perceptions. Additionally, I sought to determine whether teachers believe their administrators are providing a safe work environment for them.

## **6. The SRO's Roles and Responsibilities**

Understanding teachers' viewpoints on the roles and responsibilities of SROs will help determine whether the teachers are aware of the resources these officers provide to the school. Teachers have an intimate working knowledge of students and the dynamics of what occurs inside their classrooms, so these questions were designed to explore the teachers' thoughts about the daily operations of SROs. The questions sought input on the teachers' experiences with an SRO and whether they believe the model of policing implemented on campus is effective. The questions were asked to determine what the SROs do well and seek opinions about areas for improvement. How does the presence of an SRO affect safety?

## **7. Summary**

These questions served as a foundation for understanding the teachers' perspectives of the SRO program. Understanding their thoughts and feelings about school violence, school safety, and the role of SROs on campus will assist in further developing the SRO

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<sup>162</sup> Alexander Newman, Ross Donohue, and Nathan Eva, "Psychological Safety: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Human Resource Management Review* 27, no. 3 (September 2017): 521–35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.01.001>.



program. These questions allowed for a diverse set of answers and a broad range of experiences.

## **B. DATA COLLECTION**

Before any interviews were conducted, the thesis proposal was submitted to the Naval Postgraduate School's Institutional Review Board and received its approval. Before recruiting teachers for this study, I met with the principals from the designated high schools and middle schools and discussed the purpose and scope of the study and provided them with a recruitment flyer seeking volunteers, which was distributed via email to the school staff.

I sought to include teachers from diverse backgrounds and with a wide range of teaching experience and familiarity with SROs, with either CUSD or another school district. Twenty-eight CUSD educators participated in interviews—18 high school and 10 middle school teachers. Each teacher had a minimum of three years' experience, with one having more than 38 years in the classroom. The average tenure of teachers participating in this study was 17.6 years. Of the 28 teachers interviewed, 20 were women and eight men. Ethnically, 20 teachers were White and eight Hispanic. I interviewed eight teachers from Pleasant Valley High School (PVHS), three from Chico High School (CHS), and five from Fairview High School (FHS), as well as three teachers from Bidwell Junior High School (BJHS) and seven from Chico Junior High School (CJHS). No teachers from Hank Marsh Middle School were interviewed.

Interviews lasted 35–45 minutes and were conducted in person, by telephone, or online via Zoom. Each interview was recorded and transcribed for review and analysis, resulting in 316 pages of transcribed text.

## **C. DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH**

I analyzed the data using thematic analysis.<sup>163</sup> During each interview, I took notes and highlighted recurring themes. Following each interview, I prepared a research memo,

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<sup>163</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

noting the emerging themes and indicating how each participant's responses related to previous responses and the literature. I then transcribed the interviews using online transcription software, resulting in 316 pages of transcribed interviews and 43 pages of summaries and highlighted direct quotes. I carefully read each transcribed interview several times, identified recurring themes, highlighted representative quotations for each theme, and then grouped the themes into categories. Finally, I compared the themes and categories across groups of participants based on teachers' experiences to relate the themes and categories to the research questions and make recommendations. See Appendix B for initial themes, final categories, and example quotations organized by relevant research question.

#### **D. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH**

While qualitative research allows an in-depth exploration of experiences, it also poses limitations. The time necessary to compile and analyze rich, qualitative data limited the number of participants that could be included in the study. As of this writing, nearly 500 teachers work for CUSD, and only 28 teachers participated in the study. Thus, it is possible that those who did not participate would have shared different views than those who did. This study focused on middle school and high school teachers and did not include support staff, administrators, or elementary school teachers. These other groups may have differing perspectives. Furthermore, the study focused strictly on the Chico Police Department's (CPD) SRO program and should not be interpreted to apply to SRO programs as a whole. Last, funding and staffing levels limit the services the CPD can provide to the school district. In making recommendations, I considered these limitations. If budgetary and staffing constraints had not been an issue for the department, the recommendations might have differed.

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## V. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This analysis investigates teachers' perceptions of school violence and the efficacy of the CPD's SRO program in reducing violence. An analysis of the semi-structured interviews resulted in key themes and categories, including national school violence, violence in Chico, and beliefs about physical and psychological safety on campus. Other aspects of the interviews described how SROs have prepared teachers for violence on campus and provided assessments of the SRO program.

The analysis finds overall support for the SRO program. Generally, teachers expressed a positive opinion of the SRO program and the officers assigned to the unit. Most teachers said they felt safe having an SRO on campus and appreciated the relationships the SROs build with students, staff, and administrators. Although the teachers' perception was favorable, they voiced some concern about the officers' competence, visibility, and communication. For example, some teachers questioned the effectiveness of physical barriers, such as fencing and security cameras, while others questioned the effectiveness of SROs in creating psychological safety. Some teachers expressed feeling physically safe on campus because of their school culture and the community itself while others felt safe because of the SRO's presence on campus. Although there are security measures in place, most teachers said these would not prevent a shooting from occurring, thus calling their effectiveness into question.

This chapter analyzes teachers' views about school violence nationally, the sources of feeling safe or unsafe at school, and the SRO's effect on their overall feeling of safety. It also discusses teachers' positive and negative opinions about the SRO program. The final chapter of this thesis provides recommendations for the SRO program based on suggestions from teachers on areas for improvement.

### A. PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Several overarching themes emerged in participants' perceptions of violence nationally and at their schools. Overall, teachers felt powerless to affect national violence or mass shootings. They believed that perceptions of violence ebb and flow depending on

current events, and they expressed concern about both physical and psychological safety on campus.

## **1. National School Violence**

When teachers were asked about their views of violence nationally, there was a consistent theme: most said there was nothing they could do about violence nationally and nothing could be done to prevent a mass shooting on campus. They added that the national landscape influences viewpoints about violence, which ebb and flow based on current events. Teachers said they know there is an inherent risk, but the likelihood of a mass shooting on campus is extremely low.

Shortly before the interviews, a mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, resulted in the deaths of 19 students and two teachers. The questionable response from SROs and police further fueled the national debate about SRO programs and police tactics. This current event weighed on the minds of the teachers interviewed. Although school violence remains a relatively rare event, the timing of the shootings generated some interesting observations from the teachers. The teachers shared the perception that their concern about school violence and mass shootings fluctuates based on current events. They also agreed that an SRO's presence on campus does not necessarily mean that a mass shooting or violence will not occur. All the teachers stated that shootings are rare events—statistically, they occur on fewer than 1 percent of all campuses nationwide—but the possibility of such violence still weighs on their minds.

Most teachers said it was difficult not to feel vulnerable and unsafe, and some even said the lack of SRO visibility on campus has contributed to that feeling of vulnerability. As a result of violent incidents elsewhere, some teachers said they have changed how they discipline students to prevent being targeted by a disgruntled student in the future. Some teachers said they believe their jobs are more dangerous because they lack the training that police officers have, and they are not armed to defend themselves or others.

A teacher with more than 35 years' experience offered the following comment on school violence nationally during an in-person interview:

Right now, schools are safer than they've ever been before by the latest studies—Reuters, CNN, NYU. I believe, also, overall, schools are safer than ever before. However, the collective trauma associated with some psycho with an air rifle, 40 magazines with 30 rounds each, going to a classroom and wiping out 22 babies. That's just, I mean, that is just incomprehensible. So, . . . you know, it makes me sick. It makes me want to come up with ideas. . . . There's nothing I can do except . . . just follow protocol, you know, mark my door. And if anything like that happens at my school, . . . it makes me feel a little bit like I don't have much of a choice in that area.

Another high school teacher indicated that, in light of the national news, it is difficult not to feel unsafe and vulnerable on campus. This teacher explained that educators are not naive about school violence, but they cannot let it govern their day. Although the campus is fenced, which provides a barrier for outsiders, the teacher knows it would not be difficult for someone to gain access. The teacher stated, "I think, overall, that's a positive thing because . . . you forget like we're in Chico and nothing bad happens, which is kind of good. Ignorance is bliss. . . . So, yeah, I feel pretty safe."

Some teachers even stated that reports of school violence affect how they teach and punish students. For example, during a telephone interview, one middle school teacher expressed that "it's really scary, and anybody who's in the classroom teaching can't help think in their minds when it's [a shooting] going to happen." The teacher expressed concern about the impact of disciplining a student; for example, if the student "goes off the deep end, is this kiddo going to come back and do something to me?" She concluded that current events do affect how she teaches and how she disciplines.

Furthermore, a teacher stated in a telephone interview that she does not feel safe on campus because of recent school shootings and no SRO presence at her school. However, even if an SRO were on campus and violence did occur, the teacher said she had little faith in the SRO engaging the suspect. Furthermore, she believes school violence will continue given the lack of discipline, consequences, and engagement between staff, counselors, and parents.

Along these lines, a middle school teacher said during a telephone interview that she believes her job, at times, is more dangerous than police work. In the wake of violence

across the country, she expressed, teachers usually feel vulnerable to attack because they lack the training to effectively disarm a subject or properly de-escalate a student. She stated,

Honestly, my job is probably at times more dangerous than a police officer's job because [police are] equipped in the correct way. And, at times, we are a lot more vulnerable. And if the situation were to arise, I think, for the most part, we're as safe as we can be. I don't want an SRO at our site all day, every day, standing guard because they're afraid we're gonna get shot up. So I think the life we live now is just kind of a little bit more dangerous as a teacher. And, unfortunately, I don't think there's a whole lot we can do about it, except for, like I said, locking up that gate and then maybe finding just a little bit more training for us as teachers, self-defense and de-escalation.

A teacher's perspective on school violence nationally, as indicated, depends on current events. However, violence seems ever-present in their minds. Teachers often forget about school violence until the next highly publicized incident.

## **2. Physical Safety**

Another recurring theme in the interviews was teachers' physical and psychological safety, and this section presents that discussion. Most of the 28 teachers interviewed said they have an overall positive feeling about school safety. However, they provided differing opinions when asked about their physical and psychological safety on campus. Physical safety considerations include campus SROs, barriers such as gates and locked doors, surveillance cameras, the stature of students, and the physical design of the classrooms and buildings. High school and middle school teachers had differing perceptions of student behavior and its relation to physical safety. Middle school teachers said their students do not necessarily intimidate them while high school teachers said their bigger and stronger students can be imposing and intimidating.

Physical barriers, such as exterior fencing and security cameras, provide a false sense of safety, some teachers said, adding that these measures would not prevent a motivated attacker from coming onto campus. Both high school and middle school teachers mentioned this concern. For example, during a phone interview on August 28, 2022, one CJHS teacher stated, "I don't think it [fencing] will stop some crazy person making a last-minute decision. . . . I don't feel like a gate will stop someone that really wants to come in.

They could jump over nine times out of 10.” Likewise, a teacher from BJHS compared the cameras on campus to a residential alarm system: although their presence might slow down an assailant, no security measure is bullet-proof. Furthermore, a teacher at PVHS specifically questioned the purpose of the security gates, indicating that students can disarm the gates with their student body cards and throw their backpacks over the fence, thus disengaging the crash bar.

Another concern was expressed about the design of school buildings. As explained by a CHS teacher, there are gaps in the fence surrounding the school, rendering it useless to stop anyone from coming onto campus. The teacher referred to the fence as “window dressing” on a building constructed 130 years ago. This point was echoed by two other teachers, both of whom expressed grave concern about the location of their classrooms with no security fencing around them.

Although some participants expressed concern about the security gates, others had positive feedback. Most of the teachers indicated that the gates would slow down an attacker or even prevent trespassers from committing quality-of-life-type crimes on campus. Furthermore, they said the gates serve a purpose and make them feel secure. For example, during a Zoom interview, an FHS teacher expressed feeling safe on campus because of the gates, security cameras, and the presence of an armed SRO. Offering further support, a PVHS teacher stated, “It’s a very open campus, an inviting campus. We have barriers now, which is nice. I know that it’s difficult to get on campus, but not impossible.”

Some additional worries for teachers—especially those in high schools—included students’ stature and support from school administration. However, middle school teachers’ observations about safety were different from those of their high school counterparts. For example, middle school teachers said they felt supported by their administration and their teaching working group, explaining that, especially at the middle school age, there are few disciplinary issues or incidents of violence that they cannot handle. Some teachers mentioned the physical size and maturity of students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, saying that most students do not pose a significant threat in size. Many of the teachers interviewed said they have no major safety concerns, adding that if behavioral issues came up in class, they were handled before police intervention was



necessary. Especially in middle school, the teachers said they relied on their own experience in handling behavioral issues or problem students. For example, during an interview on September 28, 2022, a CJHS teacher with more than 30 years' experience stated,

I have never, ever felt unsafe due to student behavior. Not even one time. And maybe because it's my discipline style. It's the fact that I listen to my kids, you know. I go, "Hey, look, this is what I saw". . . . Some of these kids are, you know, pushing five foot one, maybe 110 pounds soaking wet. The average right now, the eighth graders, they're pushing five-five to six foot here or there.

In further support of this observation, a teacher from BJHS expressed similar experiences with students. During an in-person interview on August 23, 2022, the teacher attributed most of their success in managing student behavioral problems to their 27 years of teaching experience. The teacher indicated that before involving an SRO or school administrator, the teacher would exhaust all means of intervention, adding that never has a student threatened them or made them feel unsafe at the school. In contrast, the teacher indicated that a few years ago, a female student teacher had been harassed by a student who exhibited volatile and unpredictable behavior.

Violence on campus can happen anytime or anywhere, so the trend among CUSD schools is to install exterior security measures such as fencing and security cameras. Most of the teachers interviewed feel that the fencing around campus provides a false sense of security or no security whatsoever. The teachers feel that if a student were motivated to bring a weapon on campus, a fence or a camera would not prevent the student from doing it. Also, if a violent incident were to occur, a fence would only delay a student's escape. The teachers feel that if a shooter were motivated to attack a school, a fence would merely slow down, not prevent, the attacker.

Participants acknowledged that if someone were motivated to attack the school, that person would do whatever necessary to get onto campus and commit the crime. Some teachers even indicated that the gates were unlocked most of the time and someone not welcome on campus could easily gain access to the school. Furthermore, students know how to defeat the fencing system and where the security cameras are placed. For example,

students know to smoke or vape in bathrooms because there are no cameras there. Also, while cameras might help identify students involved in a fight or provide intelligence to law enforcement or administrators, they do nothing to prevent a mass shooting or violence on campus.

Even though security gates and cameras might lend a modicum of security, they really have no legitimate means of preventing a mass shooting or violence on campus. They offer a feeling of psychological instead of physical safety. If school districts want to build modern fencing and install security cameras, they should know there is no evidence to suggest that such measures will prevent violence or crime on campus. Based on the perceptions of CUSD teachers, these exterior security measures do absolutely nothing to keep the campus safe.

On the other hand, high school teachers had different perceptions of their physical safety when confronting students and disciplinary issues. During a phone interview, a PVHS teacher expressed concerns about their safety when confronting students who are fighting or being aggressive. The teacher indicated that she does not have the physical skills to intervene appropriately if students are actively fighting:

Honestly . . . I'm small, maybe 115 pounds. How am I going to appropriately intervene [with] two huge football players fighting? Yeah, I'll try my best, but I have a family to think about. I have two young kiddos at home. My job is to educate, not to break up fights between two massive linebackers.

Another PVHS teacher, who has more than nine years' experience, expressed similar concerns. The teacher described a time when a drunk student became aggressive toward another student in their classroom, and the teacher felt helpless, vulnerable, and scared because there was nothing she could do based on the student's aggressive behavior. Ultimately, the teacher relied on a colleague to help intervene. The teacher said, however, that if an SRO had been present, the officer would have assisted in the situation.

Most of the teachers interviewed said they felt safer with an SRO on campus, adding that they believe having an armed officer on school grounds creates a positive environment to deter crime. The visual deterrent of a patrol vehicle parked in front of the

school and the presence of an officer walking around campus create the feeling that if a major incident were to occur, the officer would take the necessary enforcement action. For example, one teacher indicated feeling a sense of security when the officer was at school and the SRO vehicle parked in front. The teacher appreciated the SRO's being armed and ready to respond to an act of violence:

I definitely like that he's armed. I like having an armed presence at the school site. I was indifferent back in the day. But since there's been so many, you know, shootings—people coming on campuses with weapons—I think that when there's an opportunity and there's a police car parked out front, I think they're going to think twice and avoid campus.

Overall, the teachers have a positive perception of the SROs' providing a sense of security for them on campus, and they appreciate that the officers are present and visible. The SROs' presence makes the teachers feel safe in the event an incident occurs. However, regarding physical barriers, most of the teachers interviewed do not believe the barriers provide a sense of security, having highlighted the design of the buildings and the lack of adequate and effective fencing. Additionally, the physical stature of students does affect the teachers' feelings of safety. As indicated earlier in this subsection, middle school teachers have a completely different perspective from high school teachers, with most middle school teachers feeling confident they can adequately discipline the students. In contrast, some high school teachers consider their students' stature intimidating at times.

### **3. Psychological Safety**

In addition to physical safety, psychological safety has proven critically important to the teachers' overall perception of safety on campus. The fact that an officer is present makes the teachers feel safe and secure; however, peer and administrative support play a crucial role in teachers' overall feeling of psychological safety and mental health. Having support from peers and administrators was deemed important in resolving disciplinary problems and helping students with behavioral issues. Teachers also said that school culture and the safety of the community are important aspects of their perceived psychological safety at school. This subsection discusses how administrative and peer

support provide a sense of psychological safety for teachers, bolstered by the practical application of code red drills, tabletop exercises, and close work with SROs.

Teamwork and peer support—particularly the support of administrators in disciplinary issues—were identified as contributors to the feeling of safety on campus. Being emotionally and physically safe at work, able to freely communicate and listen, allows teachers to thrive professionally. Teachers said that if their administrators both at the school site and at the district level take care of them, they feel safe and happy with their jobs. During in-person interviews, two CJHS teachers stated that having the support of their fellow teachers makes them feel both emotionally and physically safe on campus. Having a group of teachers supporting one another creates a work environment that allows for creativity and consistency.

Some teachers said the overall culture of the campus is what provides a feeling of safety. For example, during a phone interview, a PVHS teacher indicated that she has never felt unsafe at school, adding that Chico is a relatively crime-free community as well. She said she is not concerned about her safety on campus or outside of school. Another teacher expressed a similar opinion. Before teaching in Chico, he had spent several years in classrooms in Southern California and taught at a school in Long Beach during a time when gang activity and violence was a normal occurrence. Although Chico is not immune to crime, he expressed not feeling the same stressors that he had in Long Beach and recognized that BJHS and the Chico community are safe environments overall.

A teacher at CHS and a teacher at BJHS echoed these sentiments. Before coming to Chico, the latter teacher worked at a high school in Sonoma County that was plagued with gang activity and violence. It seemed like every week there was a fight on campus, and her overall feeling of safety diminished based on the violence. Although an SRO whom she described as a “phenomenal asset” and resource was assigned to the school, the officer could not fully mitigate her feelings of vulnerability. Additionally, the overall culture of the school significantly affected her feeling of safety. The teacher said that even though Chico is not immune to criminal activity, the community and school culture lend a greater sense of safety and security.

Positive communication and transparency were mentioned as critical in feeling safe and enjoying one's workplace. This concept was further supported by a PVHS teacher who stated that support from her peers and administrators has helped build her confidence in decision-making regarding student discipline. Although the teacher has not been at PVHS very long, she has nearly 18 years' teaching experience at schools throughout California, enjoying support from peers and administrators at every school. Such support makes her feel confident and emotionally safe.

Conversely, during an in-person interview, one teacher expressed the feeling that his administration lacks transparency and communication, leaving him feeling unsupported with no faith or confidence that the administration will keep him safe. The teacher is annoyed that during his 30-year career, he has never been included in drafting safety plans or asked about his safety needs by an administrator. The teacher expressed frustration about the lack of communication and consistency with student discipline.

Several teachers indicated that code red drills help support their feeling of psychological safety on campus. The CUSD uses the internet-based Catapult notification system, which informs teachers when a lockdown drill is scheduled or an actual lockdown is activated. The system allows any teacher or administrator to activate a lockdown if a violent or suspicious activity occurs on campus. Not only does the system notify teachers of an incident, but it assists in taking roll to account for students' whereabouts during the lockdown and provides an all-clear notification when the incident has been resolved. The system uses color coding to categorize certain incidents. If there is an out-of-control student in a classroom, teachers can ask for a code yellow, but if an immediate lockdown is needed because of violence or police activity, a code red is activated.

A teacher at BJHS stated that code red drills and tabletop exercises with fellow teachers have improved her feelings of psychological safety on campus. She explained,

So, we practice the code red drills and fire drills and all that stuff. I think that in a real situation, it would be completely different. We have a lot of programs like on our cellphones where it alerts that it's a code red, and it's supposed to say where the person's coming from, where they're going to, so we can get to a proper, safe place. And I love the idea of that.

Conversely, having a limited number of code red drills has the opposite effect on the psychological safety of some teachers. A teacher at PVHS stated that her school rarely holds code red drills, so when a drill does take place, teachers are completely unprepared and fail to follow the proper protocols. The interviewee said she would like more direction from administrators or even the SRO to know how to properly respond during a drill.

Regarding SROs, their presence on campus was rated as positive by the teachers interviewed, creating feelings of both physical and psychological safety for educators and the perception of improved campus safety overall.

## **B. PERCEPTIONS OF THE CPD'S SRO PROGRAM**

This section explores the teachers' overall perception of SROs. Of the 28 teachers interviewed, most had an overall positive experience with SROs, and most conveyed that the SRO presence had increased safety and influenced student behavior. However, some expressed concern about SROs' overall effectiveness in preparing teachers for violence on campus and ambiguity surrounding their roles and responsibilities. In the interviews, several themes emerged regarding how SROs prepare teachers for violence on campus, including student behavioral changes, a lack of SRO engagement with students and staff, and a lack of accountability or a visual deterrent.

### **1. Positive Perceptions of SROs**

Of the 28 teachers interviewed, most had an overall positive opinion of SROs, saying that they believe the SRO presence improves campus safety. The visual deterrence that the SRO provides, the presence of an armed officer on campus, and the officer's training and experience were deemed vitally important to protecting students and staff. Teachers believe that the students' behavior changes when they see the officer on campus and that the officer's presence prevents crime. This subsection discusses the teachers' overall positive perception of the SRO program and the recurring themes they mentioned.

Regarding campus safety, teachers said they believe the presence of an officer on campus is vital to ensuring everyone's safety. A teacher at PVHS conveyed feeling safe at school and not regarding security as much of a concern. The teacher added that SROs are

absolutely vital to the safety of both the students and the campus overall, saying that SROs prevent crime by making students think twice before engaging in criminal behavior. Similarly, another teacher at PVHS expressed feeling happy about having a police officer on campus regularly:

I think the most effective [SROs] are the ones that we know we're safe with, because they're on our campus, they build up a relationship with the students [and] because I think that helps to cross some barriers between police officers and kids. But I also think it helps us, you know; I like it when I see them around campus versus only in the administrative office.

Furthermore, a CJHS teacher appreciated the presence of SROs on campus because they are trained and equipped to handle a violent situation. The teacher wished an SRO had been present when staff were dealing with an eighth-grade student who brought a firearm to campus in 2002 and threatened to shoot another student. The student, who the teacher said was suffering from a mental health crisis, removed the firearm from her backpack and held her entire class hostage for nearly 20 minutes. Other teachers heard screaming coming from the classroom and responded quickly to de-escalate the situation. After nearly 20 minutes of negotiating with the student, they took the firearm away.

The teacher said he will never forget that day because of how volatile and dangerous the situation was, adding that having an armed officer or SRO on campus would have helped disarm the student, but admitted to having mixed emotions as well. If an armed officer was available that day, the situation might have turned out badly for the student. The student had been suffering tremendously from a mental health breakdown, and the use of deadly force by the officer might have been unnecessary, the teacher said. However, with the recent climate of mass shootings, the teacher said his opinion could easily change. The teacher believes that everyone was lucky that afternoon but that an SRO on campus might have prevented the student from bringing a gun to class in the first place.

A BJHS teacher expressed feeling safe with an SRO on campus—just knowing the officer is present and has the training, tools, and experience to calm a volatile student or engage an armed suspect is reassuring. The teacher also mentioned an appreciation for personal interactions with the SRO, who is professional and approachable and has a calming demeanor. Additionally, the teacher has been impressed with how the SRO

engages with the students by both talking and listening. Likewise, a teacher at CHS said she is completely impressed with the SRO on campus, complimenting the officer for being engaging, talking with students, and always being approachable. The teacher said she feels safe not just because the SRO is armed but because the SRO has specific training to de-escalate situations with students who are experiencing emotional distress.

The SRO's engagement with students on campus was a theme highlighted by several teachers. A PVHS teacher said she appreciated the SRO's mentoring a troubled student who came from a broken home and had no positive male role models. The SRO noticed the student struggling and took the initiative to get to know the student and be a positive influence. The teacher noticed that the SRO walked around on campus with the student, sat with the student at lunch, and even took the student to coffee when the student was having a difficult day. The teacher felt inspired to see their mentoring relationship develop. Additionally, the teacher complimented the decor of the SRO's office, which features school memorabilia hanging on the walls, and the officer's choice to wear school apparel on campus. Both details demonstrate the SRO's engagement in the school community and integration into the school's culture. As a result, the SRO enjoys lots of credibility with the students, according to the teacher.

As indicated in the interviews, many teachers had an overall favorable opinion of the SRO program. They said they feel safer and reassured when the officer is present, knowing the officer has the skills to peacefully resolve tense situations. Even though there is an armed presence on campus, SROs who are engaged in the community and culture of the school have been effective at breaking down barriers between SROs and students. Such an approach allows SROs to be more approachable and feel a sense of ownership of the schools to which they are assigned. However, although participants conveyed an overall positive experience with the SROs, some teachers have concerns about the program and its effectiveness.

## **2. Negative Perceptions of SROs**

Of the 28 teachers interviewed, most had an overall positive opinion of the SROs, but some expressed negative perceptions of the program and concerns about its



effectiveness in reducing crime and creating a safer campus. This section discusses teachers' negative perspectives of the SROs, which include not improving campus safety; lacking competence; failing to communicate effectively; and lacking visibility, program consistency, and engagement.

Incompetence was a major concern for a few of the interviewed teachers. These teachers questioned the SRO's motive for being in the unit and said the officer did not appear to be engaged in solving problems or taking the role seriously. The teachers accused the officer of being lazy, constantly making excuses for not taking enforcement action, and being more concerned about building relationships with administrators than with being a physical presence on campus. Additionally, these teachers said they did not feel safe with this particular SRO because they were concerned about the SRO's physical and mental health.

During a phone interview, one teacher said of this officer, "I think that it's a game. I think that the car's out front to look like we're safe. I don't think we're safe. But I don't see a lot of involvement with the SROs. I never have. Okay. As far as walking around the campus, as far as deterrents, hell no! I'm super disappointed." Another teacher from the same school lamented that the SRO just sits in the office with feet up on the table. When asked for help with a troubled student who had run away, the SRO seemed annoyed and rolled their eyes. The teacher questioned why the officer is even on campus if they refuse to assist. Additionally, the teacher expressed concern that the SRO is unhealthy and incapable of engaging students if a violent act were to occur. As described in this interview, the SRO has complained constantly about health problems to this teacher. The SRO's demeanor has caused this teacher anxiety, making the teacher question why the officer is even working.

Another teacher said the SRO on campus is ineffective, suffers from injuries, and appears to be disabled. This teacher expressed concern about how this SRO could be a deterrent if the SRO is incapable of protecting oneself or the students, as evidenced when four students walked into a classroom and assaulted another student. The assault was gang-related, and the student suffered significant injuries after being kicked in the head, stomach, and ribs. The SRO was not on campus when the fight broke out, and it was ultimately

broken up by school staff and administrators. The teacher expressed frustration about the SRO program, particularly when the assigned officer is not consistently on campus to keep the students and staff safe.

This theme extends to the SROs' lack of consistency and visibility at middle schools and high schools in Chico. Currently, the SROs spend most of their time at PVHS, CHS, and FHS, and the middle schools are secondary assignments. Concerns expressed about the program included the constant turnover of officers and their lack of visibility. A BJHS teacher expressed frustration during her interview about the lack of visibility of SROs on campus. In this teacher's eight-year career, she said she has seen an SRO on campus only a handful of times. The teacher said she has no idea what the SRO does when there is one on campus and assumes the SRO keeps busy with students. Likewise, a teacher at CJHS said the SROs make no difference in campus safety because they are never present, and he never sees them. If the SROs are more engaged and he sees the fruits of their labor, he said he might have a different opinion.

In addition, another CJHS teacher expressed disappointment in the program because of the lack of visibility of SROs over the past couple years, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although COVID-19 forced students into online learning for a time, they have since returned to campus, yet the SRO is not often present. Having no consistent SRO on campus has made the teacher feel uneasy because he does not know when an officer will be on campus or even who the officer will be. The teacher added that he does not even know how to contact an SRO though an officer is assigned to his school. The teacher indicated that when SROs were present more frequently on campus, there was a sense of calm and security, which has not been replicated since. For example, an SRO a few years ago would come to campus and positively engage the students, giving "high fives," telling stories, handing out stickers, and playing kickball with them. The teacher was impressed with how available this SRO was; he could call or email the officer, and they had a strong working relationship. That feeling of support is currently lacking in the SRO program.

A lack of consistency in the SRO program has created concern among teachers who are interested in improving safety on campus. For example, since 2017, when the SRO program was reintroduced in Chico, the program has seen four sergeants and six officers

rotate through the schools. The constant changes have created an unstable environment in the unit, and with the constant rotation of officers, it has been difficult to establish consistency and a direction for the program. Plus, the teachers never know who is going to be on campus at any given time, leaving them frustrated.

A PVHS teacher explained his frustration over the lack of consistency in the SRO program. The teacher said the constant changes make it difficult for the SROs to establish routines and for teachers to get to know the officers. He believes the SRO needs to be engaged, build relationships with students, and be more involved in the culture of the school. These ideals differ from those of the current SRO, who sits in the office and provides no visible presence. The teacher said a successful SRO would have experience, demonstrate considerable life skills, and effectively communicate with high school students.

Teachers identified the SROs' visibility and presence on campus as current shortcomings of the program. Often, the SROs are seen sitting at their desks in the administrative offices rather than engaging with students. The teachers said they want to see more interaction between the SROs and students, and they want the SRO to be more accessible. The interviews suggested the SROs should visit classrooms, build relationships with students, and acclimate to the culture of the school. Engagement would allow students to see the officer in a different role and allow the officer to mentor students. For example, a teacher at FHS stated that when he taught at a high school in the Bay Area, the SRO was completely engaged with students and created an after-school program in which they got to know the officer. The teacher said a productive SRO program should focus on youth development.

In addition to the lack of visibility and consistency in the SRO unit, teachers have expressed concerns that SROs are unapproachable and noncommunicative. Teachers also reported being unfamiliar with the SRO's job responsibilities. In fact, a PVHS teacher said he believes SROs should be transparent about the resources they provide, adding that he had many positive interactions with SROs in a nearby city, where they knew how to communicate with high school students involved in gang activity. The teacher said he has

had no negative contact with any SRO while in Chico but added that he wants to see more effort from the current SRO, whose visibility and engagement with students are lacking.

Teachers also expressed frustration about the lack of communication with the SRO program. For example, a teacher expressed major concerns about the SRO on campus, describing the SRO as being unapproachable and lazy and constantly making excuses for not performing one's duties. This teacher indicated that the SRO sits in the office all day, talks down to students, and does not engage with students whatsoever. The teacher questions why the SRO is even present on campus if the goal of the program is to engage in solid communication and collaboration.

Another teacher expressed a similar concern about the SRO's lack of communication skills on campus. For example, when the teacher sought help and advice from the SRO about a student suffering from a mental health crisis, the officer seemed to ignore the teacher and counselor and was interested only in sending the student to the hospital instead of working on de-escalating the situation. The teacher said there was no collaboration, engagement, or solid communication with the SRO to successfully manage a student in crisis.

As indicated during the interviews, when SROs lack communication skills and are unapproachable, teachers feel vulnerable to violence on campus. If teachers do not have confidence in the SRO's protecting them and the students, how can the SRO prepare the teachers to respond to violence on campus?

### **3. Ambiguity Surrounding the SRO's Role**

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that teachers do not know what SROs do on campus, and they are frustrated about not knowing. Most of the teachers interviewed said that they were unaware of the role and responsibility of the SROs. Teachers thought the officers simply walk around campus and serve as a visual crime deterrent, not realizing there is more to the position than being a physical presence.

A teacher at CJHS compared her experiences with SROs in London, England, where she grew up, to those with SROs in the United States. She said an SRO was

constantly present at her London school and would engage the kids outside of campus. He knew the kids and their parents, serving as a mentor and a constant presence that allowed him to build trust with the students in the neighborhood. The teacher remembered the SRO as a lovely man who had the interest of the students in mind and took on the role of mentor. She stated,

He [SRO] would come around outside of school hours and . . . find us at places where we would hang out, like in parks and things like that. And he would introduce us to different community members. I remember one time he talked to us like human beings. If we went to his church, he played games with us for a while, and it created warmer feelings of the officer with the students.

In contrast, when the teacher was asked what the SROs did on her campus in Chico, she said she did not know and that she has had little experience with them. The teacher said she had no idea that the SRO was supposed to enforce laws and build relationships. She never paid attention to what they did because she had never been introduced to the SROs nor had a working relationship with them. The teacher said she would like to see the SRO walk into her classroom and explain to her what the role of the SRO is and what resources are provided.

A teacher at PVHS expressed similar perceptions of the SROs, saying she has never had contact with the SRO at her school nor was she told what the officer's roles and responsibilities are. She simply assumed the officers were out on campus, being a visible presence. The teacher said she would like to know exactly what their roles and responsibilities are so she could use them if necessary. Additionally, the teacher said it is not her responsibility to bring the SRO into her classroom; instead, the officer should make the effort to build relationships with both students and teachers.

Some teachers voiced frustrations about SROs remaining in the office and not engaging with students and becoming part of the community. For example, as explained by a teacher at PVHS, there needs to be better and more effective communication. He would like to see the SROs do more than sit behind a desk with their feet up and to hear them explain to the staff and teachers what their roles and responsibilities are and what services they provide, not only to the school but also to the teachers.

During an interview, one BJHS teacher expressed similar thoughts. Before joining the school's faculty, the teacher had taught at a middle school in Gridley, California. The SRO at that school was a retired Los Angeles police officer who had a positive influence on campus. The teacher said everyone knew how to contact him, he was always present on campus, and he specifically explained his role. She said she appreciated the officer's transparency, which made reaching out to him and using his services and expertise easier.

Another teacher expressed major concerns with the SRO program. The teacher said the SRO does nothing but sit in the office and talk with administrative staff instead of enforcing the law and being a physical presence. The teacher's perspective is that the SRO is failing to perform required duties and that the entire program needs revamping. She believes the SRO program is a waste of resources because it does not contribute to the school:

I don't see a lot of involvement with the SROs. I never have. Okay. As far as walking around the campus, as far as deterrents, um, okay. The one now I'm super disappointed with, and that's why it's confidential. . . . Honestly, I have no idea what they do. They walk around and look important. Seriously, what do they do?

This section has detailed the perceptions of some teachers who would like more visibility, accountability, and communication from SROs on campus. Nevertheless, the negative views of the SRO program should not be indicative of the quality of work that the officers do on a daily basis. Obviously, not all SROs will appease every educator or administrator; however, a critique of their performance is valid because they are supposed to provide a service to the school. Following multiple school shooting tragedies around the country, a spotlight continues to shine on SRO programs as the debate continues about school safety. It is difficult to design a flawless SRO program, but teachers' suggestions and concerns should be examined carefully, with the safety of students, faculty, and administrators as the primary goal.

## **C. PERCEPTIONS OF THE SRO PROGRAM'S EFFECTIVENESS IN PREPARING TEACHERS FOR VIOLENCE**

The 28 interviews conducted revealed several themes related to teachers' perceptions of how effectively they are being prepared to handle violence on campus. The teachers' assessment of the SRO program revealed overall support; however, they highlighted significant shortfalls in the program's ability to prepare them for violence. Specifically, they noted three major drawbacks with the program: the absence of SROs in classrooms, inconsistency in their presence on campus, and a lack of transparency.

### **1. Presence of SROs in Classrooms**

Teachers have recommended that SROs increase their presence in classrooms and engage with students and teachers in the classroom setting. According to the participants, if SROs visit their classrooms more frequently, teachers and SROs can build trusting professional relationships. Doing so will allow open communication whereby both parties can share critical details about campus safety, including troubled youth on campus, current crime trends, or other public safety issues that might affect the school. If SROs are not a regular presence in the classroom, these relationships will never develop, nor will SROs train teachers to deal with school violence appropriately. Frequent visits by SROs provide an avenue for teachers and officers to communicate about safety issues occurring on campus or in the community. Furthermore, having a strong relationship with SROs will allow teachers to make the officers aware of any safety issues in the classrooms or with problem students.

### **2. Consistency of SROs on Campus**

The interviews revealed that there were some inconsistencies with SROs on middle school campuses. For example, while middle school teachers acknowledged that SROs focus primarily on the Chico high schools, they would like more of a presence on their campuses. Their infrequent visits to middle school campuses erode the communication channel between teachers and SROs. Critical pieces of intelligence could be missed, such as information about crime trends or at-risk students who might be problematic. Additionally, if SROs are not consistently on campus, teacher training, organized safety

planning, and preparation cannot occur. The SROs' presence on campus reduces the scope of teachers' perceived responsibilities, such as intervening in severe disciplinary cases and violence as well as confronting minor crimes occurring on campus. If an SRO handles these duties, teachers can focus strictly on classroom management of student behavior. Although teachers said they feel comfortable disciplining their students, they feel safer and more secure if there is an armed officer on campus. Teachers would like the SRO to have a designated day away from the high schools to focus strictly on the issues occurring on middle school campuses. Some of the teachers interviewed at CJHS said they had experienced some positive results with a consistent SRO on campus, building relationships that led to a greater sense of safety.

Overall, that is what the SRO program provides: a feeling of safety for teachers on campus. They appreciate the presence of an armed officer who can react to a violent situation if it arises. Teachers like to see a patrol vehicle parked in front of their school and a uniformed officer walking around campus. An SRO's contribution extends to more than merely a presence, however; teachers say they feel unprepared to handle violence.

### **3. Lack of Transparency**

From the interviews, a lack of transparency emerged as a theme. Teachers feel that SROs need to be transparent about their job and what they are doing on a daily basis. Many perceived that SROs were sometimes illusive, absent, and noncommunicative with them. Even though the teachers know certain aspects of the SRO's job require discretion and confidentiality, they feel that more openness and approachability is needed. Especially in feeling prepared for violence on campus, teachers want more connection and transparency to effectively communicate, understand the roles of the officers, and develop reasonable expectations. The teachers feel that if the SROs are more transparent about their jobs, all parties can communicate more effectively about how to prepare for violence on campus.

## **D. SUMMARY**

Overall, the teachers indicated that school violence nationally is nothing that can be controlled or prevented. Violence is something that occurs on campuses, and teachers



need to be prepared to handle it. Teachers feel that while their campuses can implement some mitigating factors to prevent school violence, most of these measures are window dressing and do nothing to prevent a mass shooting or a gun on campus. Even though the presence of an SRO makes teachers feel safer and depicts the image of safety, most teachers feel that violence ebbs and flows based on current events. National violence trends weigh heavily on teachers' perceptions of physical and psychological safety. If teachers feel physically and psychologically safe, their perception of violence tends to dissipate. However, if there is no physical and psychological safety, teachers tend to express a negative or vulnerable view of safety on campus.

SROs are not preparing the teachers for violence on campus. Teachers have conveyed a concern about officer wellness and health and the lack of communication and information sharing. They feel that if there were more transparency and communication between them and the SROs, their perception of safety on campus would be different. If SROs communicated with the teachers on a regular basis and were more visible, both could exchange information. Furthermore, by being included in tabletop exercises and engaged in safety plans, teachers would feel prepared for violence on campus.

Based on the interviews conducted, the teachers are unsure whether the SROs are preparing them for violence. Their assessment indicates that a lack of transparency, inconsistency of SROs on campus, and the absence of SROs in the classroom are missed opportunities for officers to engage with students, teachers, and staff about crime trends; share information; and identify at-risk students. Teachers feel that this engagement will help them feel prepared for violence on campus, and SROs have missed the opportunity to establish these relationships. The final chapter of this thesis discusses the findings and identifies recommendations to improve the CPD's SRO program.

## VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The SRO position is a difficult one, with many officers wearing multiple hats—counselor, social worker, friend, and law enforcer—to address a wide range of problems on campus. The split-second decisions they must make and the critical incidents they experience are scrutinized by the public, parents, and administrators. SRO programs are in the spotlight when tragic violence occurs, such as following the fatal shootings in Uvalde, Texas, and Parkland, Florida, and SROs are often criticized for failing to prevent these tragedies. However, SROs are hailed as heroes when they take appropriate actions to stop a threat on campus or mentor an at-risk student. Currently, the CPD’s SRO program serves to provide security and student engagement. The program is dedicated to caring for the safety and welfare of the teachers, students, and administrators. SROs for CUSD are intended to serve the community by mentoring and coaching students so they can become productive members of society.

Teachers appreciate having an officer on campus, believing that the SRO will make difficult split-second decisions when needed. Teachers conveyed that having an armed SRO on campus provides a sense of security because they believe an officer will react if and when violence occurs. The presence of an officer on campus also allows teachers to defer significant disciplinary issues to administrators and the SRO. An armed officer allows teachers to place their focus on teaching and classroom management instead of worrying about confronting an armed student or other criminal on campus.

Teachers conveyed that when they see a patrol vehicle parked in front of the school and the SRO walking around campus and engaging with students, they feel that the campus is safe and that their physical and psychological needs for safety are being met. The knowledge that an officer will respond effectively when a crisis arises alleviates anxiety among teachers. Additionally, with an SRO on campus, teachers believe intelligence about at-risk students is being gathered and that the SRO is taking the appropriate steps to monitor these students and provide them with the appropriate resources they need to be productive learners.

As with any program implemented by the CPD, improvements can be achieved only through a critical assessment of what the SRO program is doing well and where it must get better. The concluding chapter of this thesis provides recommendations for improvements to the CPD's SRO program based on the perceptions of the teachers interviewed and explores opportunities for future research into the challenges facing the CPD as it strives to meet the needs of the school district and its teachers.

## **A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE PROGRAM**

The first major recommendation is to maintain the SRO program because teachers said they appreciate having an armed presence on campus, and the officer makes them feel safe. Although there are some concerns about an SRO's ability to react to a threat, the overall consensus is that the teachers like having an armed officer on campus. The presence of an officer engaging with students, using de-escalation techniques, making arrests, and mentoring the youth has an overall positive effect on students, the teachers said. Although an armed officer provides a sense of security, teachers' responses suggest opportunities to improve the SRO program, particularly regarding the SRO's broader roles and responsibilities.

### **1. Roles and Responsibilities**

Many, if not all, of the teachers do not understand the roles and responsibilities of SROs, particularly the resources and services the officers provide. Especially at the middle school level, many of the teachers are unaware that SROs have a direct role in the discipline of students. Teachers also do not know that SROs mentor, develop, and engage students in a positive way to build relationships between the police department and at-risk students.

To rectify this situation, SROs ought to introduce themselves to teachers before each school year and attend monthly school staff meetings. By clearly identifying their roles and responsibilities, SROs can help teachers understand the officers' daily functions, as well as the expectations and limitations of the unit and the SROs' capabilities. Furthermore, the officers' regular attendance at staff meetings can improve communication and information sharing.

## 2. Tabletop Safety Exercises and Real-Time Safety Training

Another common theme expressed during the interviews was the exclusion of teachers in safety plans and training exercises. Teachers voiced frustration about feeling unprepared to manage an out-of-control or violent student on campus, and some teachers even stated that doing so is not part of their responsibilities. Although some teachers said they are comfortable with the training they have received at their school site, others said they feel unprepared to manage their classroom when a lockdown is in effect. Additionally, teachers voiced an overall frustration that they do not feel confident in their ability to handle a dangerous situation.

It is recommended that SROs be a part of the school's safety plan and develop tabletop exercises with teachers and administrators on how to handle violence. The last active-shooter exercise hosted by SROs in Chico was four years ago at PVHS. Since then, there have been no exercises to help teachers build confidence in managing violent and unpredictable situations that may occur on campus. The tabletop exercise can include scenarios such as active shooters, armed subjects on campus, first aid application, code red lockdowns, de-escalation tactics, or a violent student. These scenarios would allow teachers to develop the tools necessary to feel safer at school.

Law enforcement in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, has become a frontrunner in developing real-time training to prepare first responders, teachers, and school administrators for a threat on campus.<sup>164</sup> The trainings—Exercise Satchel and Exercise Socrates—are designed to incorporate a coordinated response from school administrators, teachers, and law enforcement to an out-of-control student, an active shooter, an out-of-control parent, or a fight on campus using computer-based programs to simulate these indicated events.<sup>165</sup> Because the program is computer based, it can be transported from school site to school site.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ike Ellis and Sara Thorley-Smith, *Serious Incident Management in Australia* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1787/248725444288>.

<sup>165</sup> Ellis and Thorley-Smith.

<sup>166</sup> Ellis and Thorley-Smith.

The NSW's training examines actions by law enforcement and school administrators to improve their critical-thinking process and, thus, confidence in decision-making.<sup>167</sup> As the training progresses, the scenarios evolve, requiring the principal to develop new tactics and think critically about the change to the scenario. With these changes, the principal or police officers need to devise an action plan to address the threat and manage the incident effectively.<sup>168</sup> Currently, the NSW Police Force requires a safety plan at each school and mandates that teachers and school officials participate in the exercises.<sup>169</sup>

SROs in Chico should engage teachers in monthly or quarterly training like Exercise Socrates and Exercise Satchel. Also, the CPD and CUSD should partner biannually to conduct a real-time active-shooter scenario with mandatory teacher involvement. These exercises will review best-practice policies and allow for a question-and-answer period between teachers and law enforcement on active-shooter tactics, responses, and expectations of teachers for these events. Furthermore, these exercises will allow teachers and law enforcement to be on the same page regarding the police response to active-shooter incidents.

### **3. Unit Turnover and Consistency**

Unit turnover and officer consistency have been a concern for teachers in Chico. Since the SRO program was reintroduced in 2017, there has been significant officer turnover in the unit, resulting in an inconsistent presence of officers at school sites. These issues have created frustration among teachers. Currently, the CPD has assigned three officers and one sergeant to the SRO unit, all of whom are on a four-year rotation. However, eight officers and four sergeants have rotated through the unit since 2017, averaging fewer than two years before moving on to different assignments. This turnover means that teachers do not know who will be on campus and that officers lack time to understand their role, develop mentoring programs, and build relationships with students.

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<sup>167</sup> Ellis and Thorley-Smith.

<sup>168</sup> Ellis and Thorley-Smith.

<sup>169</sup> Ellis and Thorley-Smith.

Furthermore, teachers have indicated they cannot build their own relationships with SROs because the unit is in constant flux, adding that relationship building is a critical aspect of the SRO unit.

Turnover among the officers' supervisors has been another challenge for the SRO unit, which has seen four different sergeants in the past four years. The sergeants face a learning curve as they work to understand the culture of the schools and the unit itself while the SROs are adjusting to a new direct supervisor. By the time a sergeant understands the roles of an SRO sergeant and gets comfortable in the position, the sergeant rotates out or transfers to another assignment, leaving the officers subject to a new supervisor and new expectations.

Moreover, constant change at the supervisory level creates confusion among officers and the school staff. Teachers say they want direct interaction with their school's SRO, but they do not know who that officer is or whom they should contact. The teachers believe that having a consistent SRO on campus helps to build relationships and develop trust. It is recommended that sergeants maintain the same rotation schedule as the officers and that they not be allowed to transfer out of the unit until a four-year requirement has been met. Such a requirement would allow the sergeant to gain expertise in the position, have time to develop as a mentor and coach the SROs, implement policies and programs that are beneficial to the schools and students, and provide consistency and stability in the unit.

Officer consistency in the classrooms and on campus was identified as a common frustration among teachers. Currently, the SRO program's primary responsibility is to have a major presence at the high schools with periodic site visits to the three middle schools. However, the unpredictability of the current schedule is a source of frustration for middle school teachers, who said they would like the SROs to be on their campuses on specified days. A consistent schedule would allow teachers to build rapport with the officers and allow the officers to build relationships with both the teachers and students. Furthermore, if the teachers know when SROs will be on campus, they can be prepared to bring to the officers any issues that need law enforcement attention, thereby efficiently using their limited time. Therefore, SROs should have a specific day during their work week to visit

middle schools. This consistency will allow students to access the officers for any resources they need. Furthermore, the SROs can obtain intelligence more readily about problem students or safety concerns.

#### **4. Mentoring Programs and Youth Development**

The interviews suggested that the SRO program is lacking in youth development and mentoring programs because of consistent unit turnover. The teachers interviewed all said they would like to see the SROs do more than simply walk around campus; they want to see the SRO engaged in the classroom with the students, learning who they are and what they do. The teachers said that classroom visits would help to build strong relationships and breaks barriers for students who might have a negative perception of law enforcement.

When it is functioning efficiently, the SRO unit can have an incredible influence on students. By partnering with school staff to develop and implement a mentoring program, an SRO can connect with students who might have a negative perception of law enforcement. Furthermore, mentoring and youth development programs can help students become connected and involved with their school. Additionally, they will allow the SRO to become fully engaged and involved with the school community. However, the first step is selecting the right officer for the SRO position.

#### **5. Selecting the Right Officer**

Choosing the right officer to serve as an SRO is critically important to the success of the unit. Based on the teachers' perspective, SROs need to be approachable; have excellent communication skills; take appropriate enforcement action; and engage students, teachers, and staff in a professional manner. Teachers want to see SROs engaged in the culture and community of the school and take an interest in what occurs on campus. Teachers added that they do not want lazy officers sitting at their desks all day, looking at their phones; they want to see SROs walking around, meeting and talking with students, and being present and available on campus. Moreover, teachers do not want to hear SROs complaining about injuries or creating the perception that they are unsuited for the job or unwilling to confront a violent subject on campus.

Of the 28 teachers interviewed, the majority indicated they do not want an SRO who has limited life experience or a short tenure as a police officer. They believe an officer who has children and is involved in the community has better tools to engage with students. It is recommended that the CPD carefully select the officers it assigns to serve as SROs. The department should establish guidelines on the type of officer it wants to serve at schools and conduct a thorough vetting process of the candidates that fall within the policies and procedures of the CPD and the City of Chico. Also, during the selection process, employees' past evaluations should be reviewed and discussed with candidates' prior supervisors. Furthermore, it is recommended that a representative from CUSD sit on an interview panel to take part in the assessment and review of each candidate.

By selecting the right candidate for the SRO position, the CPD will ensure that the officer can have a positive and lasting impact on the school and its students. The SRO position is not for every officer; it requires a special officer with the appropriate patience, demeanor, maturity, and skill set to be successful.

## **6. Training Teachers**

Educating teachers about current crime trends is critically important in preparing them for violence on campus. The participants' responses suggest that teachers would benefit from SROs' providing training to respond to active-shooter incidents, violence on campus, and out-of-control students and to recognize a student that might be troubled or planning an attack. Teachers would also benefit from basic first aid, such as applying a tourniquet, providing basic wound care, and administering CPR. Furthermore, teachers would benefit from obtaining awareness on local gang, drug abuse, and current crime trends occurring on campuses or in the community. Chico is a unique community with specific needs. Having training on intelligence and awareness of current crime trends and criminal activity will better prepare teachers should a violence incident occur on campus. SROs ought to develop lesson plans and provide teachers with monthly or quarterly training to better prepare them for violence on campus.

As indicated during the interviews, the SRO is in a difficult position, with many of the officers wearing multiple hats on campus. The ability to be a mentor, law enforcer,



trainer, and critical decision maker is unique to the law enforcement profession. On any given day, at any given second, SROs can be thrust into the media spotlight for the decisions they make on campus. To garner more support, SROs must rely on teachers and utilize their innate ability to build relationships with students. Teachers have intimate knowledge of the students in their classrooms, and the relationships that teachers build can be vitally important for SROs in providing campus safety. SROs need to tap into the teachers' ability to engage with students and include teachers in the development and success of the program. By being more engaged and active in the schools, SROs will flourish in sharing critical intelligence and developing positive relationships.

## **B. FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONTRIBUTION**

This research focused on the CPD's SRO program. The analysis of in-depth interviews with 28 teachers has provided a needed account of perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers in a rural community. This research was limited to high school and middle school participants in one school district in one rural community. The perceptions and needs of teachers from this school district might differ from those of teachers in other districts, regions, or environments. Further research should extend to additional rural school districts, regions, and environments. Research also needs to focus on elementary school teachers, administrators, and other school staff to understand their perspectives of school violence. If similar themes are identified in future research, policymakers, school administrators, and police administration around the state should make necessary changes in SRO programs to address these concerns.

Furthermore, future research should evaluate the effectiveness of SRO programs in reducing crime on campus. This thesis focused on teachers' perspectives of the SRO program. Because teachers cannot fully focus on their primary role if they and students do not feel safe, and because teachers play a vital role in creating a safe environment, understanding their perspectives is important for creating safe environments. However, this research does not objectively assess the safety outcomes of SRO programs or program elements.

Future research also needs to identify the characteristics of a high-quality SRO. Research should examine the hiring, recruiting, and retaining processes and recommend practices to ensure highly skilled officers fill these roles. The development, management, and direct supervision of SROs need to be examined as well to identify policies and procedures that will support high performance in SROs.

## C. CONCLUSION

The likelihood of being victimized on a school campus is relatively low. Campuses are usually safe environments, but increasing school violence in the United States has led many school districts to employ SROs on campus to provide safety for students and teachers. The presence of an SRO can have a lasting impact on school safety. SROs fill more than just the role of law enforcement officers on campus. SROs are leaders, mentors, confidants, safety experts, communicators, and advocates for students, teachers, and parents, and through these many roles, they can have a lasting impact on individuals and school communities.

Research suggests that having police officers on campus is critically important to student safety and an environment that allows education. The mere presence of an officer allows teachers, students, and staff to feel safe and secure with the knowledge that if violence were to occur, a trained, armed officer would take action to stop the threat. However, the SRO can and should—based on the perspectives of teachers in this research—be more than just a law enforcer. Teachers who participated in this research indicated that SROs need to share information, be more visible, develop lines of communication with teachers, and have teachers take part in training and intelligence sharing. Teachers are craving these SRO activities to make them feel safe on campus. Even though the SROs take part in some of these activities, there needs to be greater consistency and a more prominent presence, particularly on middle school campuses. Given the limitations of personnel, funding, and staffing levels at the CPD, some recommendations from this thesis might not be achievable in the near future. However, the findings of this research suggest that improvements in these areas, with buy-in from the SROs, can strengthen the program and enhance teachers' feelings of safety on campus.

Understanding CUSD teachers' perceptions of violence, the SRO program's efficacy in preparing teachers for violence on campus, and the SRO program's ability to create a safe school environment are vital to program success and the overall ecosystem of school safety. While the SRO is a key figure in school safety, ensuring the safety of students, teachers, and staff requires a holistic approach and multi-level engagement with the school community. This thesis provided a detailed, in-depth account of teachers' perceptions of the CPD's SRO program. Participants welcome the presence of SROs, but there is considerable variation among teachers' assessments of the preparation for violence that SROs provide. Participants feel that while they can do little to prevent violence on campus, they want an SRO present to intervene and take enforcement action. Participants indicated that if they better understood the roles and responsibilities of the SRO and were more fully included in safety solutions, their school campuses would be safer environments for learning.

## APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How long a teacher?
- How long at school? (designated school)
- What other schools have you taught at?
- Age?
- Gender?
- Race?
- Tell me about your experience with the SRO program. I'm interested in your stories. Please begin with when you first heard of SROs and include your first interaction and any key incidents, negative or positive.
- When did you first interact with an SRO?
- How have you observed SROs engaging with students?
- What was the outcome of the engagement?
- Can you give me an example of a positive interaction?
- Can you give me an example of a negative interaction?
- Let's talk about safety. I am interested in your perspective on SROs and how you feel about school safety. When you hear of or think of school violence nationally, what does it mean for you as a teacher in Chico, and how do you feel about it?
- What does being safe at school mean to you?
- What does being unsafe at school mean to you?

- Tell me about a time when you were concerned about safety.
- Tell me about a time when you did not feel safe at school.
- Psychological safety
- Physical safety
- Tell me about a time when you felt very safe.
- What does being safe mean to you?
- What helps you feel safe?
- How do teachers' and administrators' behavior or actions influence your feeling of safety?
- How does the presence of an SRO influence your feeling of safety?
- How does student behavior change with an SRO on campus?
- How does teacher behavior change with an SRO on campus?
- What do SROs do on campus?
- What do SROS do that you would like them *not* to do?
- What do SROS *not* do that you would like to see them do?

## APPENDIX B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW THEMES

RQ1: What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?		
Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
National landscape	Ebb and flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think, overall, that’s a positive thing because . . . you forget like we’re in Chico and nothing bad happens, which is kind of good. Ignorance is bliss. But then, again, just bringing it back to the unfortunate reality and, then, I mean . . .”</li> <li>• “It is something that I do think about both as a parent and as a teacher. My daughter went to Marsh, and because of the apartment complexes over there, I’m locked down all the time. And that was just, you know, I was glad when she graduated last two weeks, got through. So I feel like we’re a very safe environment. However, I think things have changed over the 25 years that I’ve been here. And, in school, you know, school violence has changed. The frequency of it scares me. And the fact that we haven’t had a code red drill in over three years.”</li> <li>• “Or something immediate. Definitely increases as a teacher. So yeah, so I think it’s a huge problem. I think, you know, I really don’t want to have to go to the metal detectors to get out of school. But I guess what’s going to make things safer, like airport security, that’s what we’ve got to do. And that was that keeps happening. I guess I think this building, you said, have you seen those things at that time? Like when I was teaching, every officer on campus having been there should be treated like they were in a damaged school. Right, you know, be outside, did all their stuff. So they knew. You know, it’s. . . .”</li> </ul>

**RQ1: What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?**

Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
	Current events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Right now, schools are safer than they’ve ever been before by the latest studies—Reuters, CNN, NYU. I believe, also, overall, schools are safer than ever before. However, the collective trauma associated with some psycho with an air rifle, 40 magazines with 30 rounds each, going to a classroom and wiping out 22 babies. That’s just, I mean, that is just incomprehensible.”</li> <li>• “It wasn’t until a few years ago when we had a run of school shootings, and it was in the news a lot. And I can’t remember the day, but I’m talking like in the last five years, I really started to question my life choices and why I moved over to America. Honestly, I . . . went through a huge period where it was really traumatizing, even though nothing [has] ever happened to me personally. But it just, yeah, . . . you know, I don’t know where else to go. Yeah, so something that is a constant worry, but I feel like there’s nothing I can do about it, so I just shove it out of my mind. But it’s difficult to be there as a teacher.”</li> </ul>
Inevitability	Nothing can be done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Nothing is going to stop a kid from coming on campus . . . you know what I mean. Fences aren’t going to stop them.”</li> <li>• “When I started, I mean, that was so foreign. That was out of nowhere. You never heard of that kind of thing happening, ever. And . . . it was like one isolated event. And then as the years went on, it became more, less [of] an isolated event. And you started hearing more and more about it. Like, is it overblown by the press? You know what I mean? Like, it’s hard to gauge how prevalent it really is, but it is definitely on people’s minds. [There are] new teachers here. The teacher, the teachers right there have it on their minds.”</li> </ul>
	Inevitability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[If] there’s anything that could make me feel safe apart from it? . . . If we had a million police offices and fences that go really, really high. And I’m not, I don’t know, I don’t want to advocate for that. But at the same time, I’m like, if . . . laws aren’t going to change, if things aren’t going to change, I don’t know the other solution because society isn’t going to change. It’s going to keep going the way that it is.”</li> </ul>

**RQ1: What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?**

Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
Physical safety	Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[If] there’s anything that could make me feel safe apart from it? . . . If we had a million police offices and fences that go really, really high. And I’m not, I don’t know, I don’t want to advocate for that. But at the same time, I’m like, if . . . laws aren’t going to change, if things aren’t going to change, I don’t know the other solution because society isn’t going to change. It’s going to keep going the way that it is.”</li> <li>• “Right now, I’m sitting in my room, and now I’m looking up. I don’t think the fences are not high enough. I think people get over the fence if they want to get in.”</li> <li>• “I think most of the safety measures we’ve done are window dressing, so the public thinks that there’s actions being taken. Um, like for example, at Chico High, the perimeter fencing, kids hop it, they throw their backpack over the fence.”</li> </ul>
	Student stature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I don’t know. I mean, I can imagine some big sixth grader stepping up to a lady teacher, and she can feel scared. I mean, that’s never happened to me. . . . I have lots of female friends here in school, very close friends. I’ve been here for 27 years, so these are my lifelong friends now. And I never heard anything like that from them. And, again, I’m, you know, I’m in a junior high.”</li> </ul>
	No concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “No. I mean, I would like to think I’m pretty good at . . . I’ve never had a confrontation outside of the normal, like a kid gets pissed at you for scoring them something low on something, or never, never anything. Why would you even think about . . . escalating into a need for an outside party to de-escalate?”</li> <li>• “I feel safe with the students who are born here and understand they’re here. Okay. Yeah, I don’t feel any. Uh, yeah, I feel very safe with students.”</li> </ul>



**RQ1: What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?**

Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
	Teacher experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I have never, ever felt unsafe due to student behavior. Not even one time. And maybe because it’s my discipline style. It’s the fact that I listen to my kids, you know. I go, ‘Hey, look, this is what I saw. I saw you stealing so-and-so’s stuff.’ And it appears from my point of view that she got really upset. . . . So that right there, right off the bat, you know, you’re giving the kid a way, to be honest, in a safe way.”</li> <li>• “I have over 25 years’ experience. Yeah, I was speaking to another once, hearing the same. This is my experience speaking with someone over a deadline like that. And I’ve been a scientist for 28 years. My kids don’t bother me. I know. It’s like I just know I know what they’re going to do.”</li> </ul>
	Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I wish I knew more on that. Okay, I think I only know what they do on campus because . . . honestly, on this campus, they are not a presence. And like I said, I’m not sure if that’s them or if . . . we got this like we can handle this internally. I think that it could be extremely helpful on a junior high or high school campus, that cause, that presence, and walking around at lunch time, uh, you know, maybe competency for after school, you know, even once a month, . . . once a week, whatever they have time for.”</li> </ul>
Psychological safety	SRO presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “And here’s . . . a naive kind of touch on it, but do you really think that their presence affects the overall safety of school.”</li> <li>• “I think the feeling of safety would increase a little bit. Okay. So, you know, you’re talking about a trained individual with a weapon. I mean, that can be a bad thing to the, you know, the likelihood of a shooting like that. . . .”</li> </ul>
	Peers and administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It is definitely the system. It’s my school administration. And, um, it’s the . . . physical—what do you call it?—it’s the facilities. . . . I feel very unsafe at the school, and I also feel like I can’t say anything because of retaliation. So it’s a tough . . . issue for me. But I can tell you, I do not feel safe.”</li> </ul>

**RQ1: What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?**

Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
	Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think, overall, . . . I feel safe primarily just with the culture at the school. Like, overall, our students are really kind of friendly. Our admin is really kind and friendly, and . . . I’ve always felt like it’s just a really comfortable, casual vibe, and overall, . . . our students are really great.”</li> <li>• “I think, overall, that’s a positive thing because . . . you forget like we’re in Chico and nothing bad happens, which is kind of good. Ignorance is bliss.”</li> </ul>
	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I mean, communication would be nice. Seems like there is a lack of communication on what they do.”</li> <li>• “I don’t feel safe. You know what I just thought of, too? I’m just talking everywhere. But the only thing that makes me feel unsafe is we don’t get information at all. So there is no communication.”</li> <li>• “And I think unsafe is carelessness. I think it’s also inadequate planning. I think there’s a lot of things that can be de-escalated early and prevented if there’s appropriate communication and a great plan and set like there. And, so for me, especially assessing where I was teaching, it was one of those things where I wanted to make sure I ended up on a school site that had a clear plan, that was organized, that had prepared for the possibilities.”</li> <li>• “If communication is the first thing that comes to mind, I think that if and when something happens, we all get alerted immediately.”</li> </ul>

**RQ1: What are the perceptions of school violence among high school and middle school teachers working in a rural community?**

Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
	Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Yeah, so some things I remember is, and it might have even been you, but . . . I know that we got this resource officer that was visible on campus, walking around, talking to the kids, interacting. . . . building relationships in the kids’ interest with the kids, which was really cool.”</li> <li>• “Even the police officers on our college campus were not visible. You know, I knew they were there, right? You know, I went to Cal Poly. I felt secure, but I’m also more cautious. I’m not stupid.”</li> <li>• “My experience is it’s tough cause I haven’t been working with populations that necessarily have had a need to interact with the SRO for the most part. Um, you know, yes, I know it’s football. So, I mean, there’s visibility, yes. But, . . . I don’t really have actually, you know. . . .”</li> <li>• “And he was, I would argue, a more visible presence. But, also, I think our climate might have been a little different then. I mean, the preponderance of school shootings nationally was not where it’s gone the last decade. I would argue . . . I’m just making that up pretty confident that, you know . . . .”</li> <li>• “Visibility, all that stuff. I think they did a really good job out there.”</li> <li>• “I think it’s really important that you start that early, so early in the day, if you’re there on the school to come in and stand at the gate. And you’re going to get some responses, some not so personal, but just getting that you’ve got nothing going on in the office. I’m here on the campus. Right now especially, I’m just doing class time. But in the break, three seven-minute passing periods.”</li> </ul>

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of CPD's SROs?		
Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
Positive perceptions	Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think having the SROs part of the community of PV—have them at games, walking around, wearing the House of Blues shirt—I think students like seeing SROs being a part of the community, what the school feels and brings. The connection, the pride, and the involvement.”</li> <li>• “I like you, you know, the mentoring and developing students, you know, and the connections to the schools and what not.”</li> </ul>
	Training/ experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Yeah, and I don't feel as safe at Fairview when the SRO isn't there, you know, just because of . . . there being a police car out front and him having a weapon and having somebody that will go towards the danger.”</li> <li>• “I would say it was positive. . . . Like the kids would know him and, you know, say hello to him, or he would look at them and be like, okay, come on, get your act together. Hey, do the thing. And so, overall, I would say it appeared to be positive. I mean, he had a good rapport with the students, and I think our population just needed someone to care about them and needed someone to keep the chemistry.”</li> </ul>
Negative perceptions	Laziness/ disinterest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I mean, the SRO is just lazy, that's all I'm just saying. He is just passing the buck, and he doesn't want to do anything. That's kind of where I have always been.”</li> <li>• “But, I just, I tell you what, I was really disappointed with the way that was handled, and I really don't think that that is enough. Um, I know that with all the fights last year, there was not one citation given, and I think that that could have helped if kids knew that they were going to get a citation.”</li> <li>• “Went to the office. The officer was in there on her cell phone with her feet up on her desk. And I was like, I knocked, you opened up the door, explained the situation, and she said, ‘Well, um, I don't know.’ I didn't perceive that she cared.</li> </ul>
	Invisibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I have not ever seen in this or engaged with students. I've seen a car parked outside of our [school]. . . . But I've never seen them actually meeting the students.”</li> </ul>
	Unit turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I know there have been a hodgepodge of SROs, which makes it difficult for you guys.”</li> </ul>

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of CPD's SROs?		
Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
	Lack of training/ consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “And, again, I could definitely see the SRO being involved in the trainings. Mm hmm, regarding what we need to know and what we need to look for.”</li> <li>• “Would be really nice to be prepared and get training and to be ready for the worst. Just to be ready for it. So that if something happens, we know what to do. And, . . . we can take the action to do that. Don't give me a gun. I did not sign up for that. Give me the techniques and the strategies that I need to have to keep my kids safe.”</li> </ul>
	Lack of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Being able to have that open line of communication again and be able to tell them like, ‘Hey, this could be a situation. I need you to take this seriously because I've seen this and this and this,’ and actually have them follow through and support you in that. It's huge. Whereas if you feel that you are going unheard, I think that stresses out not only the teacher, but it could also escalate the situation as a whole.”</li> </ul>
Do not understand role	transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I'm not sure like I appreciated your history about the resource officer, but overall, like we don't really get updated on what they do, what they can do. It would be nice to get an email or something telling us what they do. It would be nice to know, yeah, the resource they do provide.”</li> <li>• I'm assuming they have a full-time job and are doing things. . . . I don't know what they do because I just don't know what they do. But if it would be possible, I think it would be great for them to walk around . . . just like . . . what I assume I saw that happening that one day.”</li> </ul>

**RQ3: What are teachers' assessments of how effectively the SRO program prepares them to handle violence on campus?**

Final Category	Initial Themes	Example Quotation
Presence	More SRO and police presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[If] there’s anything that could make me feel safe apart from it? . . . If we had a million police offices and fences that go really, really high. And I’m not, I don’t know, I don’t want to advocate for that. But at the same time, I’m like, if . . . laws aren’t going to change, if things aren’t going to change, I don’t know the other solution because society isn’t going to change. It’s going to keep going the way that it is.”</li> <li>• “Our on-campus police officer that knew what was going on with the other gang members.”</li> <li>• “I was seeing we had a third gang member drop off a gun in a gutter, and we went in lockdown because, on campus, police officer found out about it, and there was an initiation. One of our high school kids was supposed to use it at school, so we were able to safely get the situation under control because of that relationship.”</li> </ul>
	Mentoring and youth programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “She was running a program that I never attended. But the last period of the day, she’d come in, and she got kids out of classes. I’m not sure how it ran, but she’d actually have a group of kids, and she’d be with them for the last period of the day.”</li> </ul>
	Tabletop exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Unfortunately, I don’t think there’s a whole lot we can do about it except for, like I said, locking up that gate and then maybe finding just a little bit more training for us as teachers, self-defense and de-escalation.”</li> <li>• “Like [grabbing] a book and . . . they would go over a couple of scenarios, [giving] you ideas for [those] scenarios, or talking for working through them with a different group, doing like tabletop discussions about in this situation, what would you do, and like trying to figure out what the best, safest way to do, and just discussing it and [helping] you process and think about it before it happens. And, you know, it’s like a training for your brain. And, yeah, I think that’s important to process.”</li> </ul>
Consistency	Lack of information sharing and intelligence gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It would be really nice to know what’s going on. I know somethings need to keep confidential, um, I get that. But just knowing something would be great.”</li> </ul>

	Minimum tenure and selection of the right officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The kids loved having them on campus. You know, they would always go up to them. They were very friendly. They, I think, they chose well, which officers were going to be on the campus.”</li> <li>• “They were smiling. The last one we had was a young lady. She must have been maybe 25 or 26. Okay. And she was very good with the kids. She’d meet with them.”</li> <li>• “I mean, yeah, it’s important, I’d say here. Chico PD, I’ve seen both spectrums of people being happy, doing their jobs, and other people trying to figure it out. I think it’s newer people coming in that are new to Chico PD and question what to do, you know, as a resource officer.”</li> </ul>
Lack of transparency	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I mean, communication would be nice. Seems like there is a lack of communication on what they do.”</li> <li>• “If communication is the first thing that comes to mind, I think that if and when something happens, we all get alerted immediately.”</li> </ul>

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