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Perceptions of School Resource Officers on Their Role in Southern Maryland Public Elementary Schools

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Perceptions of School Resource Officers on Their Role in Southern Maryland Public
Elementary Schools

by
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Approval Page

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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even stronger than what it already is, including adding SROs to as many elementary schools as possible.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Grammy and Pappy Lodge. They passed away during my doctoral program, but will forever live on in my memories, especially the funny ones and our world-traveling adventures! Thank you for believing in me! I hope that I continue to make you proud!

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You all are loved and missed by so many!

Abstract

Perceptions of School Resource Officers on Their Role in Southern Maryland Public Elementary Schools. Lori B. Lodge, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: school resource officers, SRO, school safety, perceptions, positive relationships, behavior, Southern Maryland, elementary schools, generic qualitative research

This applied dissertation was designed to investigate the perceptions of school resource officers (SROs) in Southern Maryland regarding the support SROs could provide elementary schools to foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety and what additional resources that the SROs needed to support their job.

The overall school climate and morale at some elementary schools have significantly decreased due to increased student-aggressive behaviors. The school climate is correlated to student academic success (Sanders et al., 2018). School climate can include safety, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, and the school environment.

There is a need for school resource officers in elementary schools to support the overall school climate as they build a general feeling of safety. They can collaboratively foster healthy relationships within the school environment and create an environment conducive to teaching and learning. SROs should refrain from regularly needing to handle disciplinary needs in schools. Instead, they should help build positive relationships through collaboration with staff that help empower these future community members to make wise and safe choices in and out of the school environment.

This generic qualitative study addressed what SRO perceptions were in role in a public school in Southern Maryland. It also addressed the training and additional resources that SROs need to continue to grow the SRO program.

The findings of this study suggest that SROs can foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety at any school level that they are assigned to. Their perceptions demonstrate the importance of building relationships through trust, being approachable, having positive interactions with staff, students, and administration, being playful, showing compassion, and having good communication skills. The findings of this study suggest additional resources that SROs need, such as continued training and collaboration, among other accessible items, in order to improve the SRO program.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

According to the American Psychological Association (2016), there has been a significant increase in hostile, aggressive behaviors within the school-aged population (Justia US Law, 2014) over the last decade. According the LSS Board of Education, there has been an alarming increase in hostile, aggressive behaviors at the elementary level (PK-5). These behaviors can vary from verbal aggression toward staff and peers, physical attacks towards staff and peers, and destruction of property (Bayley & Rohrkemper, 1987). Some of the students involved with aggressive behaviors have a disability that requires specially designed instruction, supports, and services through an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). However, most of these aggressive students are general education students. These increased behavior concerns are seen in students with IEPs and general education. Some students have a behavior intervention plan (BIP) that targets proactive strategies to address problem behaviors exhibited by the student in the educational setting.

With the significant increase in hostile, aggressive behaviors comes the need for additional resources to support these students at the elementary level. A few resources available at the elementary level are teachers, support staff, building administration (principal, assistant principal, dean of students), behavior specialist/technician, school counselor, behavioral or school psychologist, school social worker, regional special education supervisors, and deputy superintendent. Only the teachers, support staff, and building administrators are available daily. The other resources listed are shared with other schools in each County. One resource that is not readily available to elementary

schools is School Resource Officers (SROs). Their local law enforcement agency employs the SROs in Southern Maryland and is primarily assigned to middle and high schools.

Even with the abovementioned resources, elementary school students are in crisis daily. Crisis' can look like physical attacks, defined as hitting, kicking, spitting, or throwing of objects that hit peers or staff; physical aggression, defined as throwing or pushing objects that do not hit peers/staff or destroying parts or all of an instructional area; and verbal outbursts with extensive profanity inappropriate for a school setting, and eloping, defined as leaving a classroom without permission, in or out of the building.

The overall school climate and morale at some elementary schools have significantly decreased due to increased student-aggressive behaviors. The school climate is correlated to student academic success (Sanders et al., 2018). School climate can include safety, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, and the school environment.

Phenomenon of Interest

Communities nationwide have come together due to recent increases in school violence. Unfortunately, implementing or expanding school resource officers is often part of an after-action plan to help better support schools. Very few school systems proactively provide resource officers to all schools, including elementary schools. In that case, the SROs can help prevent and respond to school-based crime, foster positive relationships among law enforcement, educators, and youth, and help to promote a positive school climate (Rosiak, 2014).

There is a need for school resource officers in elementary schools to help the overall school climate as they build a general feeling of safety. They can collaboratively foster healthy relationships within the school environment and create an environment conducive to teaching and learning. SROs should refrain from regularly needing to handle disciplinary needs in schools. Instead, they should build positive relationships through collaboration with staff that help empower these future community members to make wise and safe choices in and out of the school environment.

Background & Significance

History of School Policing School policing has been around since at least the 1950s. In 1948, the Los Angeles School Police Department formed a security unit to patrol and protect schools in newly desegregated neighborhoods. In the 1950s, law enforcement officers, now commonly known as school resource officers (SROs), were permanently assigned to schools in Flint, Michigan, as part of a community policing strategy. In 1954, the Supreme Court held in Brown v. Board of Education that segregation was unconstitutional and mandated public-school desegregation. Many school districts refused to desegregate and required federal military intervention (Alliance for Educational Justice, 2023).

In 1966, the Chicago Police Department established the first "Officer Friendly" program to help reduce crime among children. It served as a precursor to other police officer-led programs launched in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) and Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT). The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) was founded in 1991. They developed the "triad" concept, using school police as teachers, informal counselors, and

law enforcement officers. In 1994, Congress passed the Gun-Free Schools Act. This allocated over $15 billion to prisons and prevention programs, created 100,000 new police officers, and established Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants.

The 1999 Columbine High School massacre in Columbine, Colorado, recreated a widespread fear of school shootings and set in motion the expansion of school policing. Between 1999 and 2005, the federal government awarded more than $750 million to law enforcement agencies to hire nearly 7,000 SROs.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education released national data on school-based arrests and referrals to law enforcement for the first time. Civil rights advocates say the data confirms fears that the practices disproportionately harm black students and students with disabilities. In 2013, after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, former President Obama announced plans to prioritize grant applications for LEAs wanting to hire SROs. The Obama administration's U.S. Departments of Education and Justice issue guidance to help public K-12 schools identify and prevent discriminatory discipline based on race, color, or national origin and encourage schools not to rely on officers to handle routine discipline matters. The Department of Education released data in 2021 that shows schools continued to disproportionately refer Black students and students with disabilities to law enforcement in the 2017-2018 school year.

In 2018, in the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, during which an SRO retreated rather than trying to stop the gunman, the Trump administration developed a plan to prioritize federal funding to help police departments hire more SROs. The Trump administration rescinded the Obama-era

discipline guidance, with then U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos citing concerns that schools are reluctant to discipline non-white students for unruly or violent behavior because they feared federal discrimination investigations. In 2020, Congress reauthorized the IDEA Act in 2004 and 2015 amended it through Public Law 114-95 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for equity and the advancement of social-emotional learning.

In 2022, an 18-year-old male killed his grandmother, entered an unlocked door at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. It took police officers over an hour to breach the classroom with the gunman who murdered 19 students and two teachers. In 2023, a first-grade teacher was shot in her chest in her classroom by her six-year-old student at Richneck Elementary School in Newport News, Virginia. The teacher survived her gunshot wound to her chest by taking a defensive stance with her hands up. The bullet traveled through her hand and into her chest. There are several reports that there were three warnings from school employees about the handgun and a warning about the student threatening to harm another child. About 16 to 20 students were in the classroom during the shooting. After the teacher was shot, she ushered all her students out of the classroom and was the last person to leave. Within five minutes, the responding police officers found another school employee physically restraining the combative 6-year-old suspect in the classroom. No SRO was assigned to the elementary school.

United States

U.S. Demographics & Statistics According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), the United States has 98,577 public schools and approximately 49.5 million students, ranging from pre-kindergarten to grade twelve. This data is in addition

to the 30,492 private schools and approximately 4.7 million enrolled students from pre-kindergarten to grade twelve (NCES, 2020). The reported public schools have remained within 1000 of the current number since 2010. Private schools have been on a slow decline of approximately 1000 private schools per year since 2016.

The number of students ages 3-21 receiving IDEA services in the U.S. increased from 6.4 million in 2010-2011 to 7.3 million in 2021-2022. This equals 15% of the total U.S. student population. The U.S. national average is $13,489 for current expenditures per pupil (NCES, 2022).

The United States has recorded 2,331 school shootings from 1970 to mid-April 2023. The Center for Homeland Defense and Security School Shooting Safety Compendium presented 2,067 school shootings from January 1970 to June 2022, which resulted in 684 fatalities and 1,935 injuries. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that there have been 783 shootings with deaths or injuries at elementary and secondary schools from 2000-2021. The data does not include school shootings that did not result in death or injury. The NCES reported that in the 2020-2021 school year, there were 145 public school shootings. Of those 145 school shootings, 57 were in high schools, 21 were in middle schools, 59 were in elementary schools, and eight were in other institutions. In the 2019-2020 school year, there were 114 public school shootings (69 high schools, 11 middle schools, 32 elementary schools, and two others).

U.S. SROs National Association of School Resource Officers (2023) reported that no one knows how many SROs are in the United States. This is because SROs are not required to register with any national database, police departments are not required to report how many of their officers' work as SROs, and school systems are not required to

report how many SROs they use.

National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reported that approximately 47,200 public schools have security staff present at least once per week. Of that number, 28,500 schools reported using full-time SROs, and 23,500 schools reported using part-time SROs. The other security staff included security guards and other sworn law enforcement officers.

The Institute of Education Sciences School Crime and Safety (2022) reported that 96% of public schools performed or will perform active shooter drills with students. 52% of schools report having sworn law enforcement officers, including SROs, present at school at least once weekly.

Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) of 2022 The BSCA was developed under President Biden's administration and provides funding to support State educational agencies (SEA), local school systems (LSS), and schools in establishing safe, healthy, and supporting learning opportunities and environments. This includes the Stronger Connections Grant Program that allocated $1 billion through Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for SEAs to competitively award subgrants to high-need LSSs to establish safer and healthier learning environments and to prevent and respond to acts of bullying, violence and hate that impact our school communities at individual and systemic levels, among other programs and activities.

Local school systems may use the Stronger Connections funds for SROs as a recipient of Federal funds. The LSS and LEA should select SROs who have volunteered for the position and have experience working with children and youth. SROs should have training and ongoing professional development on MTSS, de-escalation, restorative

practices, civil rights, disability, and emergency response. Clear roles for SROs should be established, conduct community and family engagement, and implement accountability measures and data-driven annual evaluations of the program. It is advised that schools should consider providing training for SROs and educators on students' civil rights, on distinguishing behavior that can be appropriately handled by educators from conduct that the school's disciplinary process cannot safely address, and on developmentally appropriate strategies for building trusting relationships with students and families. LSSs should ensure accurate collection and reporting of disaggregated data regarding student referrals, arrests, and citations by school-based policy and other school staff.

Maryland

MD Demographics & Statistics According to the Maryland Association of Counties (2023), Maryland comprises twenty-four leading local jurisdictions, including twenty-three counties and Baltimore City. Maryland has 1,400 public schools and 881,461 students in pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade. The number of students ages 3-21 receiving IDEA services in Maryland is 12% of the total Maryland student population. The Maryland average is $18,710 for current expenditures per pupil (NCES, 2022).

Maryland has a total of 77 school shootings from 1970 to mid-April 2023. There were 56 victims wounded, 20 victims killed, and 22 deaths. It is ranked 12th in the nation by incident and 19th by population. The school shootings were due to escalation of dispute (45%), illegal activity (16%), accidental (9%), indiscriminate shooting (4%), domestic with the targeted victim (3%), suicide/attempted (3%), other situations (8%) and 12% that do not have a situation listed (Reidman, 2023).

Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 On April 10, 2018, Maryland's former Governor, Larry Hogan, signed the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 (Senate Bill 1265, Chapter 30) into law (Curran, 2018). This comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach to school safety and security in Maryland's Public Schools took effect on June 1, 20218 (MCSS, 2022). This requires all public schools in Maryland to have a designated school resource officer (SRO) or "adequate local law enforcement coverage" by the 2019-2020 school year (Curran, 2018). When the bill was signed, only about 400 of Maryland's 1,419 schools had SROs (Curran, 2018). Approximately 1,000 schools were affected.

MD SROs Maryland Center for School Safety's 2021 Annual Report stated that of the 1,419 public schools in Maryland, 291 public schools had full-time assigned SROs (20.5%), and 1,128 schools had adequate coverage (79.5%).

Maryland Center for School Safety's 2022 Annual Report stated that of the 1,400 public schools in Maryland, 273 public schools had full-time assigned SROs (19.5%), and 1,127 schools had adequate coverage (80.5%).

According to Maryland Center for School Safety (2021), the law does not define adequate coverage. Determining adequate coverage requires a discussion and agreement between each school system and the local law enforcement agency, which has primary jurisdiction over each educational facility. Considerations should include the proximity of the closest first responders and student population size. Adequate coverage can include having officers who are not SROs conduct safety checks of schools in their patrol area, sheriff's deputies working overtime, SRO supervisors who are not assigned to a specific school can provide supplemental patrol service and respond to calls for service, state

police agencies, and officers/deputies who are not SROs who are permitted access to the school building can conduct other official business (MCSS, 2022).

In addition to this newly implemented bill to keep Maryland schools a safe learning environment, several school districts nationwide are considering or have announced a more comprehensive development of law enforcement in schools (Curran, 2018). In comparison, the Civil Rights Data Collection reported that in 2013-2014, only about 75% of high schools nationwide had SROs, 50% of middle schools, and less than 20% in elementary schools. This is an increase of almost 33% of SROs in schools from ten years prior (Curran, 2018).

MD Funding The Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 established the Safe School Fund authorizes grants for various school safety items and programs and includes a mandatory appropriation of funds. Currently, MCSS offers grants for SRO, safe schools fund, and school safety, and upcoming FY24 is school safety evaluation.

The School Resource Officer grant assists LSS in fulfilling the Safe to Learn Act of 2018 requirements. The Governor has appropriated $10 million in general funds for SROs and adequate law enforcement coverage for Maryland's public Schools (MCSS, 2023). Each County in Maryland that applies for and receives a school resource officer grant may use the grant for salaries and fringe benefits, and training costs to be at most 10% of the allocated amount per school. That cost for FY23 is up to $7,047 per school facility (MCSS, 2023). This amount will increase to $7,143 for FY24. The grant can also be used for equipment at most 2% of the allocated amount per school (FY23 $141 per school) (MCSS, 2023). The grant funds cannot be used for equipment or training exceeding the amount above, conference expenses, weapons, tasers, stun gun devices and

ammunition, motor vehicles, and travel expenses. The Maryland LSS or law enforcement agency can apply for the grant.

The Safe Schools Fund Grant provides funding for school safety and security-related matters as described under Maryland Code Annotated Education Article §7–1512. The Governor has appropriated $600,000 in FY23. The non-competitive grant funds can be applied toward conducting training for students and school personnel on de-escalation of situations and identifying and reporting behaviors of concern, training of assessment teams, school safety evaluations, establishing formal and anonymous mechanisms for reporting safety concerns, reimbursing local LEEAs for SRO training provided by the center, and enrolling school security employees in training provided by the center. The grant can also be used to develop plans to deliver school-based behavioral health and other wraparound services to students who exhibit behaviors of concern, including establishing systems to maximize external funding services, outreach to the broader school community to improve school safety, including heightening awareness of existing mental health services and other services, and to provide information to students and parents on traveling safely to and from school, including data related to bus and pedestrian safety, strategies for ensuring personal safety, efforts of the LSS to improve safety, and information on available options for reporting incidents and concerns. Only LSS are eligible to apply.

The Maryland School Safety Grant program, which started in FY2022, is intended to provide grants to LSS to address school security improvements, including but not limited to secure and lockable classroom doors, areas of safe refuge in classrooms, surveillance, security vestibules, and other structural school security-related

improvements that have a direct impact on the school facility, students, and school administrators. The non-competitive grant has a minimum allocation is $200,000 for each LSS. Only LSS are eligible to apply.

The School Safety Evaluation Grant is new for FY24. Three million dollars is appropriated in FY24 specifically for LSS to perform facility assessments, re-evaluate and update their existing safety evaluation tool, policy, or procedures, train staff on the policy, procedures, and use of the tool, acquire software for digital mapping, test out their communication and video equipment and overall implement a sustainable school safety evaluation plan and processes that enable the LSS to complete evaluations on all schools regularly. Each LSS will receive a minimum of $50,000 in grant funding to complete these tasks.

Southern Maryland

So. MD Demographics & Details The 2020 United States Census reported that Southern Maryland has a population of 373,179, with approximately 87,441 (23.4%) under 18. Other demographics include 64.9% white, 27.7% black, and 7.4% other or mixed races. There is 6.2% of Hispanic or Latino origin. The median household income is $110,320, with 2.79 persons per household. The poverty level is 6.77%. There are 1,028 square miles of land area in Southern Maryland.

The local school systems (LSS) in Southern Maryland have a median annual operating budget of $334,994,429, and their total combined budget surpasses $1 billion. The Maryland LSS is ranked based on academic achievement, academic progress, progress in achieving English language proficiency, school quality, and student success (MSDE, 2022). Southern Maryland counties' rankings vary and tend to trend in the

smaller counties ranking higher than the larger counties.

Southern Maryland LSS has strategic plans to address equity, student outcomes, climate and culture, workforce, and community engagement. As part of the strategic plans, there are district-wide social-emotional learning programs for elementary schools, increased professional development in restorative practices, Life Space Crisis Intervention, suicide intervention, and trauma training. They plan to foster student and staff well-being by promoting a culture of safety, security, and wellness for all learning and work environments. Efforts will focus on creating a community committed to learning and safety for all students. Establishing a safe and orderly environment ensures the most significant opportunity for positive individual development and success in student learning. They will strive to enhance safety and security initiatives through open communication, strong community partnerships, progressive policies and procedures, and proactive action by school staff.

So. MD SROs Maryland Center for School Safety (2022) reported that Southern Maryland has 90 public schools, 37 SROs, 34 schools assigned with full-time SROs (38%), and 56 schools with adequate law enforcement coverage (62%). There are a total of 59,762 students enrolled in Southern Maryland public schools from K-12 (MSDE, 2022).

Local law enforcement agencies have reported that they had strategic sessions with members of the school board administration to discuss issues and developed and implemented a plan to have patrol bureau deputies conduct patrol checks of all schools and have an increased presence in and around each school. A local sheriff stated that he will continue to make efforts and strides to make the school and children as safe as

possible.

Other Southern Maryland initiatives include MOUs between local law enforcement and educational agencies. They have reaffirmed their commitment to providing safe, secure, and nurturing learning environments for students. One county is hiring full-time uniformed safety and security assistants for each elementary school. These assistants will supplement the current uniform safety and security assistants working in all secondary schools beginning in the 2023-2024 school year.

So. MD Funding The mission of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) is to promote and enhance safer school communities. This is done through various training, grant, and community outreach programs. For fiscal year 2023, Southern Maryland received a combined school resource officer grant of $641,296. Each local school system is allocated $7,047 per school for FY23. The funds will increase to $7,143 per school for FY24. The local LEA or LSS can apply for these non-competitive, State-funded grants. The local LEAs applied for Southern Maryland's SRO grants.

Behavior in Schools

Even though there are strategic plans and additional funding, school staff, primarily the elementary school staff, are being physically assaulted daily (broken nose, broken jaw on both sides, and multiple black eyes) and are emotionally drained and stressed out to the maximum. With the shift in LSS policy and Statewide restriction on not being able to use restraint or seclusion like school systems have in the past when there was imminent harm to the student or others and used as a last resort. This has left school staff members on the front line of harm. The exact antecedent for the problem of physical harm and verbal outbursts is unknown. The important part is to help foster

healthy and positive relationships within the school setting with staff and community authority members, such as SROs, who help teach, counsel, and protect the school community. The continued support of SROs to middle and high schools is essential. Adding SROs to elementary schools is vital to the youngest and most vulnerable population.

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that 87% of public schools nationwide reported that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted student socio-emotional development during the 2021-2022 school year. 84% of public schools agreed or strongly agreed that students' behavioral development has also been negatively impacted. The increased incidents of classroom disruptions included student misconduct (56%), rowdiness outside of the classroom (49%), and disrespect toward teachers and staff (48%).

SRO Training

The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) offers a Basic SRO Course, a 40-hour training (over five days) designed to prepare SROs, other law enforcement officers, and school safety professionals to effectively fulfill their roles in the school setting. NASRO reported that this course would also benefit school administrators and education professionals. NASRO stated that participants will gain a solid understanding of the responsibilities of the SRO using NASRO's Triad model of school-based policing. The course will equip officers to develop successful relationships with diverse students and support students with disabilities and behavioral health challenges. Participants will discuss relevant public safety topics, such as digital safety, human trafficking, mental health, and substance abuse. They will learn best practices for

de-escalation, behavioral threat assessment, emergency operations planning, and armed assailant response.

NASRO offers an advanced SRO course, a 24-hour training (over three days) designed for any law enforcement officer working in an educational environment. Following the SRO Triad model, this course advances the SRO's knowledge and skills as a law enforcement officer, informal counselor, and educator.

NASRO (2021) recommends that School Resource Officers be trained to utilize NASRO's SRO Triad Model. This model includes understanding and applying the principles of each Triad component: Law Enforcement Officer, Public Safety Educator, and Informal Counselor/Mentor.

To be an effective law enforcement officer in a school environment, the SRO should have a working knowledge of constitutional and state law, armed response, crime prevention, and mitigation, interview and interrogation techniques, investigations, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental School Design (CPTED), patrol operations, advocacy within the juvenile justice system, and mandatory reporting (NASRO, 2021).

To be an effective public safety educator, the SRO should be capable of delivering lessons on public safety topics such as crime prevention, social media, school safety, victimization, laws about students, safe traffic stops, driver safety, law enforcement careers, decision making, and other topics requested by staff/parents/students.

To be an effective informal counselor/mentor, the SRO should be appropriately trained in mentoring, crime prevention, empowering youth, resiliency and overall wellness, adolescent brain development, social and emotional development, supporting

diversity, equity, and inclusion, improving youth decision-making skills, and trauma-informed practices.

NASRO offers the following courses: Basic SRO, Advanced SRO, Adolescent Mental Health Training, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), School Safety Officer, and SRO Supervisors and Management.

Barriers & Issues

Barriers that may be faced in this study may include but are not limited to, teachers, staff, and administration having a growth mindset of how SROs can support and foster positive relationships within an elementary school setting. Teachers and administration across the nation, including Maryland, have a varied level of experience and years of experience. This varied experience may impact the growth mindset needed to support using SROs in elementary schools.

Maryland had approximately 61,438 teachers during the 2022 school year. Teacher attrition in Maryland was between 9% and 10% between 2011 and 2019. In 2020, it fell to 7.3% and increased to 9.3% in 2021. Maryland's state superintendent, Mohammed Choudhury, said, "Our retention rates overall are holding steady. It's not some kind of broad-stroke, red-alert type of concern."

There will be a learning curve. Veteran teachers and the 3% of staff in their first year of teaching must be willing to embrace SROs within the elementary school setting. Students will also need to be willing to have a growth mindset to add an SRO in the elementary setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study aimed to investigate the perceptions of SROs regarding the support SROs could provide to elementary schools to foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety. What do these or will this support look like in the school setting for today's youth? Teachers need to teach, and students need to learn. Learning must happen with minimal distractions in a safe learning environment.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided for key terms that are used in this dissertation:

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) – A proactive plan designed to address problem behaviors exhibited by a student in the educational setting through positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports. (COMAR13A.08.04.02B(1))

COMAR – Code of Maryland Regulations. Title 13A, State Board of Education, includes all regulations adopted by the State Board of Education for public education to students in the State of Maryland. Within Title 13A, the following chapters are specifically applicable to students with disabilities:

• COMAR 13A.05.01 Provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education

• COMAR 13A.05.02 Administration of Services for Students with Disabilities

• COMAR 13A.08.03 Discipline of Students with Disabilities

• COMAR 13A.08.04 Student Behavioral Interventions

Community-Oriented Policing (COP) – a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systemic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to

proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. This policing strategy focuses on developing relationships with community members to address community problems by building social resilience and proactive policing; the approach calls for police to concentrate on solving crime and disorder problems in neighborhoods rather than simply responding to calls for service (OJJDP, 2023).

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) – a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under and applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education (2021).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities nationwide and ensures special education and related services to those children (IDEA, 2023).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – A written description of the special education and related services for a student with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised by the student's IEP team. (20 U.S.C. §1414(d); 34 C.F.R. §§300.320 - 300.328; COMAR 13A.05.01.03B(34))

Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) – an agency of the United States, a State, or a political subdivision of a State authorized by law or by a government agency to engage in or supervise the prevention, detection, investigation, or prosecution of any violation of criminal law.

Local School System (LSS) – a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for administrative control or direction of public schools in a city, County, or school district (National Archives, 2023).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) – a framework many schools use to give targeted support to struggling students. MTSS is designed to help schools identify students early and intervene quickly in academic growth, behavior, social, emotional, and absenteeism (Rosen, 2023).

Restorative Justice – a framework for dealing with conflict that emphasizes reparation of harm and the interconnectedness of humanity. There is a de-emphasis on punishment, instead focusing on the needs of those involved, both offenders and victims (Mouton, 2016).

Restorative Practices – similar to restorative justice in character and approach but includes preventative practices designed to build skills and capacity among those involved (Mouton, 2016).

School Resource Officer (SRO) - career law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is deployed in community-oriented policing and assigned by the employing police department or agency to collaborate with schools and community-based organizations.

State Educational Agency (SEA) – the State Board of Education or other agency or officer primarily responsible for the State supervision of public schools (Cornell Law School, 2023).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Using school resource officers in schools is not a new approach in public education. While schools remain one of the safest places in the United States (Cornell, 2015), the importance of SROs in our schools is often cut back or entirely out of the budget due to current funding trends in each state or county. SROs may temporarily be placed in schools due to a recent school shooting or other uptick in behaviors in the community or schools that involve our youth. It is essential to see where proactively using SROs in elementary schools can create a positive learning environment. The purpose of this research is to investigate the perceptions of SROs regarding the support SROs could provide to elementary schools to foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety.

School Resource Officer Standards and Use in Schools

A school resource officer (SRO), by federal definition 20 U.S.C. § 7161, is a career law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is deployed in community-oriented policing and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations (Justia US Law, 2014). They can address crime and disorder problems affecting schools (including elementary), develop or expand crime prevention efforts for students, educate likely school-age victims in crime prevention and safety, develop or expand community justice initiatives for students, train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, crime awareness, and assist in developing school policy that addresses crime and to recommend procedural changes (Justia US Law, 2014).

McKenna and Pollock (2014) reported that the use of sworn law enforcement officers in American schools has rapidly expanded since its inception in the 1950s. This growth can be partly attributed to the Safe Schools Act of 1994, the establishment of the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office, and tragic events, such as Columbine and Sandy Hook, which have occurred in our nation's schools (McKenna et al., 2014). The primary roles of law enforcement officers in the school environment have been protection and enforcement. New roles have emerged in educating and mentoring students. Using police in schools has been associated with the formalization of student discipline and the criminalization of minor misconduct. The number of SROs in schools has also increased the number of arrests and citations for relatively minor offenses. McKenna et al. (2014) argued that officers' socialization and training create role conflict because enforcing the law competes with other duties to mentor and nurture students.

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (2001) reported that "an overwhelming majority of students and staff feel safe at school" due to an SRO in school buildings. In 2020, the Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey reported that 53% agree and 19% strongly agree that "the SRO makes me feel safer at school." On the contrary, this included 16% who disagreed and 9% who strongly disagreed that "the SRO makes me feel safer at school." When separated by race, all percentages were approximately the same for each level of agreement. In another study from a midwestern State, approximately 63% of the nearly 4,000 surveyed teachers reported an SRO presence in their school. The results from Wood and Hampton's 2021 study suggest that teachers positively associate SRO presence with feelings of safety and security. These

same teachers perceive students to be more fearful and less secure in buildings employing SROs.

Weiler et al. (2011) discussed that an SRO is a police officer first and should be considered something other than another building-level administrator or teacher. According to the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium, six core standards are related to effective school leadership. The third standard reads: "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment." A safe learning environment is "a healthy and motivating school culture where educators and students feel safe, included, and ready to learn." Weiler et al. (2011) reported, just as Eklund et al. (2018), that most administrators lack the training and skill set to adequately address many of the issues in schools that threaten to disrupt the safe learning environment. The SRO program provides school administrators with additional resources to promote a safe learning environment. SROs possess the specific training that school administrators lack. As a result, schools with an SRO are better equipped to deal effectively with any threatening situations that might arise during the school day. The selection of SRO working directly with children must be chosen carefully.

Eklund, Meyer, and Bosworth (2018) also reported that SROs are increasingly employed by schools on an increasing basis to respond to incidents of school violence and help address safety concerns among students and staff. Eklund et al. (2018) reported that fewer than 100 SROs were assigned to U.S. schools in the late 1970s. This can be compared to 2000 SROs in the late 1990s and 17,000 SROs in 2014 (McKenna et al., 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reported that approximately

47,200 public schools have security staff present at least once per week. Previous

research on school safety and crisis teams examined the role of school mental health

professionals and administrators. Fewer studies have evaluated the role of the SRO.

SRO Effectiveness

In 2018, researchers at Carleton University in Canada conducted a two-year study

of the use of SROs. They concluded that for every dollar invested in the program, a

minimum of $11.13 of social and economic value was created (NASRO, n.d.). The

benefits of using SROs in schools were the prevention of student injuries due to violence,

reduction in the need for schools to call 911, reduction of the likelihood that a student

will get a criminal record, an increase of the likelihood that students (particularly those

with mental health concerns) will get the help they need from the social service and

health care systems, and increase in feeling safe among students and staff. SROs help

challenging students avoid being connected with the juvenile justice program. Juvenile

arrest rates throughout the United States decreased when the use of SROs in schools

increased (NASRO, 2012). The NASRO (2012) recommends that every school, including

elementary schools, have at least one carefully selected and specially trained SRO. The

number of SROs should be determined based on school size and number of buildings,

overall school climate, and location (NASRO, 2012). An ideal SRO should volunteer to

be transferred to this type of position and be dedicated to developing a solid relationship

with the school-aged population (Justia US Law, 2014) and staff within the school they

support. If an officer does not wish to be an SRO, they should not be assigned to a school

setting. If they were administratively transferred against their will, it could cause adverse

situations within the school. Administrators and supervisors need to help set this program up for success.

Legislation

In the United States, the primary responsibility for establishing policy and funding elementary and secondary education lies within the individual states and LSS. The U.S. Department of Education supports the general welfare of the United States to ensure equal access to educational opportunities and improve the quality of education. Education rights have evolved and been updated to help provide further personal protection and rights for the individual learner.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights legislation that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. Individuals with disabilities are defined as people with a physical or mental impairment substantially limiting one or more major life activities. Schools and employers are required to take reasonable steps to accommodate the disability. In schools, a Section 504 plan could include behavioral supports that the student needs to address behavior interfering with their or other students' learning ability. This can also include a description of specific disability-based behavior for which the student will not be disciplined under the school's code of conduct. If additional supports are needed, the Section 504 team can reconvene to determine if additional or different services or supports are necessary.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) In 1975, Congress enacted P.L. 94-142, now known as IDEA, and was reauthorized in 2004 (P.L. 108-446). This authorizes grant programs that support early intervention and special education services

for children with disabilities from birth to age 21. As part of the condition to receive funds, states must provide certain substantive and procedural protections for students with disabilities. IDEA ensures that all children under IDEA receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) On December 10, 2015, former President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into legislation. ESSA reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and replaced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act enacted in 2002. ESSA holds LSSs accountable for how students learn and achieve. ESSA aims to provide equal opportunity for disadvantaged students, including those who receive special education services. ESSA includes accountability to improve school safety with a continuum of prevention and intervention based on appropriately interpreted data collected from valid and reliable measures.

Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) of 2022 The BSCA was developed under President Biden's administration and provides funding to support State educational agencies (SEA), local school systems (LSS), and schools in establishing safe, healthy, and supporting learning opportunities and environments. This includes the Stronger Connections Grant Program that allocated $1 billion through Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for SEAs to competitively award subgrants to high-need LSSs to establish safer and healthier learning environments and to prevent and respond to acts of bullying, violence and hate that impact school communities at individual and systemic levels, among other programs and activities.

Local school systems may use the Stronger Connections funds for SROs as a

recipient of Federal funds. The LSS and LEA should select SROs who have volunteered for the position and have experience working with children and youth. SROs should have training and ongoing professional development on MTSS, de-escalation, restorative practices, civil rights, disability, and emergency response. Clear roles for SROs should be established, conduct community and family engagement, and implement accountability measures and data-driven annual evaluations of the program. It is advised that schools should consider providing training for SROs and educators on students' civil rights, on distinguishing behavior that can be appropriately handled by educators from conduct that the school's disciplinary process cannot safely address, and on developmentally appropriate strategies for building trusting relationships with students and families. LSSs should ensure accurate collection and reporting of disaggregated data regarding student referrals, arrests, and citations by school-based policy and other school staff.

Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 On April 10, 2018, Maryland's former Governor, Larry Hogan, signed the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 (Senate Bill 1265, Chapter 30) into law (Curran, 2018). This comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach to school safety and security in Maryland's Public Schools took effect on June 1, 20218 (MCSS, 2022). This requires all public schools in Maryland to have a designated school resource officer (SRO) or "adequate local law enforcement coverage" by the 2019-2020 school year (Curran, 2018). When the bill was signed, only about 400 of Maryland's 1,419 schools had SROs (Curran, 2018). Approximately 1,000 schools were affected.

Understanding Behavior

All behavior is a form of communication. Behavior can be seen as a sign that an individual may not have the skills to tell you what they need and may not even know what they need. It is essential to respond to the individual and not their behaviors. Most communication can be 60% nonverbal. Humans use body language, facial expressions, and gestures in communication. Young children rely heavily on nonverbal communication. Heneker (2005) reported that 75% of young people with social, emotional, and mental health problems also have communication problems. The CDC (2023) reported that 8.9% of children aged 3-17 (approximately 5.5 million) in the U.S. have behavior problems. One in six U.S. children aged 2-8 years (17.4%) has a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder, which includes language and communication (CDC, 2023).

Maslow's Self-Actualization Theory & Hierarchy of Needs Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) is known for his self-actualization theory which is the process by which an individual can reach their full potential. Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs for basic survival. Physiological needs include breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, and sleep. Safety and security needs include health, employment, property, family, and social ability. Feeling safe is a basic human need (Maslow, 1943). Love and belonging include friendship, family, intimacy, and connection. Self-esteem needs include confidence, achievement, respect for others, and the need to be unique. Self-actualization needs include morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, experience, purposeful meaning, and inner potential.

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
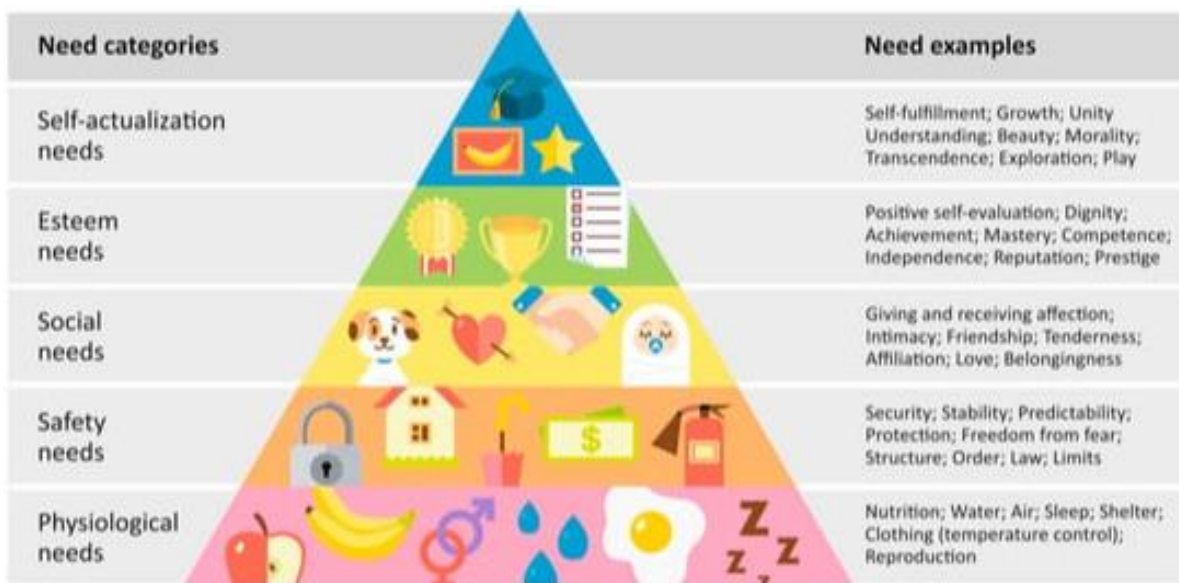
With an understanding of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the needs of students in the educational system, it is apparent that schools cannot satisfy every physiological need of every student. There are programs such as free and reduced meal programs that can help with hunger in schools. Based on this model, if basic needs fail to be provided then students may not be able to prioritize education. School staff can offer students and families resources and referrals to school and community programs to satisfy as many needs as possible. Teachers and other school personnel can provide a sense of safety with routines and procedures within the classroom environment. The students would be able to anticipate what will happen next. With the whole school and targeted interventions and supports, students can build their self-esteem and demonstrate positive behavior. These practices in turn will allow for the students to be available for learning and ultimately realize their self-worth.

Freud's Iceberg Theory of the Unconscious Mind Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was an Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis. Freud did not invent the idea of the conscious versus unconscious mind, but it is one of his main contributions to psychology. Freud developed a topographical model of the human mind in 1900. Freud believed that everything that we are aware of is stored in our conscious mind. The conscious mind consists of thoughts that are the focus of human attention now and can be seen as the tip of the iceberg. He believed that most of what humans' experience in life, emotions, beliefs, feelings, and impulses, is not available to humans at a conscious level. The preconscious mind consists of memories or knowledge that can be retrieved if wanted or tried, while the unconscious mind is things that a human is unaware of and contains repressed ideas and images. Most behaviors humans demonstrate are in the unconscious mind, including fears, selfish needs, traumatic experiences, and irrational wishes and impulses.

Behavior is triggered by feelings that come from a deeper-rooted need of a person, including children. This goes beyond basic needs that need to be met. When a child's needs are not met, they may feel insecure, afraid, angry, or detached. This is when a "behavior" is observable and may be considered unacceptable. This occurs subconsciously by thoughts, actions, or brain processes of which a person is not directly aware but can access through introspection or unconsciously by lacking awareness or a process that happens automatically and is not accessible through introspection. Stakeholders need to get to the bottom of what is going on and support the child. This is when the unobservable behaviors that a child may be dealing with should come to light.

Figure 2

The Behavior Iceberg (observable versus unobservable behaviors)

Behavioral Strategies and Frameworks

Most School Resource Officers (SRO) receive formal training to enhance their knowledge of the functions of the SRO and increase their understanding of how SROs can effectively fulfill their role in a school setting. They must have the knowledge and tools to serve their school community skillfully. Instruction should also educate SROs on enforcing the law and assuring public safety with children and inside the school, different from doing so with adults in the community. The NASRO (2022) SRO course outline and objectives that SROs will exercise proven best practices of planning, preventing, and responding to foster school safety. They should also behave professionally while

interacting with all school stakeholders. There is no transparency about the best practices or how they should interact with all school stakeholders, including students in crisis. According to Fisher and Hennessy (2016), public school educators and SROs conceptualize problem behavior differently. Educators often view student problem behavior as a display of developmental, social, emotional, or mental health concerns requiring intervention or prevention. Often law enforcement, including SROs, have different priorities than educators. This is where SRO roles can extend beyond enforcement. Frazier (2021), director of curriculum and training at D.A.R.E. America, reported that SRO training must be robust, comprehensive, and ongoing to prepare SROs for the range of knowledge they will need to effectively meet the expectations of their school community. SROs should learn classroom management skills, positive behavioral intervention, conflict de-escalation, restorative practices, and culturally responsive education. They should have knowledge of their school's approach to promoting safe and pro-social behavior, as well as accommodations, plans, and strategies used to individualize approaches to specific cases and contexts. Hibbert (2019), from National School Safety and Security Services suggests that SROs and their school administrators attend the same training to provide a common foundation of understanding roles, challenges, and management. School and law enforcement personnel having a common foundation will create an environment that will help foster positive outcomes for all, especially students. Mayer et al. (2021) stated that the field of school safety has been exploring positive alternatives to harsh discipline and exclusion as pathways to promote positive youth development and academic achievement for several decades. A few of these approaches and training that schools implement are discussed below.

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports Positive Behavioral

Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based, tiered framework for supporting

students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health (Center on PBIS,

2023). PBIS is not a curriculum but an ongoing commitment to supporting and engaging

students, families, and community members to co-create culturally responsive practices

and systems change. When PBIS is implemented well, students experience improved

behavioral, social, emotional, and academic outcomes. PBIS emphasizes the five

interrelated elements of equity, systems, data, practices, and outcomes. These elements

look to enhance experiences and outcomes for each educator and student, sustain

implementation over time, effective decision-making for implementation and outcomes,

target supports where needed, and how outcomes can be improved for better behavioral,

social, emotional, and academic growth, positive school climate, and fewer office

discipline referrals.

Figure 3

PBIS Five Elements – Equity, Systems, Data, Practices, and Outcomes
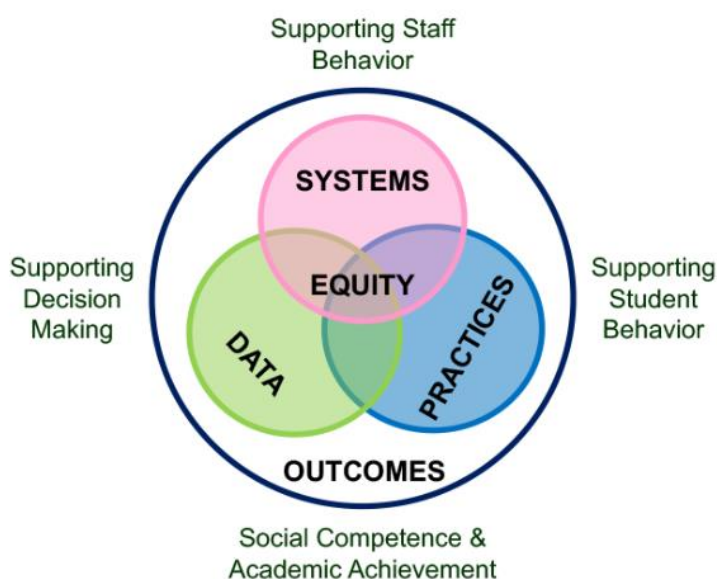
PBIS uses three tiers of support that all learners in tier one universal or primary intervention. This is where 80% or more students experience success. Tier two is targeted or secondary prevention; approximately 10-15% of students need additional support. Tier three is an intensive and individualized or tertiary prevention, and approximately 1-5% of students require the most supports.

Figure 4

Tiered PBIS Framework
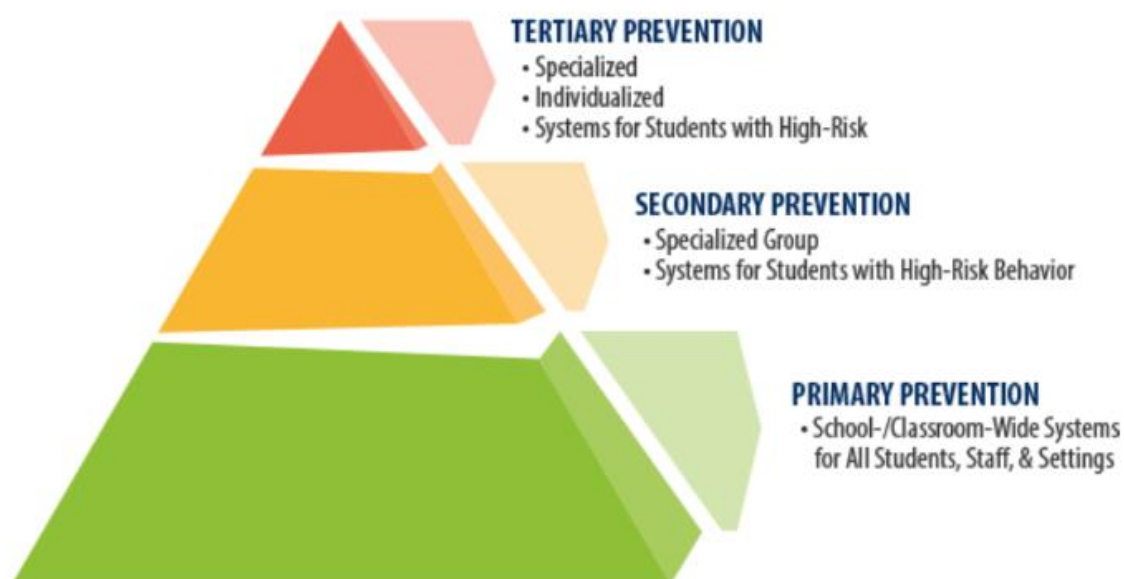
Life Space Crisis Intervention Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) is a brain-based, trauma-informed, relationship-building set of skills that helps adults turn problem situations into learning opportunities for young people who exhibit challenging behaviors (Long et al., 2021). Perry and Szalavitz (2017) believe that young people need to feel heard and understood and with the knowledge that relationships are the agents of change. Fritz Redl and Davide Wineman's Theory of Life Space Interviewing (LSI) technique, which was developed in the 1950s, served as a therapeutic tool and helped assist

professionals in working with children who were upset. It was an approach used to manage behavior and change the behavior patterns of students. A student of Redl and Wineman, Nicholas Long and William Morse, brought LSI into schools and developed a certification program known today as LSCI.

The LSCI conflict cycle is a way of looking at a crisis by analyzing interactions and following a primary sequence. A stressful event occurs, which activates an individual's irrational beliefs. These beliefs generate an individual's way of perceiving the word. Perception may lead directly to feelings or may first produce negative thoughts. These negative thoughts trigger intolerable feelings. Feelings, not rational forces, drive inappropriate behaviors. Inappropriate behaviors incite adults. Adults take on the individual's feelings and may mirror their behaviors. This adverse adult reaction increases the individual's stress, often becoming the next stressful event, and a second cycle of conflict ensues, escalating the incident into a self-defeating power struggle. The individual's self-fulfilling prophecy or irrational beliefs are reinforced, and they are not motivated to change their thinking or behavior.

The conflict cycle is a pattern that explains why student behavior management begins with the staff and not the student. Unless staff members control their reactions to inappropriate student behavior and know their "emotional button," staff will escalate and worsen the incident.

Figure 5

LSCI Conflict Cycle
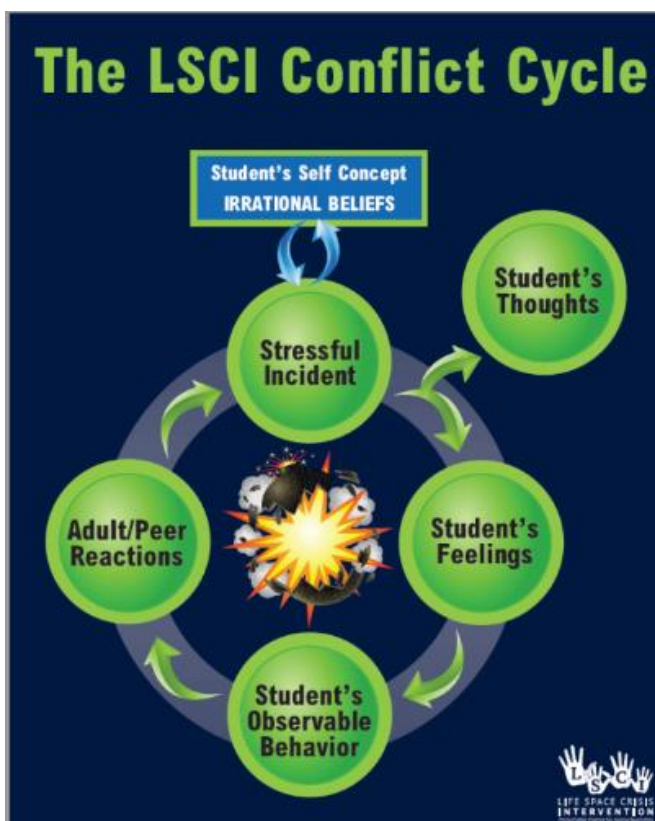
LSCI is a six-stage verbal strategy for providing active intervention in an individual's life during stress and crisis. The first three stages focus on the skills to diagnose the type of crisis and the central issue. The last three stages address the outcome goals. Stage 1: Drain off. Staff use de-escalation and focusing skills to drain off the individual's intense feelings while controlling one's counter-aggressive reaction. Stage 2: Timeline. Staff use relationship skills to obtain and validate the student's perception of the crisis. Stage 3: Central Issue. Staff uses diagnostic skills to determine if the crisis represents one of the six LSCI self-defeating behavior patterns. Stage 4: Insight. Staff use clinical skills to pursue the student's specific pattern of self-defeating behavior for personal insight and accountability. Stage 5: New Skills. Staff uses empowering skills to

teach the students new social skills to overcome their pattern of self-defeating behavior.

Stage 6: Transfer of Training. Staff use consultation and contracting skills to help the

student re-enter the classroom and to reinforce and generalize new social skills.

The central issue becomes the focus of the LSCI intervention. There is a self-

defeating pattern and corresponding outcome goals. Red flag intervention helps to

identify the real source of the stress. The focus can help individuals recognize that they

are displacing their feelings onto others and alienating the sources of support they need to

help handle stress. This can be used with individuals who overreact to standard rules and

routines with emotional outbursts. Reality check intervention helps to organize

perceptions of reality.

New tools intervention helps build social-emotional skills. The focus can help the

person realize they have the right attitude and intentions but the wrong behavior. The

individual can learn new social-emotional skills since behavior is more accessible to

change than attitude. This can be used with individuals who misperceive reality due to

the triggering of personal sensitivities, block perceptions of reality due to intense

feelings, have restricted perception of reality due to perseveration on a single event, have

privately reconstructed their reality, and those who manipulate contributions to the

problem.

Benign confrontation intervention helps challenge unacceptable behavior. The

focus can help an individual realize that they are paying a high price for justifying their

exploitation of others and are tricking themselves into believing their causes are just. This

can be used with individuals who are too comfortable with their harmful behavior,

receive too much gratification from hurting others, and justify their antisocial behavior guilt-free.

Regulating and restoring intervention helps strengthen self-control. The focus is expanding an individual's self-control and confidence through abundant affirmations and reflections about socially desirable attributes. This requires a shift in the source of responsibility from the adult to the individual. This can be used with individuals burdened by anxiety, guilt, shame, inadequacy, or remorse about their failures or unworthiness and those seeking punishment to relieve their overwhelming emotions.

Peer manipulation intervention helps expose peer exploitation. The focus is to provide insight into reasons for the behaviors of others and view social interactions from the perspective of the motivations and behaviors of others. This requires considerable maturity on the individual's part since they must learn to understand how others think, feel, and behave. This can be used with individuals who have false friendships when young people are socially isolated and rejected and become caught up in unhealthy friendships. This can support individuals who are unwittingly "set up" to act out by an exploitive peer and with the mastermind or exploiting peer who finds satisfaction and enjoyment in controlling others and taking advantage of their vulnerabilities.

Restorative Practices Gumz and Grant (2009) identified that restorative justice is an alternative for dealing with the effects of crime and wrongdoing that seeks to bring recovery to victims, offenders, and the community. It states that the critical element of social work and its ethical code is the obligation to work toward social justice. This will ensure a fair distribution of resources and opportunities. Gumz et al. (2009) suggested how social work practice can be enhanced while using restorative justice practices.

Guckenburg, Hurley, Persson, Fronius, and Petrosino (2015) documented the variety of evidence on restorative justice and how restorative justice practices are implemented in schools. Guckenburg et al. (2015) provided a summary of 43 interviews that were conducted with experts from January to October 2014. The interviews were analyzed to identify and categorize common themes. Guckenburg et al. (2015) identified that restorative justice practices are being implemented in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Their report focused on restorative justice practices in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. The interviews were over the phone and lasted about one hour. Guckenburg et al. (2015) used a semi-structured protocol. The interviews also asked about their background and experience.

Guckenburg, Hurley, Persson, Fronius, and Petrosino (2016) focused on how practitioners integrate restorative justice practices in their schools and use this as an alternative (vs. traditional) way to respond to student misbehavior. Guckenburg et al. (2016) covered how and when restorative justice is used in schools and the successes and challenges that schools face. The findings are based on surveys and interviews with practitioners implementing restorative justice in schools.

Fronius, Darling-Hammond, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, and Petrosino (2019) conducted a research review that provides a more comprehensive picture of how restorative justice practices are implemented in schools and lay the groundwork for future research, implementation, and policy. WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center focused on restorative justice as an alternative to traditional responses to student misbehavior in schools across the United States. They interviewed experts in the field of

restorative justice. These experts have been nationally recognized for their work with restorative justice in schools.

Byer (2016) researched the use of restorative practices in schools. It focuses on how restorative justice practices are being used and the effectiveness of those practices. The three restorative practice models reviewed were peacemaking circles, family group conferencing, and victim-offender mediation. Twenty-three schools in five school districts were reviewed. The most common outcomes of restorative justice practices included reduced suspension rates, reduced behavioral referrals out of the classroom, improved attendance, decreased expulsions, decreased student fights, and decreased general student misbehavior. All the reviewed schools showed favorable outcomes with using restorative justice practices.

Wilson and Olaghere (2017) identified that an essential component of restorative justice programs is communicating between the offender and the victim. Some programs are extending this participation to family members and community members. There are routine practices of the juvenile justice system, such as restitution, which are consistent with restorative principles. This has also been implemented in teen courts. There is substantial evidence that restorative justice practices are effective. Wilson et al. (2017) reported that the use of restorative justice practices showed only a moderate reduction in future delinquent behavior compared to traditional juvenile court proceedings.

Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2019) created The Restorative Practices Handbook as a practical guide for educators interested in implementing restorative practices in their schools. This included proactively building positive school communities while reducing discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. The handbook identified

a variety of restorative techniques that can be used. It offered implementation guidelines and explained how and why restorative practices work. It can help you relate the practices to real-world stories and see them in action.

Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2019) developed Restorative Circles in Schools, a comprehensive guidebook on using circles in an education setting. This is an essential component of restorative practice in schools. There is practical knowledge of circles that draw on experiences from the International Institute for Restorative Practices. Restorative practices have worked in a wide variety of settings worldwide. Real-life stories from educators demonstrate that circles can be used in diverse situations. Circles have been proven to improve relationships and enhance academics. Circles can solve problems and address conflict. Circles can also solve issues among faculty, staff, and administrators.

The Reid Technique is a structured interview and interrogation process (Buckley, n.d.). It includes three process stages: fact analysis, investigative interview; and interrogation (Buckley, n.d.). The investigation interview may be the most critical for success. The investigation interview looks for more profound background, investigative, and behavior-provoking questions. This allows for rapport to be established and to develop a behavioral baseline. This allows the subject or witness to tell their story and for the investigator to clarify any information or inconsistencies. The investigator can delve deeper into what may have been an antecedent that led up to the event in question. The investigator can give a hypothetical scenario to see how the subject would respond to punishment.

The investigative interview process is very similar to the restorative practice questions in response to challenging behavior and to help those harmed by others'

actions. Schools nationwide, including schools in Southern Maryland, use restorative questioning daily to help staff assess and respond to a situation.

Restorative Questions I (to respond to challenging behavior) (White, 2012)

- From your perspective, what happened?

- What were you thinking at the time?

- What have you through about since?

- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?

- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

Restorative Questions II (to help those harmed by others' actions) (White, 2012)

- What did you think when you realized what had happened?

- What impact has this incident had on you and others?

- What has been the hardest thing for you?

- What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

In addition to the adult response to a situation, restorative practices in our elementary schools are used to help students improve their metacognition and decision-making skills. Giving the students a chance to tell their side of the story and gain clarification is similar to the investigative interview and restorative practices process. Hopefully, students processing information, feelings, and responses at a young age will help prevent future run-ins with law enforcement as they get older and become adults.

Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention with advanced physical skills equips staff with the decision-making skills needed to confidently address risk in the face of complex behaviors. It combines verbal intervention strategies and restrictive Interventions with advanced physical skills for high-risk scenarios.

CPI uses a crisis development model representing a series of recognizable behavior levels an individual may experience during a crisis moment and the related staff attitudes and approaches used to de-escalate behaviors. When an individual presents with anxiety, defined as a change in typical behavior, the staff should be supportive. They can do this with an empathic, nonjudgmental approach. Staff must be aware of their verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal forms of communication. Verbal messages are words you choose and should be short, simple, and straightforward. They should also be respectful and positively phrased. Paraverbal is how you say what you say. This includes the tone, volume, and rhythm of speech. Nonverbal elements include personal space, body language, communication through touch, and listening with empathy. A supportive stance will communicate respect, appear non-threatening, and maximize safety.

When an individual presents as defensive, defined as protecting oneself from an actual or perceived challenge, the staff should be directive by providing clear direction or instruction. CPI uses the Verbal Escalation Continuum for defensive behaviors. Defensive behaviors can present like a kite and move through questioning, refusal, release, intimidation, and tension reduction at any time. During questioning, an individual may be information-seeking, and staff should respond rationally. When an individual presents as challenging, the staff should downplay the challenge and stick to the topic. When an individual presents with refusal or an unwillingness to cooperate or follow instructions, staff needs to set limits and redirect the person's focus and attention to the desired outcome. Release, verbal, and emotional outbursts should be intervened by allowing the individual to vent. Remove the audience or the person. Give directives that are non-threatening. Use an understanding, reasonable approach. When an individual is

intimidating by verbally or nonverbally threatening staff in some manner, the staff should take all threats seriously and seek assistance. Tension Reduction is a decrease in physical and emotional energy. This is where staff can establish a therapeutic rapport and re-establish the relationship.

When an individual presents with risk behavior, defined as behavior that presents an imminent or immediate risk to self or others, the staff should provide safety interventions. They may include non-restrictive and restrictive strategies to maximize safety and minimize harm. When confronted with risky behavior, staff may need to disengage to protect themselves and others from injury. There are disengagements for low, medium, and high-risk situations. The principles of disengagement are to hold and stabilize (limit the range of motion), pull/push (move in the opposite direction), and lever. The lever combines momentum (energy and speed) with movement (rotation) around a single point. Restrictive intervention should be reasonable, proportionate, and least restrictive to maximize safety and minimize harm. Each situation should be analyzed using the decision-making matrix for possible risks. This is an assessment of the likelihood (the chance that an event or behavior may occur) and severity (the level of harm that may occur). The holding principles are outside/inside and limit the range of motion. The outside/inside principle is placing something on the outside and something on the inside of the limbs and/or body. Limit the range of motion is limiting or restricting the person's movement to manage the person's dynamic movement and prevailing risk.

When an individual is in tension reduction, defined as a decrease in physical and emotional energy, the staff needs the established therapeutic rapport to re-establish the relationship. After a crisis, it is essential to re-establish the relationship to create a sense

of calm and safety for all involved. Staff will want to address any immediate needs of the person in distress, bystanders, family members, or other staff who might have been involved. CPI uses the COPING Model as a systematic framework for prevention and to achieve therapeutic rapport. Control is to ensure that emotional and physical control is regained. Orient yourself to the basic facts. Look for patterns for the behavior. Investigate alternatives to the behavior. Negotiate future approaches and expectations of behavior. Give back responsibility to the individual and provide support and encouragement.

Illinois School District U-46 implemented CPI, and they have reported a 50-75% reduction in disruptive behaviors, a 90% reduction in staff assaults, and a 60% reduction in expulsions for assaults on staff. Their out-of-school suspensions have been reduced by 75% over five years, fights continue to decrease yearly, and teachers spend less time on discipline and more time on teaching (CPI, 2022). Other school districts were surveyed by CPI (2016), and 30% reported decreased physical restraint and seclusion by 75%-99%, and 28% decreased by 50%-74%.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years old). These experiences include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; and household dysfunction such as mental illness, incarcerated relative, mother being treated violently, substance abuse, and divorce. These experiences during childhood undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding (CDC, 2019). Approximately 62% of adults surveyed across 23 states reported that they had experienced one ACE (out of 10) during childhood. Almost 25% reported that they had experienced three or more ACEs (CDC, 2019). ACEs can

influence and lead to disrupted neurodevelopment, social, emotional, and cognitive

impairment, adoption of health risk behaviors, impacts on life potential, disease,

disability, and social problems, and early death (CDC, 2019). Negative impacts on

development can include biological, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal. Possible

behaviors include aggression, impulsivity, defying authority, trauma re-enactment, risk-

taking/seeking, heightened fight or flight response, substance abuse, inability to bond,

and truancy. Possible contact points with justice systems include law enforcement,

jail/detention, prosecution, courts, probation, prisons, reentry, and parole. All possible

points of contact can lead to re-traumatization, further contact with juvenile and criminal

justice systems, and entry into the criminal justice system (The Illinois ACE's Response

Collaborative, 2013). ACEs significantly impact society's health problems and contribute

to rising healthcare costs. An ACE score equal to or greater than six can shorten an

individual's lifespan by 20 years. Staff must recognize ACEs' implications to break

juvenile and criminal justice system involvement cycles. Policies and practices need to be

recognized. There needs to be trauma-informed care to help these individuals. There need

to be better prevention and intervention efforts. Several policy recommendations and

resources need to be offered to help assist the stakeholders across all the systems. These

can help break the cycle of involvement. (The Illinois ACE's Response Collaborative,

2013).

     To prevent the impact of ACEs in America, professionals need to help impacted

individuals build resilience, teach skills, and support parental stress reduction. Build

resilience by increasing positive parenting skills and safe, stable, nurturing relationships

through home visitation. Explore opportunities to expand access to quality early childcare

and education. There needs to be continuous social-emotional learning, safe dating, and healthy relationship skill programs (CDC, 2019). There need to be parenting skills and family relationship approaches (CDC, 2019). Support parental stress reduction by considering economic support, family-friendly workplace policies, and affordable housing developments.

Dr. Bruce Perry (2007) reported that if an individual has a decreased intensity or duration of the acute stress response, they are cognitively capable of understanding abstract concepts and developing healthy coping skills. Perry went on to report that not all children exposed to traumatic events develop the same severity of symptoms. The severity of symptoms can be divided into the characteristics of the child, event, and family/social system. According to the American Psychological Association (2022), having strong social support can help an individual cope with problems on their own by improving self-esteem and sense of autonomy.

Patterns, Perceptions & Building Positive Relationships Between Schools and Law Enforcement/SROs

The National Center for Educational Statistics published three partnership patterns between schools and law enforcement. The first type is for a school to have a sworn law enforcement officer visit the school informally, formally, and planned or spontaneously. They would be a visible but occasional presence in the school. The second type is for schools to have security guards on site. This would be a constant presence and are not sworn law enforcement officers. The third type of partnership is a school-based SRO. This is a sworn law enforcement officer employed by a local law enforcement agency. The SROs aim to be a preventative measure intended to assist in

reducing negative student behaviors. The goals of the SRO program were to (1) provide a safe learning environment and help reduce school violence; (2) improve school law enforcement collaboration, and (3) improve perceptions and relations between students, staff, and law enforcement officials.

Buck et al. (2013) claimed that arming schools may result in individuals displaying heightened anxiety due to their environment having an observable weapon present and accessible. According to Wood et al. (2021), most current studies investigating SRO influence involve student samples producing mixed results. Teachers often lack input as well as SROs' perspectives on the jobs they perform. In the few studies that do involve teacher input, they reported that SRO presence in schools had a significant positive impact on personal perceptions of safety (Johnson, 1999; School Improvement Network, 2013).

Ochwat (2011) identified what problems teachers encounter during lessons and other situations connected with schoolwork, in what educational areas teachers often encounter dysfunctional and pathological behaviors with students, and their reactions in such situations. Two groups of teachers took part in the study. One group consisted of physical education teachers, and the other was teachers of other subjects. In all educational interaction areas, non-PE teachers used verbal disapproval, took students to task, and gave marks for students' bad behavior more often than PE teachers. PE teachers more frequently use nonverbal reactions, exclude students from the classroom, make accurate remarks, turn the situation into a joke, and give students subject marks. Teachers from both groups had several conversations with individual students and individual reprimands of students.

Bekkerman and Gilpin (2016) investigated schools' disciplinary decisions for grave misconduct and showed that punishments are more severe in schools that do not report misconduct to local law enforcement agencies. They also showed that schools that report minor misconduct to law enforcement impose more severe punishments when the student body has a higher proportion of minority students, lower socioeconomic status students, and a higher proportion of students below the 15th percentile of standardized test scores. Discretion in schools' discipline choices can provide an efficient and effective misconduct management structure. This could also lead to discipline based on unrelated factors. Schools' disciplinary decisions can significantly limit students' access to education by removing students from familiar learning environments. The results from the study by Bekkerman et al. (2016) suggested that between-school punishment differentials are associated with student body traits.

Koskela and Lanas (2016) examined what constitutes students' disruptive and good behavior that teachers describe and define. Teachers are viewed as professional experts who produce official information regarding their students. This study analyzed the behavior descriptions provided by teachers in official statements regarding students they considered problematic. The analysis showed no common understanding of good and bad student behavior; behavior assessment functioned as a ground for reinforcing power relations and making normative comments. The assessments focused on bad behavior, and the form used statements that regulated teachers' answers. The study concluded that school social problems were attributed to individual students and their families through official behavior assessments. Schools' social environments or norms were not considered related to student behavior.

Owens, Holdaway, Smith, Evans, Himawan, Coles, Girio-Herrera, Mixon, Egan, and Dawson (2018) described patterns of challenging student behaviors and teacher behaviors in elementary school in kindergarten through grade 5. In this study, 55 teachers were observed using a modified version of the Student Behavior Teacher Response (SBTR) system. Across the grades, there was variability in the rates of class-wide challenging behavior per hour (M=35.81 to 102.62). The rates of praise per hour were M=10.9 to 37.7. The percentage of challenging behaviors where teachers responded appropriately was low (M=27% to 47%) and was stable across the grade levels. Even with class-wide and targeted student interventions in place, the teachers needed professional development on properly handling challenging behavior in the classroom (Owens et al., (2018). Students at different grade levels have different needs, and teachers have different expectations. There are different expectations for academic performance and behavioral control. Typically, younger students need more supervision and assistance to follow classroom rules than older students. Teachers of older grades may respond to a higher level of violations than teachers of younger students.

Mahyar, Ashghalifaranhani, and Aryankhesal (2018) reported that classroom management leads the class by setting the class schedule, organizing the procedures, supervising the learners' progress, and predicting and solving their problems. The teachers' most significant challenges and concerns were students' disruptive behaviors and classroom management. Mahyar et al. (2018) aimed to analyze the classroom management techniques and strategies used to cope with the student's disruptive behaviors. Mahyar et al. included 31 articles in the study for analysis. The articles were searched using the keywords of classroom management, students' disruptive behaviors,

challenging students, and confrontation strategies during 2000-2017. The results showed that conflict management strategies included all the techniques and strategies used and teachers' challenges in dealing with students' disruptive behaviors. The study mainly emphasized the use of cooperative and problem-solving strategies, and the most highlighted methods were making effective mutual communication with students to correct their negative behavior, training and preparing the teachers for dealing with students' disruptive behaviors and using various teaching methods and approaches based on the classroom situation. The teachers can use different strategies to help support the challenges of students' disruptive behaviors. Sufficient knowledge and skills about teaching, familiarity with the relevant and influential disciplines in dealing with students, and effective communication in class can help develop more practical skills in classroom management.

Collier-Meek, Sanetti, and Boyle (2018) identified that teachers deliver classroom management and behavior support plans. However, many teachers struggle to implement them consistently. Low levels of treatment integrity may be the result of various implementation barriers. No study had been conducted to examine teachers' experience with these barriers within the context of specific interventions. Collier-Meek et al. (2018) did an exploratory study that involved analysis of barriers reported during implementation planning by 33 teachers (15 teachers participated in multiple baseline designs, and 18 teachers participated in randomized case studies) responsible for delivering classroom-management plans or behavior support plans. All studies employed a problem-solving consultation model. Teachers frequently indicate struggling to respond to problem behaviors and manage competing responsibilities. Strategies suggested to

ameliorate barriers most frequently include re-teaching the intervention and scheduling implementation.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2023) believe that child should be educated and not incarcerated. They work to challenge policies and practices within public school systems and the juvenile justice system that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. They believe that the zero-tolerance policies criminalize minor infractions of school rules.

May, Rice, and Minor (2012) investigated the perceptions of school resource officers toward students receiving special education services. These students are often negatively stereotyped by school administrators and educators for behaviors threatening school order and safety. SROs are part of the school culture, and a disproportionate number of students receiving special education services are disciplined (school suspensions and arrests) each year. Research is needed to examine the attitudes of SROs regarding the presence and behaviors of students receiving special education services.

Karp and Frank (2015) reported many incarcerations and other criminal justice system failures in the United States. For the first time in decades, organizations on both sides of the political party line seek criminal justice reform. Karp et al. (2015) investigated whether restorative justice practices will help their efforts and how they will be implemented. There are concerns if the community knows and understands restorative justice practices. Karp et al. (2015) would like to see how restorative justice will help in the future of the criminal justice system in the United States.

Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2015) noted that children talk when they feel safe. This observation is simple, but fear makes no information go to the pre-frontal cortex.

There is no conscious thought or learning that will take place. Cultivating a sense of safety is essential not only for an orderly school but for learning itself.

Michigan State University (2022) conducted a systematic review of perceptions of SROs. Their key takeaways were that SROs are largely perceived as a positive presence within schools, although the perception of safety associated with SRO presence varied greatly by gender, race, age, and frequency of interaction. SROs can improve their role in school safety by being visible, available, and present to students and staff. The role of SROs as educators is underutilized, and more research is needed to understand parents' and the public's perceptions of SROs.

Proactive Policing: Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training was implemented in 1988 following a police shooting of a person with mental illness in Memphis, Tennessee. The new paradigm of policing for those with mental illness challenges the core fidelities of traditional policing. Police need to recognize that mental illness is not a choice but a medical disease. According to research, law enforcement officers blame persons with mental illness for their behavior. Many officers are unable to detect signs and symptoms of mental illness. Unless our officers are trained on mental illness, the encounters can escalate and result in injury or death. Officers must communicate, utilize negotiation skills, maintain a positive attitude, and employ anger management skills. (Lerner-Wren, 2020). The Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) program exemplifies a person-focused policing approach. The mental health population may be smaller than others, but there still needs to be a focus on the person and where the crime occurs. There may be some

community-based policing to connect the mental health person(s) with services that may support their needs.

Proactive Policing: Trauma-Informed Policing

One community-based approach to trauma-informed policing is the Handle with Care Program since the program focuses on the need to have more confidence and less fear in the police. There is also collaboration and cooperation between schools and law enforcement agencies. This program is about helping children succeed every day to the best of their ability in and out of the classroom. Often, law enforcement responds to a call where children are present. You will make that mandated report if that child meets the child protective services victimization criteria. What about the kids in the household who do not meet the criteria for victimization? The children who witness domestic violence, drug deals, and assaults now see the police in their homes. These kids are in school the next day without homework, doing poorly on tests, withdrawn to the point where no one can get their attention, and acting out verbally and physically. The Handle with Care Program starts with the police and sends the school a confidential notice to the school to let them know to handle this child with care. No additional information is given currently. The notice arrives at the school before the start of the next school day. This is on a need-to-know basis and does not stay in the child's permanent record. The notice includes childcare serving agencies. Teachers and staff are being trained in trauma-informed strategies. This is a whole school approach, including the bus drivers. All the stakeholders need to be trained appropriately. (Handle with Care WV).

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this dissertation are:

RQ (1). What are school resource officers' perceptions of their role in

Southern Maryland public elementary schools?

RQ (2). What additional resources do SROs need to support Southern

Maryland public elementary school students and staff?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Method

This research was conducted using a generic qualitative methodology that investigated the perceptions of school resource officers regarding the support that SROs could provide to elementary schools to foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety. SROs who work in Southern Maryland public schools were chosen as the focus of this study based on the researcher's experience in the public school system and working with children with maladaptive behaviors.

A generic qualitative inquiry was chosen for this study because it investigated SRO reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences (Percy et al., 2015). The researcher had a body of pre-knowledge or pre-understandings about the topic, which is described in more detail from the participants' perspective.

Participants

The participants for this generic qualitative research were selected with purposive sampling. The ten participants were current school resource officers who served at least part-time but preferably full-time at the middle or high school level in Southern Maryland. At the time of research, there were a limited number of SROs who served at the elementary school level in Southern Maryland. The researcher worked with the SRO supervisors in Southern Maryland for the recruiting process. After the researcher initially recruited the SROs with background information on this research and a request for their involvement, ten SROs volunteered to participate. They were able to share their

experiences in school climate, culture regarding student behavior, investment in building

positive relationships, and overall school community success.

Confidentiality

This study involved human subjects and required approval by the Institutional

Review Board at Nova Southeastern University. Approval was required prior to the

researcher making any contact with participants.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher provided all participants with a consent

document that was written and understandable. Any concerns or questions from the

participants were addressed before written consent was obtained. Each participant was

informed of the dissertation study's research goals and critical facts. All participants

voluntarily participated in the study. The participants were informed of their right to

confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants were

over the age of 18 and able to give their consent to participate.

The identity of all participants, including their name, rank or title, and name of the

county where they are employed or the school district, they work in were kept

confidential. SRO supervisors and the researcher know the identity of the participants.

However, the researcher ensured that any statements used in the dissertation findings

were in the sole custody of the researcher in compliance with the rules of the Institutional

Review Board. The SRO statements that were used were listed until a number and not a

name.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data was collected by researcher-created, structured interviews with semi-

structured follow-up or clarification questions. The recorded interviews were conducted

virtually in a one-on-one setting. In these qualitative interviews, the questions were structured based on the researcher's knowledge. There were opportunities for "tell me more" kinds of questions.

The data collected in this generic qualitative approach was based on theoretical constructs of the existing literature. This generic qualitative study allowed the researcher to understand how SROs interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.

Each participant will be asked the following questions:

1) How many schools are you currently assigned to as an SRO? (Background info for R1)
   a. _____ 1 school
   b. _____ 2 schools
   c. _____ 3 schools
   d. _____ 4+ schools

2) Which school level are you currently assigned as an SRO? (Mark all that apply) (background info for R1)
   a. _____ high school
   b. _____ career-technology academy
   c. _____ middle school
   d. _____ elementary school
   e. _____ public-day school

3) As a School Resource Officer, have you ever been assigned to an elementary school full-time? (Background info for R1)
   a. _____ yes
   b. _____ no

4) If no to number 4, as a School Resource Officer, have you ever been assigned to an elementary school part-time or on an as-needed basis? (Background info for R1, establish adequate coverage)
   a. _____ yes
   b. _____ no

5) What characteristics make you a good law enforcement role model for youth? (R1 – demonstrates SRO's interpersonal skills, character, and ability to interact with children positively)

6) How do you gain the trust of students and staff as an SRO? (R1)

7) What does your typical workday look like as an SRO? (R1)

8) What do you consider to be the most important part of an SRO's job? (R1)

9) What is the most difficult part of your job as an SRO, and how do you handle that responsibility? (R1)

10) What training did you receive to become an SRO? (R2)

11) What de-escalation techniques are you familiar with, and how would you use those with youth? (R2 – demonstrates SRO's interpersonal communication and problem-solving skills)

12) What methods would you use to lessen or prevent bullying in the school? (R2 – demonstrates SRO's problem-solving and critical thinking skills)

13) What training do you have in working with students with disabilities or special needs (IEPs, BIPs, 504s)? (R2)

14) What types of continued training are helpful for SROs? (R2)

15) As an SRO, are you on school committees (School Improvement Team, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, etc.)? (R2)

16) As an SRO, are there any recommendations you would make to improve the program? (R2)

17) Is there any additional information that you would like to share? Comments, questions, or concerns? (follow-up)

If a participant's response to these questions seemed incomplete or needed more detail for interpreting meaning, the researcher used probes or follow-up questions to elicit further discussion.

Procedures

The proposed research was a generic qualitative method using a theoretical analysis (ThA). The generic qualitative inquiry investigated people's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences (Percy et al., 2015). The

theoretical analysis used predetermined themes to examine during data analysis while

remaining open to new themes. The researcher completed the following:

1. Identified a problem with supported background information and literature.

2. Received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nova

   Southeastern University.

3. Used purposive sampling.

4. Gained informed consent from all participants.

5. Set up virtual interviews.

6. Completed interviews; clarified any misunderstandings with the participants.

7. Transcribed the interviews and reviewed them for accuracy.

8. Analyzed the data.

Data Analysis

This generic qualitative research used a structured interview protocol. The

interview protocol was two pages long and contained 17 questions. The interview

protocol included basic information about the interview, introduction, opening questions,

content questions using probes as needed, and closing instructions.

After interviews were conducted, the data was analyzed using the following steps

(Percy et al., 2015):

1. The researcher read, reviewed, and became familiarized with the data collected

   from each participant. The researcher re-read the documents and intuitively

   highlighted any sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that appeared meaningful. The

   researcher kept in mind the predetermined themes that were related to the theory

and research questions. The researcher remained open to any new patterns and themes related to the research questions that emerged from the data analysis.

2. For each participant, the highlighted data was reviewed, and the researcher used the research questions to decide if the highlighted data was related to the research questions. Some information in the transcript was interesting but unrelated to the research questions.

3. Eliminated all highlighted data unrelated to the research questions. Before this happened, started a separate file to store unrelated data. The researcher was able to come back and reevaluate the unrelated data.

4. Each data item was given a code or descriptor for the data. The descriptor or name used a characteristic word within the data.

5. Data items were clustered that were related or connected in some way and started to develop patterns.

6. Patterns related to a preexisting theme were placed together with any other patterns that corresponded with the theme, along with direct quotes taken from the data to elucidate the pattern.

7. Any patterns that did not relate to preexisting themes were be kept in a separate file for future evaluation of meanings that were related to the overall topic. Steps 1-7 were repeated for all participants.

8. Took all the patterns and looked for the emergence of overarching themes. This process involved combining and clustering the related patterns into the preexisting themes.

9. After analyzing all the data, the themes were arranged to correspond with the supporting patterns. The patterns were used to elucidate the final themes.

10. The patterns that did not fit the preexisting categories were revisited and remained open to any new patterns and themes related to the research topic that emerged from the data analysis.

11. For each theme, the researcher wrote a detailed analysis describing the scope and substance of each theme.

12. Each pattern was described and elucidated by supporting quotes from the data.

13. Finally, the themes were synthesized to form a composite synthesis of the question under inquiry.

Limitations and Potential Research Bias

The researcher may have implicit bias surrounding the school environment and already known opinions and stereotypes of school personnel, including SROs. It was important that the researcher made intentional decisions by strictly following the interview protocol and reporting the findings accurately.

The researcher may have been seen as intrusive due to the nature of the interview protocol questions. The researcher easily built a rapport with the participants. There was some private or confidential information that was reported that the researcher could not report or needed to report in a way to protect confidentiality. The researcher conducted the interviews in a Microsoft Teams virtual meeting rather than natural setting or in person. Not all participants may have been able to articulate meaning and be perceptive with their experiences. The participants were provided the interview questions in advance to help them reflect on their responses. They were asked not to discuss the interview or

the questions with any other SROs who may have participated until the researcher had completed all interviews.

The researcher had to determine whether the findings were accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participants, or the readers of this account. The qualitative literature addressed trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility to identify internal and external validity. Using multiple validity strategies helped the researcher assess the accuracy of findings and convince readers of that accuracy. The validity strategies included triangulating data, using member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings, using detailed descriptions to convey the findings, clarifying the bias that the researcher brought to the study, presenting negative or discrepant information, spending prolonged time in the field, use peer debriefing, and use an external auditor.

Summary

Adopting SROs in schools is usually a popular response to a tragic event, such as school shootings. Teachers, staff, and administrators need additional resources to help students have a safe learning environment. Some of these resources include a growth mindset, and the cost is minimal, while others will be a financial burden. Adding mental health counselors, behavior technicians, and SROs at the elementary level will help reduce these behaviors and, in theory, foster a positive and safe learning environment. The students come to school with larger-than-life responsibilities than a school-age student should have. Many children do not know how to cope with the stress they have in front of them. The structures, support, guidance, and relationships that additional resources and SROs could provide the elementary schools with increased relationship building and decreased punishment with criminal law.

Chapter 4: Findings

General Overview

This generic qualitative study was designed to investigate the perceptions of school resource officers in Southern Maryland regarding the support that SROs could provide to elementary schools to foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety. The findings of this study include direct quotes made by participants, to allow the voice of each participant to be heard. The data collected was the SROs' subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and reflections on their experiences. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ (1). What are school resource officers' perceptions of their role in Southern Maryland public elementary schools?

RQ (2). What additional resources do SROs need to support Southern Maryland public elementary school students and staff?

Participant Profiles

The ten SROs who participated in this study are currently SROs in Southern Maryland and work primarily in an elementary school, middle school, or high school. In order to preserve confidentiality, each SRO was given a number. Of the ten SROs, five were assigned to one school, two were assigned to two schools, two were assigned to three schools, and one was assigned to four schools. All ten SROs have a primary school that are assigned to and five are assigned as adequate coverage to other schools.

Out of the ten SROs, six worked in high school, one in a career technology academy, three in middle school, seven in elementary school, zero in a public-day school, one in a charter school, and one in another type of academy. This group of ten

participants were responsible for the safety of nineteen schools. Of the ten SROs, three SROs have been assigned to an elementary school full time and six have been assigned to an elementary school part-time or on an as-needed basis to support adequate coverage.

Data Collection

After receiving permission to conduct participant interviews from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board, the researcher contacted the SRO supervisors in Southern Maryland. The supervisors worked with the researcher in recruiting SROs to volunteer for the interviews. Once the names and email addresses of the SROs who were going to participate were received, the researcher contacted each participant individually to set up a one-time, one-on-one interview. The researcher emailed out the interview questions and consent prior to each interview. The interview questions were sent prior to the interview to allow the SRO to reflect on their responses since some of the questions were about their perspectives and experiences as an SRO. They were informed that there are no right or wrong answers, and their responses will be not tied to their personal identity such as name, rank, or agency. For the integrity of the study, they were asked to not share the interview questions with others or discuss their responses with others who may be involved in the study until all interviews were completed. The researcher let them know that their time and participation were appreciated. Prior to each interview, a signed consent form was received. Each interview was conducted individually using the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting platform. All interviews were audio and video recorded via Microsoft Teams. Questions from the Interview Questions Framework, designated as Appendix B, were asked. Interviews lasted between 21 and 52 minutes and the average interview being 35 minutes.

Data Analysis

The Microsoft Teams platform software provided a transcription of each interview. The researcher exported the audio and video recordings to a file for record. The transcription was exported into a Microsoft Word document and verified for its correctness. After the initial interview, there was no need to contact the participants for a second interview or any other follow-up questions than what occurred in the initial interview. While the Microsoft Teams transcription service captured most words in each recording, the researcher made spelling and grammar corrections to construct each in-depth interview verbatim, including deleting pause words like "umm" or "you know" and vocabulary corrections such as "a salt" to "assault" and "Nazzro" to "NASRO". The researcher did a second review of each transcription, to verify its accuracy. Upon completion of transcription, recordings were deleted from the Microsoft Teams platform and securely stored, according to IRB-approved processes.

The transcript was entered into the qualitative software program. This program helped the researcher code for themes, sub-themes, and concepts that frequently occurred in the SROs' responses. This process was also verified through traditional checks and balances that the researcher conducted manually in Microsoft Word. This included re-reading the transcripts and highlighting sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that appeared meaningful. After each participant's transcript was coded, the responses that related to research questions were moved to the appropriate section as patterns emerged for further review in the presentation of the findings.

Presentation of Findings

After the completion of the open coding process, a total of nine sub-themes were identified and categorized into three primary themes: SRO Perceptions, Training, and Additional Resources. See Table 1.

Table 1

Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Concepts	Codes
SRO Perceptions	Building relationships	Trust, Approachable, Positive Interactions, Play, Compassion, Communication	SROP-BR
Training	Formal SRO Training	NASRO, MCSS	T-FT
	Crisis Training	CIT, ICAT	T-CT
Additional Resources	Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)		AR-MOU
	Camera Access		AR-CA
	Power School eSchool Plus Access		AR-ESA
	Additional SROs		AR-ASRO
	Continued Training/Conferences		AR-CT/C
	Administration & SRO Collaboration		AR-Collab

Research Question 1 Theme: SRO Perceptions

Research question #1 examined the school resource officers' perceptions of their role in Southern Maryland public elementary schools. The participants' responses were reviewed, and one main sub-theme emerged: building relationships. Through the sub-theme, six concepts, which presented more as character traits, frequently were

intertwined in the SRO responses. They were trust, approachable, positive interactions, play, compassion, and communication.

  Building Relationships. There was a noticeable trend for all ten SROs who discussed the importance of building relationships through trust, being approachable, having positive interactions with staff, students, and administration, being playful, showing compassion, and communication skills. Their statements intertwined several character traits into one sub-theme.

   "SRO #1" discussed that they gained trust student and staff trust:

> By interacting with them. If I'm in my office, my door is always open. I mean, by now, the kids know they don't even have to knock, just walk in. I have chairs, they can come in and sit down. I hang out in the cafeteria during lunch. It's obviously a busy time. That's where I'm going to see most of my students. I love sports, so that's a big way I interact with them. I'm in the gym, whether they're playing basketball, dodgeball, whatever it is, I get in there. I try to play with them from time to time. I pop into the classrooms every now and then. Anytime I pass, a teacher or students in the hallways, I always try to ask them how their day is going. I always try to make myself one of them (students) for the time being, take my take the badge off for a minute and just try to be human…Now, obviously, I deal with those kids (students with disabilities) a lot, but honestly, I have a pretty good relationship with them…I usually try to make it where I'm one of the first people they see (as they enter the building) or God forbid, that somebody tried to enter the building that wasn't supposed to be here, at

least close by the door…I try to be in the hallways where I'm visible…I would say (what makes this SRO a good role model is) my compassion. I'm a law enforcement officer first and my job is obviously to uphold the law when I see wrongdoing in the school, I'm going to call a student out on it. I'm not in a school with the mindset to charge students or to get them in trouble. That's not our job. I realize you know young people, they're prone to make mistakes. They're going to mess up. You know, I wasn't perfect. I care about kids. I try to treat people for who they are.

"SRO #2" understands that the most important part of the SRO job is to be there for an active threat and to make positive, lasting impressions:

That's why we're there (at school) to keep everyone safe and to intercept anybody that comes in (the school) that might be an issue with, but closely followed by that, I'd say just our relationship with the students…a lot of these students have never encountered law enforcement, so they might see cops here and there, but they don't actually get to go to him and talk to him or different things. So, their perception of us is we might be that first encounter and that might be the lasting impression that we have...you got to be the right officer for the job. We've got some SROs, or have had some, that just might be really good with the kids, but not good at maintaining that relationship with the staff or it can be really good to the staff, but they're bad with the kids and there's a medium in there and you have to want to do this…I like what I do and I like where I work…You got to have the right officers in place to have a good SRO community and

we do that right now….I think (what makes this SRO a good role model

for youth is) integrity…and honesty…specifically with students and

youth. Empathy. Compassion. The most dominant character trait that

every police officer needs is dependability more than anything because we

want to be able to be counted on and that counts with the students and the

staff as well. Obviously, communication. But dependability is a big one.

The students and the staff want to know that you're available and you're

there when they need them…. You need to know the students. There are a

lot, especially at my level in high school. They are a lot smarter than you

realize. They can see through things. Just be real with them. And it's easier

for them to communicate and work with you when they realize you're just

another person you know.

"SRO #3" wants to ensure that every student feels safe and be a part of their best

days by saying:

The most important (of being an SRO) is self-explanatory. It's just general

school safety and the safety of the entire school. And then as you work it

down to the individual student, make sure every student feels safe and

comfortable doing what they're here (at school) to do, which is learn and

have a good time to be quite honest. And then beyond that, it's

relationships. I would say the biggest, the biggest reason we're here is

hopefully to kind of bridge that gap between how people see us, in a black

and white car on the road and hopefully see us as just regular people. Our

goal is to help you, not hurt you. Every other position in the Sheriff's

Office pretty much deals with dealing with people and their worst day, whereas here (at school) we get a chance to be a part of some of their best days also. So that's cool. I would say (what makes this SRO a good role model for youth is) professionalism. Obviously just being accountable. Just the simple stuff being where you're supposed to be on time. The one thing that we were always told is the only attitude you can kind of control is your own. I try to be in the bus lanes every morning, you know, opening doors for parents, smiling. Good attitude. Try not to bring the family stuff to work. I guess that is the easiest way to put it. They teach that SROs are counselors, educators, and officers' kind of in that order. So yes, at the end of the day, we're police officers, but that's kind of the last resort. I think kind of in that order being available to kids all the time, not sitting in my office with the door shut and just kind of oh that's the officer in there. Communication with a sense of humor is the best way to put it. I'm trying to make them feel at ease.

"SRO #4" responded with the importance of getting involved in your school community by saying:

Put the time in to go to the after-school activities. Go to the sporting events. Be in the lunchrooms. Be in the hallways interacting with the kids. I think the more involved you can be and the more time that you put into being a part of the school and not just being here for an active threat…and to take care of that as soon as possible…hopefully that day never comes…It's all the other time that you put in that you are trying to….be a

good role model… and build those positive relationships…let them know

that police aren't always, that we're not the bad guys. We're here to help

them, so that would be the most important thing.

"SRO #5" feels they are a good role model for youth because they are a good

communicator:

I feel like I'm witty and kind of funny. I incorporate being a parent,

especially now that I'm in elementary school. I feel like a parent, being

patient, just trying to find what kids are interested in. You can do sports.

You can do different gaming things that kids like and just try to engage

them and question them to see what they're into. And then sometimes you

surprise them when you're knowledgeable about it and you sit down with a

conversation about stuff that they play with…I was lucky enough to get an

SRO spot and can now spend the day with kids every day. It's kind of nice.

"SRO #5" works daily to build trusting relationships by:

Putting in time at their school. Trust is simply in building relationships

with the kids, with the staff, with the administration, and the more time

you spend there, the easier that is. You build those relationships, you gain

that trust, and that trust comes with time. And then, as time goes on, there

will be an incident where you're looking for some insight from them, and

then they're looking for some insight from you. And then it grows more,

and then the communication just increases, and it really puts a face to the

title of the SRO…with communication and trust in the person and it just

takes time… there are a lot more kids in the elementary schools than I ever

expected, some with an enrollment over 700 and staff members… And it's

very surprising from the outside, especially coming from patrol. There's a

lot of people in here and it just takes time. I think especially for children,

you must be outgoing. You must be approachable and positive. On top of

that, I am just like a great communicator. I want a child, regardless of the

age, especially now in elementary school, to feel comfortable walking by

me to start and then maybe giving me a high five… if you come to my

elementary school, I'm always down on my knees and I'm sitting

crisscross with them and I feel like it's so much easier for them to look me

in the eye or even for them to look down at me than me just to stand over

them…My number one goal is to keep those people safe in that building.

I'm going to protect it at all costs from anybody trying to harm a student, a

staff member, or an administration member from the outside, and then

they know that we did our safety brief, our active shooter training, and I'm

not waiting for anybody else to come. None of the SROs on the team are

waiting for anybody else to come, patrol is not waiting for the SRO to be

there if they are not there, we're coming in. We're going to hurt whoever is

trying to hurt the staff member and then we're going to try to save as many

people as we can. But for me, the priority of life is number one.

"SRO #6" understands the importance of mistakes and wants to make sure that

the human side of an SRO is shared by saying:

Being approachable to the kids, building those relationships, not holding

the kids to the silly decision they made as a youth and trying to say, hey,

you made it, messed up and you know, you got to move on from this

because this is really in the long scheme of things, this is not something

that's going to define you. Being there when you're needed, and you have

an opportunity to show more of your human side in the schools versus out

on patrol or you're going to a call and you have to be these rigid police

officers…It's those little things like you build a house, you put the

foundation down. You just keep adding to it.

"SRO #7" says building relationships includes:

Consistency. Presence… If they see you around, and if you are

approachable and you're there a lot, then they feel more comfortable

talking to you. They feel more comfortable approaching you with

problems and if you're consistent with your responses or your input, they

feel comfortable with what information they're going to get from you.

"SRO #8" says building relationships is:

Interacting with the kids and forming some kind of relationship with them.

Showing them a different perspective of law enforcement because, I'm

very diverse and some of my kids, you know whether you hear the Popo

just in that type thing and they just see the negativity where you know we

might come into the neighborhood looking mom and dad up or somebody

like that. You know it's changed over the years since I first started in this

program because I was one of the first SROs in my county when they

implemented the program. So, it has changed a lot including the laws…I

always say good morning because believe it or not, a lot of these kids don't

hear that from mom or dad or anything like that, so. You know, they some

respond, some don't…Just try to interact as much as I can and try to be

somewhat positive.

"SRO #9" discusses the importance of how:

Being part of the community helps with everything. Trying to do the right

thing for everybody, especially the youth. Mainly because nowadays youth

are our next generation, and learning their kind of ways, sometimes just

from being in high school, learning the stuff they like. So, using my

personal experience with life in general and how hard it was when I was

growing up to try to teach them how to do things…. When they need

something or if they need to have questions answered, I'm there and make

sure they understand what the law is and what it's not. And what I'm

supposed to do and what they're supposed to do.

"SRO #10" wants:

To have good communication skills…for our youth…. A lot of our kids

are lacking in a way to communicate with each other, so having that come

from a law enforcement officer, an adult, I think that's good to show them

that. And then I always try to be positive and upbeat with them, even if

something's bad, I try to find the positive in it and say, hey, look, it could

be worse. And one of the biggest things I think too is being able to keep

up with the kids and the changing times like, as soon as I learned

something, it's already so 5 minutes ago. So I think dealing with the

learning the kids and keeping up with them and what they're going

through because like when I was in high school, I'm so glad there was

there was no social media and these kids that are dealing with social media

right now, I can't imagine what they're going through a lot more than then

I went through school…the most important part of (being an SRO) is just

being there. Being approachable by these kids, not being ones that they're

not afraid to come to. That's why we're there. We want to be there for

them and honestly, it's an important part of our job if somebody tries to get

into the school and harm the kids, that's a very important part. But daily

day to day we're there. I try to say it's like I want these kids to be like

when they approach a police officer on the streets. I want them to think of

my interaction with them and say, OK, they're not all bad people and this

is what I'm going to do. This is how I should talk to them. I did a segment

on our TV show at the school called "What to do when you get pulled

over by the police" and I got good responses from that because they (the

students) said, oh my gosh, I really needed that and think about that. So, I

took something away from your tips.

Research Question 2 Theme: Training

Research question #2 examined what additional resources SROs need to support

Southern Maryland public elementary school students and staff. The participants'

responses were reviewed, and two sub-themes emerged: Formal SRO Training and Crisis

Training. Concepts within those sub-themes included: National Association for School

Resource Officers (NASRO), Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), Crisis

Intervention Team (CIT) Training, and Integrating Communications, Assessment and

Tactics (ICAT). Each concept within the sub-theme is described in detail.

National Association for School Resource Officers (NASRO). Seven out of the

ten interviewed SROs shared that they had training through NASRO. Five SROs took the

40-hour basic NASRO course, one SRO took the basic and 24-hour advanced course, and

one SRO took the 24-hour supervisor course. There were varied State locations where the

NASRO courses were offered. Some SROs took the course in person prior to COVID-19,

while others participated in training via virtual platform during and after the COVID-19

pandemic.

Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS). All ten interviewed SROs shared

that they had specific SRO training from the State of Maryland. Nine specifically

mentioned that they had training through the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS)

and one mentioned training through the Maryland Police Training and Standard

Commission and was unsure if they had any training through MCSS.

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training. All ten interviewed SROs shared de-

escalation techniques or strategies that they use to help support a student in crisis. Six

SROs specifically mentioned CIT training. The CIT program is a community partnership

of law enforcement, mental health, addiction professionals, their families, and other

partners to improve community responses to mental health crises (CITI, n.d.). Their goals

are to develop the most compassionate and effective crisis response system that is the

least intrusive in a person's life and to help persons with mental disorders and/or

addictions access medical and mental health treatment rather than place them in the

criminal justice system due to illness-related behaviors.

Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT). All ten interviewed SROs shared de-escalation techniques or strategies that they use to help support a student in crisis. Four SROs specifically mentioned ICAT training. The ICAT training program provides first-responding law enforcement officers with the tools, skills, and options they need to defuse a range of critical incidents successfully and safely. ICAT is designed especially for situations involving persons who are unarmed or are armed with weapons other than firearms, and who may be experiencing a mental health or other crisis. This training emphasizes scenario-based exercises, lectures, and case study opportunities.

The SROs' responses regarding training and the impact that it may have on the students and community that they serve are included below.

"SRO #1" reported that de-escalation is:

> More just speaking to them like an adult. I try to give them a chance to speak. I'm not trying to talk over anybody. Obviously, when it's my time to talk, I'm going to talk. I guess the main thing is just speaking to them like an adult and treating them like an adult, so they feel a little more important or comfortable in speaking to me.

"SRO #2" de-escalation techniques include:

> Active listening, maintaining composure, and effective communication. There's different de-escalation (strategies), maybe even more that it's not physical de-escalation. I've had to physically restrain maybe four students in six years, so that doesn't happen a whole lot. It's almost always, talking to that student after he gets in a fight and he's hyped up, and getting them

to calm down and then words or terminology I always use with them is

actionable next steps, like, OK, we're at this point right here and what are

we going to do to get to where we got to get to this next level? And then

keep going and we can talk about, we can go round and round about things

all day, but unless you specifically say, OK, one, this is what you're going

to with actionable next steps that are attainable goals. That's when I think

that we can communicate to have de-escalation.

"SRO #3" says de-escalation is:

Centered on the kid. I'm still trying to figure a lot of those now. I know

what works much better at this level (elementary) and it's kind of almost

that immediate redirection trying to remove the audience, so there's not ten

kids watching on, but redirecting them and allowing them to choose their

redirection, which is a big deal to them. It makes them feel like they have

some control over (the situation), what they're trying to accomplish, and

then understand that it kind of follows the same cycle. So, they're going to

be calm. They're going to be triggered. It's what is going to peak. And then

they're going to have their blow up and understanding that a lot of times

that cycle just must occur and not getting so emotionally attached to it that

I start to show signs of being aggravated and frustrated and upset. So, sort

of detach yourself to the level and allow it to happen. Once we can get that

redirection, get them focused on another task, and then if the time presents

itself, then maybe we have that empathetic conversation. I'm not judging

you because you're having a terrible day, but I guess one of the big things

they talked about is the trauma-informed response to kids and

understanding that the kid you see in front of you doesn't tell the whole

story. And with a 16-year-old, sometimes it's a lot easier to get that

information, so trying to understand how to do most of it honestly comes

from adults in the building, and encounters with the school social worker

or therapist.

"SRO #4" reports that:

Most of the time we will try to separate the kid from the classroom. If

they're not willing to leave, then we get the other kids out of the

classroom. If they're in crisis we will give them some time to lash out a

little bit as long as they're not being violent, whether they're tearing up

their own stuff or we kind of give them some time, give them some

distance. And we separate them if possible. I know I had a kid that would

blow off the handle a lot at a middle school and just getting them outside

and some fresh air would help. So, I would always take them to the nearest

exit door, get them outside, and let them walk and vent. But be close by so

they couldn't take off on me or anything like that. So those are basic things

that we normally do. We talk softly to them and be patient with them. We

just kind of watch your tone and your words. You don't want to be too

demanding of anybody. So those are pretty much what we use daily,

especially with the little ones. It's hard to be too assertive with them or

anything like that. It's just giving them time to get over their crisis and

then move on with the day.

"SRO #5" reported that:

> Crisis intervention training…is understanding the issue, knowing the
> person, understanding what they're saying. I'll tell you who I am. I'm here
> because you're in crisis. Tell me what's going on. You tell me, and then I
> repeat the crisis back to you. That way, if there's any mishap on what
> exactly is happening, you know that I understand. And then now that we're
> on the same page…Let's find common ground on where to go from here,
> and I mean it's just fantastic training. You get insight from all over. A lot
> of role-playing, and with that, they bring in individuals from local
> organizations who work with special needs youth and adults. They have
> role players…people with intellectual disabilities, and they'll come in, and
> then they're in their scenario. It's not acting. You're talking to an autistic
> person. (SROs have learned that) some of them have their IDs on their
> badges, their wristbands (with information pertaining to their disability
> and interests). And then you'll see they love Star Wars and get lost easily
> with a contact number…not all the current SROs in our county have gone
> through specific crisis intervention training beyond their in-service
> training. The training, at the time, was only mandated for patrol officers.

"SRO #6" reported that

> Maryland has pushed a lot of de-escalation techniques for specific
> ones…Usually, I tell my kids, that I will talk them out of a bad situation. I
> will talk you out of a bad decision to the point where you probably get
> tired of talking to me and their like, I just want to go back to class…If I

can get him one on one and start talking to them to have him go through

the thought process and why probably it's not something they were

thinking about doing and it wasn't a good idea. Usually, they'll come to the

right decision at that time. Just have them go through and walk through

with like, hey, how are you feeling? You know you're about to do this.

Probably not something you really want to do. You know your choices

have an effect not only on yourself, but others. Talking about that at times

helps. And then with kids, they're also impulsive with decision

making…the training has been very beneficial and in situations where in

the past you went head-on to something and now you're looking back, you

kind of put yourself in a position where maybe force was used that really

didn't need to be done and especially when you're dealing with kids you

kind of like, do we have a child that's an imminent danger or can I maybe

talk to him a few minutes trying to deescalate him…you know you have a

duty to protect the life and liberty of those students. But if it's just

something where I can take time and effort and talk to them and relate to

them and try to get them to calm down, why not?

"SRO #7" reflected on their CIT training and how they:

Establish a personal rapport. Hey, what's your name? My name's X. It

looks like you're upset. You identify what emotions they are going

through and then try to connect with them and then talk things through

with them. I also went through ICAT training where if you see what

they're going through and then if it's something that needs an immediate

response to you, inject yourself as something that you can do at a distance. You work on that, so the other person doesn't feel pressured by your immediate presence around you. I personally, I don't care if the student calls me deputy, Mr., or just my name, if they feel comfortable talking to me. If I know the student has issues where I'm likely to deal with that student in a law enforcement manner, I try to talk to that student or be seen by that student and see what kind of interest we have in common. There's one here that likes animals, so I made a point to go show the student photos of my animals and we talk about the student's animals and such. There's another student who was having a moment where he didn't want to go to in-school suspension, and he was just refusing to leave the classroom that he was in. I recognized him and I could not place where. And after talking with him, he threw things against the wall and got no response. It finally clicked together because I saw his Pokémon T-shirt. We talked about Pokémon two weeks ago for like five minutes. So, then I started talking about that and just knowing some of their interests gets them to like, OK, in the moment. I started talking about Pokémon like that. That kid went from I'm not moving. Then we started to talk about Pokémon a bit, and then once that wall is kind of down, we can circle back to hey, we need to go, we need to leave here and start walking towards where we got to go.

"SRO #8" reported that ICAT training:

Piggybacks off the CIT training, that crisis intervention training. More de-escalation training. I went through the ICAT training recently and went through the CIT maybe 2-3 years ago when I was on patrol. I don't go up and just bombard people. I have a way to talk to people, and in certain situations, it's just like talking with autistic kids and everything like that. We had some specific training. I've had it years ago, but you know how to talk to them because some of our young guys have a different way of thinking nowadays. You know their mentality is completely different than yours. I've had kids come in, all upset and cussing and this and that type of thing. I got one simple rule, respect and I'll basically just say. I would just say, sit down, and when you're ready to talk, we're going to talk. The first year I went back in the middle school, a sixth-grade student said, Man, I don't like the police, I said. I don't care if you don't like the police. You can respect the place. Sit down. Keep your mouth shut when you're ready to talk. Sometimes that is so difficult when you're switching from high school to middle school because I talked to high schoolers a little bit differently because I was blunter with them and told them how it was in middle school. I must back up and I don't want to offend a sixth grader, you know? So, but like I said, most of the time, I try to be compassionate, trying to de-escalate them, to me it's just more common sense if someone is upset and to give them a minute. Don't press them. Take a deep breath. Just talk to them normally. Don't talk about the situation. Talk about where you are living, kind of little personal stuff, and then kind of work

your way up to the issue to see if they feel a bit more comfortable with you.

"SRO #9" reported that:

Our agency gets trained in ICAT. We learned about de-escalation in general. Not so much the youth, but just how to talk to people in distress. How to talk to somebody. How to listen to somebody, so it's a basic program just to help everybody.

"SRO #10" finds that:

Calming my voice and slowing my tone and my speech and I mean, if I look at them and I say look at me, I make them keep eye contact with me and help them calm down. If the student is mad with somebody at the school, I can look at them and de-escalate them while the schools do their thing and I'll have a student sitting in my office and it's worked several times. I have a student who, when he is escalated, he just comes straight to my office, and he sits, and we talk. But the biggest thing that I have found is keeping that contact with them, slowing my response. My voice, my tone and just being real with them. Finding out what their problems were and what they were accused of, and me taking that student away from the situation. It helps you know the school staff handle what they need to handle such as looking at cameras or getting statements or whatever they need. And then we can piece it all together, but then by the time that I'm sending the student back to them, that student is de-escalated.

Research Question 2 Theme: Additional Resources

Research Question #2 examined what additional resources SROs need to support Southern Maryland Public Elementary School students and staff. The SROs' responses were reviewed, and six sub-themes emerged: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Camera Access, Power School eSchool Plus Access, Additional SROs, Continued Training/Conferences, and Administration & SRO Collaboration.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Each county in Southern Maryland that was involved in this research study had an MOU between the local law enforcement agency and the local school system. I was unclear if each school that the SROs work with had the same, similar or varied expectations of the SRO.

"SRO #5" reported:

> The MOU that was created and actually my task this year is going to be revamping or revisiting the SRO MOU because we have new personnel and we got that notice late after the new fiscal year. And then with the board approval and that process may seem simple, it's not a simple one when integrating new people into the local school system buildings.

"SRO #6" believes:

> Constantly reevaluating the MOU with the schools and seeing what we can and can't do as far as law enforcement because of how we handle things in school is different than how you handle things if you're a patrol officer and constant reevaluation of things is always a good tool to do because you want everyone to be on the same page and I think that is constant.

"SRO #8" discussed the differences between the expectations in one county versus another by saying:

> Being in the next county over and how different their SROs are than ours. And I know for many years, and I don't know if you realize, but and you probably see our county SROs dress in full gear, we must be in full uniform. While other counties are more relaxed. I think they wear polo shirts and BTUs, and they have their guns on their side. We have everything from our Taser to our body camera and everything and that's part of it. That's our policy. We got to be in full uniform when we're in school. We can't wear polo shirts. I wish I could wear polo shirts and just BTUs, but I just feel it's I back in the day when, you know, I don't know if you know X is. But yeah, so you know, when they were like, suit and ties, they weren't allowed to wear a uniform because the Board of Education didn't want it. I said that won't happen under our MOU.

Camera Access. During the interviews with the ten SROs, access to cameras was a common concern. There are some SROs with no camera access, while others have live camera access, and some are getting access soon. Some schools only supply access to the Safety Advocate, who is a local school system employee, and not the SRO, who is employed by the local law enforcement agency.

"SRO #1" reported "We have safety advocates here. I always let them know or ask them (the student), did you speak with the safety advocates? If it happened in the hallway, we could pull up camera footage and look into it."

"SRO #2" reported:

There are a lot of educators that are either at the board of education or at the administrative level that have been here a long time. And I think that they're used to just kind of handling things on their own and not having law enforcement so readily available. So, I think we need to do better with that and understand (how or why) we're here to help. We're on the same team. Ultimately, we just want the kids to be safe and to get an education. If I'm 100% honest, I'm a little upset with our access to things like the cameras and eSchool. We are one of the only departments in the whole state of Maryland that does not have access to cameras or access to eSchool. It's a big deal. I think that just comes down to, I'm not going to say names, but one or two people with the board who have been there a long time who simply want to be in control. And it's a huge pain in the *** for me to handle an investigation and then have to wait weeks for a subpoena and for that evidence to come back to me instead of just being able to look at it right there on the computer and see and this kind of all came to fruition. I started calling around to other SROs I know in the state, and figured out that we are one of the only ones that doesn't allow access to eSchool and cameras. This is just an example. Let's say there's a Saturday night. A patrol officer called me and said, hey, so and so students put something on Instagram that says they want to hurt themselves. Well, we need an address. Alright, so now I have to get involved. I have to insert myself into that investigation and then get ahold of an administration at the school and hope that they're in a location where they can get access to

each school to get just basic information. I don't care what that kid's

schedule is at school. I'm not trying to get any other information. I need an

address and a name, and I need to know where we can go to check to

make sure that the student is OK and that can take hours and by that time

someone could really get hurt. So, I don't know why that is and why I

don't. We're not going to be sitting there watching the cameras all day.

We're not going to be going through students' files. We just needed to

handle our daily task so that's my biggest issue right now that I've seen

over the last six years is give us the tools to do our job. But there's no

reason that we can't just, other than someone saying that you're not, we

don't want you to have this.

The researcher followed up with "SRO #2" and asked if SROs need access to camera

(footage), would you have to subpoena to get them? "SRO #2" responded:

So technically, and this isn't law, from my understanding, this is what I've

been told and what I've researched, we're not even allowed to look at the

screen. So, let's say the safety advocates are investigating a theft

something that happened in the school, maybe an assault or a fight or

something like that. They can't even tell us technically what they saw on

the video. My safety advocates are pretty good. They'll give me a thumbs

up. Like, hey, this is something you might want to subpoena. So, I can't

even see the video. Technically, by policy, not law, but just by policy. So,

then I have to then write a report. Give that to my supervisor. He will then

take that to the States Attorney's Office, they will issue a subpoena. That

process is quick, can usually be done within a day or two, but then it goes

to the Board of Education. Well, most of that time based on standard

language, those subpoenas, they're given 14 days or 30 days for the board

of education to then hand over that information. And then what happens is

the school board gets a subpoena, the subpoena goes to the school, the

school will provide all that documentation and then give it back to the

school board. Then the school board will review what they're about to give

to the law enforcement and then give it to us. And that and typically they

will sit on it and wait at the board level. So, for something as simple as,

hey, we had a fight in the hallway. We're trying to see if this was an

attack, like if one student attacked the other student, or if this was just a

mutual thing. The staff are going to do their own investigation at the

school and then by law, they have to notify us. Technically, by law it says

that they will notify us while they're doing their investigation.

Sometimes they do after, but we've gotten better at letting them know.

Hey, this is what the law says, and we just want to work with you and then

I'm in contact with the parents at this time. And I'm saying, well, I can't

charge anyone. I can't do anything. You know, I can write a basic simple

report that says I've requested the information. So, it just takes a lot of

time when if I knew that happened, I could just pull up the cameras and

say, Yep, so and so did this or so and so did that the workaround on that is

right now as a student or a parent, you can say I want to see the video. So,

if you're going to suspend my student or my student was in the school, you

can request to see the video and then a lot of parents will just come in and see the video. And then I'll ask him, What did you see? What do you think happened? You know what's going on there? So that's kind of the way it's not even worth subpoena anymore unless we're going to charge. So, I won't even subpoena until I talk to the parents first to see what they think. And then after two weeks or three weeks or four weeks have gone by. The problem is that the residual effects of that are the student no longer wants to charge, and the parents don't want to charge because that drama has gone away. And I totally understand that because they're not trying to bring up the old stuff and they don't want it to exist anymore. Where that becomes an issue is now, we've got students who are starting to get into more and more fights or in this case, we're using the assault example. It could be theft or something like that…Their punishment was three days out of school (suspension). There was no actual anything to change the behavior, right? It may not include me charging, but just me getting involved and saying that you can get in a lot of trouble. You have to stop doing this and tell them that I wrote a report and tell them that they could be charged at a later date, a lot of times will change behavior. It's just like issuing a warning for speeding, right? So, we try to do that, but I think that students are going to continue to do those things until there's some real punishment or the scare of some real punishment.

"SRO #4" reported:

We don't have access to the cameras in the school and I just think it would be nice if I'm sitting in my office to have a screen up, a 50-inch stream with all the entry and exit points of the school so I can see who's coming and going, and I wouldn't think that would be a violation of a kid's educational folder. If I'm watching the entry and exit points at the school, I'm not watching their movements throughout the school. But again, they (local school system) say that's a violation. So, they have one in the front office for the secretaries of the watch, but it'd be nice if we could watch as well.

"SRO #6" reported:

I cannot review (recorded) camera footage or anything like that. You have to ask the administration. I know there's in the process of us just seeing footage, meaning if I have a TV screen. I can see who's in the hallway. Or maybe who's outside, but I can't go back and review footage on my end.

The researcher followed up with "SRO #6" and asked if the administration could review certain (camera) footage and let the SRO know what they see or if the SRO was allowed to view the footage with the administrator. "SRO #6" reported:

I'm allowed to view with them and like I can't constantly watch a kid or anything like that, but anything that pertains to any kind of criminal element or issue or school safety issue, they'll bring me in immediately and they'll review camera to see what we have. You know, we had an instance where a couple of kids last year were going to the hallway and making a bad choice of using gun hands, so we have to review that, see

who's all involved. Identify them. Have a conversation with them. We have an area where kids come out and in the front parking lot. If there's a car that comes speeding around, I can go back and try to backtrack to have a conversation with that driver. So, anything that involves the safety of the school or a criminal element that I have to get involved with is when I'll view the cameras.

"SRO #7" reported that their county is:

Working on it (camera access)…If I go to the admin and that's kind of the benefit that I've had after three years, I've kind of built the rapport with the admin here. If I go to them and say, hey, can we look at this, something happened then they can pull up the cameras with me and show me if I'm investigating a case and I need camera footage, and our policy and the school policy is, if I just turn on my body camera and I hold it to the screen, that counts as us recovering the video footage without having the subpoena, the school for the footage. But they'll show me in person like the video of whatever incident they are working on, getting a large TV with a live feed of the cameras in my office. I think they test-ran that at a local high school, and they found good results that way. If I am sitting in my office typing something, I can still glance up at the computer at the screen and see what's happening throughout the school. So, they are working on getting a camera feed in my office. It won't be recorded. It'll be live feed, so won't be able to manipulate and roll back or record anything, but I can just look up and see what's currently happening.

"SRO #9" reported:

> I do see my cameras…All I have is the live feed now due to the way the
>
> policy works and the lawyers that got involved, I can only see the live
>
> feed. I can't rewind and see what's going on.

The researcher followed up with "SRO #9" and asked if they needed to view a video, and what the steps the SRO would need to take. "SRO #6" reported:

> I'll go to one of the assistant principals or the principal, they're pretty good
>
> at letting me know. They will send it to me in an email and I can pull it up
>
> on my screen and I'll have access to it like that if I need it.

"SRO #10" reported, "My school is very open about letting me view video. I have a monitor coming that I'm going have access to live time at the school cameras."

Power School eSchool Plus Access. During the interviews with the ten SROs, access to eSchool was a common concern. There are some SROs who have no access to eSchool in their local school system and other SROs who have access to eSchool. Power School eSchool Plus is a K-12 student information system. It is fully web-based, highly configurable, and always accessible to local school system staff. It contains demographic information, parent or guardian information, student schedules, testing information, and more. Parents and other staff can be given access with limited access.

"SRO #1" reported:

> The schools use a system. It's called eSchool…I know for the longest time
>
> we've gone back and forth about trying to get the SRO's access to that…I
>
> don't know if there's a training that could be put on for that, but it would
>
> be very beneficial for us to. We might not need access to all of the

student's information. I get some of it's confidential, but a lot of times, we're dealing with students, and we might have to do paperwork on them, but we find ourselves always having to go to a teacher or an aide or somebody in the school to get information on the student where it would be helpful if we had that information to begin with.

"SRO #2" reported:

If I'm 100% honest, I'm a little upset with our access to things like the cameras and eSchool. We are one of the only departments in the whole state of Maryland that does not have access to cameras or access to eSchool. It's a big deal…This is just an example. Let's say there's a Saturday night. A patrol officer called me and said, hey, so and so students put something on Instagram that says they want to hurt themselves. Well, we need an address. Alright, so now I have to get involved. I have to insert myself into that investigation and then get ahold of an administration at the school and hope that they're in a location where they can get access to each school to get just basic information. I don't care what that kid's schedule is at school. I'm not trying to get any other information. I need an address and a name, and I need to know where we can go check to make sure that students OK and that can take hours and by that time someone could really get hurt…. We're not going to be going through students' files. We just needed to handle our daily task so that's my biggest issue right now that I've seen over the last six years is give us the tools to do our

job. But there's no reason that we can't just, other than someone saying

that you're not, we don't want you to have this.

"SRO #6" reported that they do have access to eSchool and:

That has actually happened a few times where a patrol might be out with

one of my kids and need an address and I'll be able to because of threat of

harm, or he's involved in a robbery or something like we need to go talk

(to the parent and) that we need to go find them. I'll get those calls. I do

have access to eSchool. The only thing I have access to is name, address

and maybe his schedule. Other than that, no grades or any other

educational stuff I'm not privileged to with eSchool, there is information

for as if there's protective orders or child custody issues of who's supposed

to pick up that child. We've had an instance where someone we didn't

know would try to come up to pick up a child, and there was no ID and the

school, and I are both in agreement. Like unless you have an ID and you

are on that list, you're not getting a child. We don't know who you are.

The researcher followed up with "SRO #6" and asked if the SRO can access the student's

discipline log in eSchool. "SRO #6" reported, "I'm not privileged to the discipline aspect

of it or in-school suspensions or out-of-school suspensions or anything like that."

"SRO #7" reported they:

Have full access to eSchool. I can see all the students in my high school. I

can see the student schedule and another SRO's schools and all that kind

of stuff, which comes in handy. When a detective has a first and half of a

spelling of the last name. The school kind of helps you out there or when

patrol needs something. I had one where a patrol officer ran into one of

my special education students at like two in the morning and I didn't know

his dad's phone number. I had access to eSchool so I can easily punch the

kid's name in eSchool, and it gives me the kids address and the phone

number and I could provide that to that patrol officer immediately.

"SRO #8" has access to eSchool and noted they:

See the (student) schedule, their name, their address, date of birth. As a

matter of fact, I just had it up. Let me see what else I see. I get the kids'

email addresses, the parents' email addresses, and their parents' contact

(information), and I have their schedules. I think that's limited (access). I

wouldn't know if they have an IEP or stuff like that, and the only thing I'll

see is some alerts like if Mom and Dad can't pick them up, or if there's a

protective order or something like that. I cannot (see the student's

discipline log).

"SRO #9" reported that SROs:

Have access to every school in our county, so any. One of the reasons for

that is let's say that I'm off work and another SRO needs to have access to

a student. So, one of our other middle schools is right up the street. So,

when I'm off for training or whatever that SRO comes down sometimes to

walk around, have the one-hour lunch. And so that way they have access

to everything also for patrol reasons. If something happens outside of

school, they call us and we're able to pull up our eSchool and we're able to

give them any name they need for any elementary school or middle school

or high school.

"SRO #9" does not have access to the student's "discipline log. All it (eSchool)

has is their basic information. Their name, date of birth, the parent's information, their

address, and their schedule if we need to get him out of class."

"SRO #10" reported that they have "access to eSchool for generic information

including their demographics and their schedules and do not have access to the student's

discipline logs."

Additional SROs. During the interviews with the ten SROs, there was a common

response of wanting additional SROs in their school system. Some schools have used an

Adopt-a-School program when there was not a full-time SRO designated for a particular

school. The FBI began the Adopt-a-School Program in 1994 with a goal of helping kids

steer clear of drugs and gangs while learning core values that would make them good

citizens. This program has been trickled down to local law enforcement agencies in an

effort to build positive relationships with young children and to provide adequate

coverage for local schools.

"SRO #3" reported that they want the SRO program to:

>Continue to grow. To do the job right, you have to be focused on one
>
>school, not three or four schools. So, to do some of the things you're
>
>talking about to be involved (in school committees and programs) like
>
>PBIS, in an incentive, if you walk in a classroom and you're there for five
>
>minutes and then, another elementary school calls well now I got to leave.
>
>I'm not here for that. So, I think to grow the actual program, to have

coverage for every school… I think we have the support of our community

to do this. I know we have the support of the sheriff to do this. He talks

positively about their meetings with the school superintendent about it

(growing the SRO program), so just continue it and knock on wood every

year we've gained a couple of deputies. We're at three elementary full time

now. So, if next year we make that 6 and then you know kind of keep that

progression, I think we're in great shape…some of the private schools are

inquiring how to start that process (of having an SRO at their school).

"SRO #4" reported:

We want to get one SRO at every elementary school. That's the goal. It's

just money and bodies. A lot of counties are doing 10 month and contract

employees that are police officers, but there is contract. So, they work the

same days as a teacher would do. It would cut the cost a little bit and they

could get a bare bone marked car. So, we still have a mark car sitting out

front and you know they would be most likely retired police officers, or

you know government agency where they can carry a gun so that wouldn't

be an issue. And even if they couldn't handle some of the police powers,

an SRO could come support them from another school, if necessary, but at

least they would be there for an active threat and be a deterrent. So I know

some other counties are advertising that, and I've talked to some guys that

are retired Secret Service and stuff like that and they think that would be a

pretty good gig because you still get your summers off, you get a winter

break, Thanksgiving break, Christmas break…then we would have the

ability to cover more, if not all of our elementary schools because

unfortunately we have more people leaving the Sheriff's Office than we do

coming in, it seems like, and I think that's just the way the police are being

viewed…I think we're doing the best we can with the situation in our

county with the number of SRO's. I just came back from patrol, and I

know patrol is hurting for people. So, I get why I think our sheriff wanted

twice as many new bodies as we got, if not more. I mean, he ran (his

campaign) on covering elementary well, covering most schools, if not all

schools. And it just stinks that society has such a negative view on police

right now. It's starting to get better, but it's just hard for people that want to

be police and even kids now when they say they want to be a police officer

and they're actually at the age, high school or college student, I just tell

them to really think hard about it, talk to other police officers because it is

really rewarding, but it's hard too, especially if you're out on the patrol

dealing with people. There's just so many liabilities and new laws that are

making our job harder and more dangerous. I think that until we get over

some of that, we won't get all these schools covered until we can get some

more manpower unless we do contract stuff. But it is a very rewarding job

and I enjoy it.

"SRO #5" reported:

We just need more SROs and that's a loaded question because we need

more police officers. In general, hiring is down across the nation…patrol

has to be fully staffed for us to start pulling people off the road because it's

the tale as old as time where you're robbing Peter to pay Paul. And the

sheriff has done a great job taking care of the schools because even in this

huge deficit, we got two additional SROs this school year and that's all on

the burden of patrol. So, for us to have a fully staffed patrol and then for

us to have an SRO in every elementary school and especially at all

schools, that's the end goal here. And I don't know how many other

counties have that. I don't care, but that's our goal. And the sheriff has

aligned with us on that….it wasn't a tough choice to give us two people.

And you think if you think two isn't a lot, two is a lot. And it comes with

taking people off patrol and bringing them up to be an SRO without any

vacancies…and we're starting a whole new SRO program in the

elementary school, so it's fantastic to see and I'm optimistic that we're

going to continue to grow…I'm at my elementary school every single day

and I respond from there like I would respond from the Sheriff's Office.

Last year was a little bit different. We had less SROs, so we had high

schools covered. We had all middle schools covered and (no elementary

schools with full-time SROs) …When there was an issue at a school, I

went to that location. If we were having consistent issues at certain

schools, I would try to spend the majority of my time there as a second

SRO on site. Now this year we have picked up two additional SROs with

the Sheriff's Office moving towards more school safety. I was asked early

on. Do you mind moving to elementary school? You know for added

coverage, which of course that's a fantastic idea. Move me into a school.

Anything that I can do from the Sheriff's Office, I can do right from my

elementary school. They hooked me up with a fantastic office there and if

something happens, I'm there. You know I'm an asset to them and still at

the Sheriff's Office. It's just a location change, so which was a very good

help. You know, moving on this year.

The researcher followed up with "SRO #5" and asked how the SROs were assigned to

what schools, especially what elementary schools were covered versus others. "SRO #5"

responded:

It goes by call volume. Initially one elementary school in particular.

Unfortunately, they had serious accidents at the intersection there and

there was a traffic detail that is dispatched on 911 twice a day. Every

single school day, so this elementary school was a no-brainer because we

were pulling patrol people every single day to go to this school last year

with help from our SRO grant. We were able on the days that one of the

middle school guys could cover, they would go to this elementary school

and cover that traffic enforcement. It's about a 40-minute assignment

getting all the buses. They come in kind of staggered. The buses come in

and then the buses come out in the evening. Now as we look down South

at two other elementary schools. So that was a way to put one SRO on site

and have the ability to cover dual schools because they share a campus.

The third SRO original consideration went to be at two elementary schools

because they're centrally located. Well, when we pulled up the map, the

longest response time for an SRO was always to another elementary

towards the south. It was the one with the furthest SROs away from each other, furthest away from the Sheriff's Office. Response timewise geographically it made sense to put one at the elementary school with the longest response time and we're only growing. Our hopes are to get more SROs each year and then more considerations for where one would be located…say we get one next year or two additional (SROs) for the coming year and then we'll keep adding on geographically for response time for calls for service. What exactly does the school hold? Because each school, especially elementary school, they have their own little things going on and may need additional resources, although it may not make sense, you know, outside looking in…. Now the Sheriff's Office has applied and successfully been awarded the SRO grant. Now that will cover it doesn't cover like salary lines as far as like instilling new SROs to the team, but it takes over all overtime costs. So, any after-school activity for the entire year is covered by that SRO grant and the grants are all over the state of Maryland and it's based on population and enrollment. So, if you're enrollment as it compares whatever the total amount is that they issue it's broken down and enrollment and then it goes from there. So, our Sheriff's Office umm, is a lot of approximately $XXX,XXX through the Maryland Center for School Safety for SRO overtime. Anybody that's not an SRO, like at football games, if we need four officers to staff the event and we only have two available that that's for a grant allows us to pay those patrol deputies to come in and work the assignment for the end goal

of school safety. The other grants I'm unaware of, I know they presented

one earlier on which was through MCSS, but it wasn't SRO's. It was safety

advocates, who are similar to us, but they're very different. They're

unarmed personnel that are in the school, and then there was another one.

They gave it to us through community policing services. That was for the

school board for the integration of metal detectors and stuff like that. But

the only one that we currently work off of is the SRO grant for overtime

lines working after school assignments, anything that come up

investigations, traffic control, any public event, the graduations, that's how

we are able to fully staff those with really no cost to the agency, the

Maryland Center for School Safety pays for it for us. And there's a fear

that the money will run out, with Maryland Center for School Safety, too,

you know? So, every year this is only my second year applying for it. But

every year you're like, alright man, I hope this keeps going and it doesn't

look like it's slowing, but that's always in the back of your mind, you

know, because it's not our money. I think we covered a lot the true thing

for me is to have additional SROs and being in the schools, especially now

that I'm in elementary school regularly.

"SRO #6" reported that in their county, SROs are only in:

The secondary schools. Our Sheriff's Office is potentially looking to

broaden the program to elementary schools. I know our community wants

it, but it goes back to right now just trying to build up our main mission

statements with patrol until we can get enough manpower to facilitate

those elementary schools…With how Maryland defines the SRO, we do

have officers that are part of Adopt-a-School Program, meaning they'll go

to the elementary school, check in with them. Read the kids some books.

Just make sure everything and everybody at the elementary school is OK,

but there's currently not an officer assigned to the elementary school, like

how I am here at the middle school.

"SRO #8" would like to:

Expand (the SRO program) a little bit maybe into the elementary schools.

We do have in my county this program called Adopt-a-School program

that encourages some of the patrol guys and you're not compensated. So

basically, say your kid goes to one elementary school and you go in there

to kind of volunteer your time go in as the positive stuff to have the

presence or maybe talk to a kindergarten class about stranger danger or

something like that. Then if they have any ambitions to become a school

resource officer, they could say well I did this elementary school for five

years prior to here which gave them some experience and interacting. Of

course, manpower wise we're not feasible like that.

The researcher followed up with "SRO #8" regarding patrol officers not being

compensated and if a patrol officer was driving around a certain school and was

patrolling a local neighborhood, could they swing in as part of their shift? "SRO #8"

responded:

I think that absolutely they could. And I know some of the guys do so. For

example, when I say one of the elementary schools, the guy works in the

South end here and says he's on patrol and he starts, we have different calls. We can start from community policing to a school check. You know he can stop in there. Do a school check. Unfortunately, because of how busy we get, he could be walking in and being there for two minutes, and a call comes out, and he has to go to it. I always encouraged my guys who are training my young guys and say, while they're on field training, bring them into the schools, so they can get a layout, of how it is. If we have a situation in the school, you know each school.

"SRO #9" would like to:

Add more SRO's. I'm all for adding people to elementary schools, I know they're not as busy and probably won't be as busy as high school or middle school just because there's so much younger, but having an SRO in an elementary school will help the youth as they get transitioned into middle school. Be prepared to always have a cop in their school.

"SRO #10" reported:

Our agency does have what's called an Adopt-a-School program. That is normally patrol officers when they're off duty, they go to elementary schools and check on them…elementary school level (SROs) would be good. A lot of times, parents will bring their little children to the station and say, can you scare my child? Or they'll say, and this is just one of my pet peeves. So, they'll say if you don't stop, if you don't listen to me, that officer is going to lock you up and they'll point it out to me. And that hurts me because I want their children to come to us if they need help and I

want their kids to know that we're not the bad guys, that they can come to
us. So if they had a positive interaction with an officer throughout their
school day, even at the elementary level, I think that would be very helpful
for their development and not having I don't want to say a bad taste in
their mouth of police, but you know a lot of times only thing kids see is
what they see on the news or what's reported on, YouTube or what's on the
Internet. They never get that face-to-face interaction, and they can see
there's so much more that we're here to help.

Continued Training/Conferences. During the interviews with the ten SROs,
there was a common response: continued training, particularly NASRO or MCSS
conferences, and being able to network with other SROs in the State of Maryland and in
the Nation as a whole.

"SRO #1" would like SROs to have continued training in "crisis intervention and
conflict resolution…I also think cultural and diversity training as well as basic youth
development and psychology…the schools…are different."

"SRO #3" responded:

I would say that in particular when you go to a large gathering like that
(training)…It's the fact that you can talk to guys from all across the
country who are dealing with either the same issues or maybe they're
dealing with something that you're going to see in six months and
exchanging ideas. Then you sit down with whatever field expert that's
going to talk about the trauma informed stuff. I think those are the most
beneficial because I can't sit in a classroom for 40 hours a week and take

away all 40 hours of what they say. If you give me good information and a

45-minute break out session and I can take that PowerPoint in my email

and then give it to the rest of the guys in the unit. I find that to be the most

beneficial because I'm like the kids. I can't sit still for an hour and listen to

you talk. I mean it is what it is. But I think that's the more you can meet

with other agencies and field experts. You know we do it. The Maryland

State Conference this year was the second multi-day conference. They

usually pack it pretty tight, but they did breakouts this year, which was a

new thing for them, and it was really good. Virginia State does a great one

too, which is pretty close.

"SRO #4" reported that continued training should include:

Active shooter training when we can have access to the buildings without

students here, so we can actually walk through and do mock active shooter

drills and we use other buildings. We've used churches and then some

other county buildings to do those kinds of things. I would think anything

with mental health, especially, it's hard with the younger kids because they

haven't gotten diagnosed with some of this stuff and they're not medicated.

But the middle school and high school kids, now that we know what's

going on, it'd be nice to get a little bit more training on mental health, how

it affects the body, some of the reactions that are normal for certain

disorders so we can see it a little bit easier and deal with it a little bit faster

so it doesn't become a disruption in school. REID training. It's an

interview and interrogation techniques. I haven't been (to that training)

yet. It's been on my list to do it's kind of expensive, but it teaches you how to read body language, how to tell if somebody's lying or not. So, I feel like maybe we're not interrogating kids, but especially when it comes to safety concern, and we need to get to the answer quickly. Sometimes being able to read a kid's body language or little quirks that they might have to let us know if they're lying or being truthful would be helpful.

"SRO #5" reported:

For us (SROs) specifically, is difficult to attend training during the school year because you're away from the school and you know you're away. The school knows your away, and inevitably when you're away, that's when something's going to happen. So, a lot of our stuff happens over the summer and NASRO and Maryland Center for School Safety are very cognizant of that. So annually we always attend our Maryland conference, which is the Maryland Center of School Safety Annual Conference. This year was in Ellicott City, and it's a two-day conference. They bring in guest speakers. They talk about issues that Maryland is seeing in different jurisdictions. Different ways to deal with new stuff such as what kind of drugs are being integrated in, how the vaping devices are influencing, and how the kids are interacting with each other. It's great training to stay up to date on issues in Maryland specifically. They have been sending four to five SROs every single year to the NASRO Conference. I attended my training in Colorado. I went with other SROs at the time and it's exactly like the Maryland Conference, but on a national level. So, they're going to

talk about what Texas is seeing, what New York is seeing, how the

schools in North Dakota compared to the schools in California, and

inevitably, when one school is having an issue, it kind of trickles around.

And then you know, you might see it at different levels, but then you

know they're dealing with this and what they're doing to combat it. And if

we see that we know what to do. So, the national conference is fantastic

for that. There is a financial element, of course. You're sending four to

five people to Colorado for a four or five-day training. Virginia is one of

the leading behavioral threat assessment areas that we have. And last year,

I went for the first time to the Behavioral Threat Conference. But it's

fantastic training and other SRO's have been over the year. Last year was

the first time that I attended. We don't do a lot with behavioral threat

assessments like on the school level. We talk about discipline and stuff of

that nature, but it's good to get an overall picture as it ties into and as it

escalates and gets into safety concerns where law enforcement is going to

start to get involved. So, you kind of get an overview. It's mostly civilians

that attend the meetings or attend the conference, but you get an idea of

what they're looking for. And then how maybe the SRO could help, like

integrating into those teams and moving forward and seeing that maybe

this was a red flag for you and not for us. Or maybe you saying you know,

they had firearms, but nothing was ever mentioned. They just openly talk

about it. But the kids, a good kid and everything. That's a red flag for us.

So, it's interesting to see the civilian mind and the law enforcement mind

kind of integrate in those meetings and that was a great training that we're

going to try to keep sending more and more people to. Now they cover

that in the Maryland basic course. When you're going through the basic

course with the individuals that are law enforcement to be certified as an

SRO, where the conference is a little different because you're going with

people from the local school system, from Virginia public schools all over

the world, are traveling to Virginia to attend that conference. And that's

not the first time that they have done a threat assessment. That's not the

first time they heard of it. They are continuing education to see how they

can become better. That is using the information that they have to guess

the next move the individual or what we could do to prevent something

bad happening, you know down the line.

"SRO #6" reported that continued training should include:

Case law updates because it's constantly changing with the current

juvenile laws. De-escalation, we do a lot of. Now we do a lot of threat (to

self and others) assessments, so have additional training and resources on

how to navigate what is a credible threat and what is not a credible threat.

Is this kid just trying to make a poor joke?

"SRO #7" reported:

The yearly conference that the Maryland Center for School Safety puts on

is interesting. They had a lot of different courses that you could pick out

and attend, some of them more impactful than others. We do D.A.R.E. in

service training that we go to during spring break. That's also like three or

four days long. We had mental health training, but also first aid training and restorative circles training. I'm going to need either an awareness of mental health training to identify it myself for others, or then everyone needs first aid training. But, like restorative circles is not something that has an SRO may partake in, but it's interesting to know about know what kids in classrooms are doing If I can put a name to something in particular, I can't think of it at the moment and I think that between those two, there's been a lot of interesting classes that have been put forward that we've learned about. I know that my agency tries to have PowerPoints and trainings and when we do our annual in-service training, they bring in state attorneys from the Southern Maryland area to come talk to us about new law changes and that includes like last year's new juvenile reform stuff.

"SRO #8" believes continued training should include:

Anything up and coming, whether it's in reference to drugs, alcohol, the whole marijuana thing is a fiasco right now that just changed, stuff like that. Always interacting with other (SROs) throughout the state or the country because each part is different everywhere in the country. The State of California is completely different than Florida than it is in Maryland or New York or whatever it might be. If it's in a high crime atmosphere, you know those guys. If they have to be familiar with gangs and stuff like that, going to the conferences, yes, it's nice where they hold them and that's why I try to tell the supervisors everything I said. Just because you have a

conference in Vegas, yeah, that's cool and everything, but it's very

beneficial. You know, you just like the Maryland safety conference we

just had this past summer was informative, especially for the younger

guys. I'm still learning some of the stuff.

"SRO #9" reported:

Any training that deals with youth, but we went to a conference this past

year which goes over the new stuff that they're seeing, the new trends

they're seeing in school. It goes over social media trends and some

bullying trends. It's a conference that we went to be a weeklong, our

agency tries to get us into a lot of those programs. That way we keep up to

date on what's out there that's happening.

"SRO #10" reported:

I do like our tactical training. You know what to do in the event of a

school shooting. You know, we never thought we were ever going to use

it, so Great Mills High School shooting happened one day, and you never

know when it's going to happen. Then it's not something we use every day.

We use our de-escalation stuff every day…also for the law updates

dealing with juveniles and the juvenile laws and case updates. I always

think those are helpful because we're always behind the times on that. It

seems like as soon as we get used to it, something changes and it's right

back. And also speaking of behind the times, social media training. I'm not

very good with Snapchat and trying to be sneaky with Snapchat. I can

keep tabs on a lot of my kids through Instagram, but I'm not very good

with Snapchat and how to be sneaky. So just these little things that they're

doing that you know, us old people, we need to be up on the times.

Administration & SRO Collaboration. During the interviews with the ten

SROs, there was a common response of wanting the administration to attend the same

training as SROs attend. This response was to allow the administration and SROs to have

a common language and understanding of SROs in the local school systems.

"SRO #2" reported:

We have to remember that our impact on students may be the first impact

that they have ever had with law enforcement. So that's super important.

We also have to remember that there needs to be some training between

the administration and SROs and understand what we can and can't do

when we are involved and when we're not involved. For example, we have

discretion as officers, sometimes we don't have a choice, we have to

charge a student even though we may or may not want to. We have to, but

the overwhelming majority of the time, we understand that charging is

probably not the most appropriate action. It depends on the whole

situation. So, working with the staff and the admin on that. You also have

to remember that the majority of the time we don't get to choose if we

want to change or not. It's up to the victim, right? So, if two students get

into a fight, you'll hear the school say, well, we're not going to charge.

Well, it's not really up to them, right? It's up to the victim who's going to

do whatever. The only thing the school gets involved with is when it

comes to that, it would be like destruction of property. Or interrupting a

class or something like that, they could get involved and say OK, we are

the victim in this, and we want to charge. So, it really comes down to the

victim….Right now, there's a lot of educators that are either on the board

of education or at the administrative level that have been here a long time.

And I think that they're used to just kind of handling things on their own

and not having law enforcement so readily available. So, I think we need

to do better with that and understand that we're here to help. We're on the

same team. Ultimately, we just want the kids to be safe and to get an

education.

"SRO #3" reported that they would:

Like dual training (SRO and Administration together) …it all comes down

to money. Virginia State does a good job of getting a lot of the

administration, a lot of the teachers in the same conference room with 400

SRO's. I think that would be very beneficial if we had an equal

understanding of each one of what each one of us was doing, I think it

would kind of stop a lot of the confusion. When I first started, what we did

at one high school was completely different from what they did in another

high school, and I don't think it should necessarily be like that. It should

be a little more uniform, with the Maryland Center for School safety, their

training and stuff. I think it does make it a lot more uniform. But I would

say that combined training, so they have a perspective when we go to a

situation where we're thinking and vice versa, we understand what they're

thinking. And I think it would be a lot better than rolling with our pants on fire and hoping it works out for the best.

"SRO #5" reported:

I'm in elementary school regularly you can see although there's over 100 staff members, you can see that they are short and those other staff members do not…all 700 aren't kids that are sitting at their desk at all times and doing exactly what they're told. It's tough and I feel like the schools that get by with what they have, don't get any additional (training) because they get by with what they have like, hey, you guys' managed last year, could you manage again this year instead. The schools that are really struggling then they're like alright, we need to do something, their hand is forced versus kind of being proactive like hey, we got all these long-term subs that are getting zero training. Why don't we get them training, but, well, should we wait until something bad happens and then they say they weren't trained and then now our hand is forced to retrain them? We're training them so it's tough to see and this is just an outside of Birds Eye view looking in, they do seem short more often than not. At one high school year last year on paper, had the most issues than in the other school. And they had the smallest administration. And I'm like, man, how's this right? As we know there's a problem here. We can't fix this. Everything doesn't have to happen over the summer like we can integrate somebody in here new to help them out. So, it's small things like that that you see from the outside and you wonder why it's that way.

"SRO #9" reported that one of the difficult parts of their job as an SRO is:

> Dealing with parents, oddly more than anything the parents. A lot of parents think that their children do nothing wrong. So, trying to deal with them and trying to make them understand on an admin level of the school board itself, because sometimes maybe the school board or the admin here might not explain it as well. There's a lot of things that the admin or teachers cannot tell the parents about other students or whatever. I'm able to at least try to work that in to where I'm able to tell if your kid did this, the other kids getting punishment also, but they can't tell them that you know, so just trying to explain to the parents how things work. It kind of calms them down better than the admin trying to do it. So, I step in on that.

SRO #9 stated that bulling in their school:

> Normally goes to our admin which I may be familiar with the bullying and harassment form. I like to try to get involved with those just because I try to get both students, the bully and the person getting bullied in the same room together. Try to talk to them. Try to figure out what the problem is, why they're talking crap about each other and I try to explain if it gets to the point where law enforcement gets involved, depending on how they're being bullied, whether it's social media or if it's just in person or something like that, we can do harassment charges or telephone misuse charges, but obviously we don't like it to come to that if we don't have to.

"SRO #9" reported:

> They (local school systems) should have more admin trained on how we
>
> (SROs) interact with them, and we can be better with the program.
>
> Because I know talking to some of the other counties SROs, some of the
>
> schools don't want them there. So, our particular county loves us here and
>
> they actually want more. But just getting the admin and the teachers
>
> trained up on what we actually do. How much we help here daily.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided an overview of this generic qualitative study and research questions. The participant recruitment process was described in detail. The main criteria were that they were an SRO in Southern Maryland who currently worked in a school setting.

The data collection section included that the participants received the interview questionnaire in advance to allow them time to personally reflect on their experiences, perceptions, and training. The Interview Questions Framework contained 17 questions that investigated the SROs' background information, established adequate school coverage, demonstrated SROs' interpersonal skills, including communication and problem-solving skills, character, critical thinking skills, and ability to interact with children positively.

The data analysis section discussed the methods used to individually review each interview transcript and how patterns were identified. The use of a qualitative software program and manual coding was described to identify three major themes. The major themes were SRO Perceptions, Training, and Additional Resources. SRO Perceptions had a sub-theme of Building Relationships, which included concepts of trust, being

approachable, positive interactions, being playing and compassionate, as well as using communication as a tool. Training had sub-themes of Formal SRO Training and Crisis Training. This included training from NASRO, MCSS, CIT, and ICAT. Additional Resources included sub-themes in developing and using a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Camera Access, Power School eSchool Plus access, Additional SROs, Continued Training/Conferences, and Administration & SRO Collaboration.

In Chapter 5, the researcher will discuss the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications of the study on perceptions of school resource officers on their role in Southern Maryland Public Elementary Schools.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of school resource officers regarding the support SROs could provide to elementary schools to foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety. The research questions allowed the researcher to inquire about the SROs' perceptions of their roles in Southern Maryland public schools and what additional resources they needed to support their job.

The study allowed the SROs who were interviewed to reflect on what makes them good law enforcement role models for youth and how they gain the trust of students and staff. While the SROs are in the schools for overall school safety, they were able to consider what they believe is the most critical and difficult part of their job as SROs. Their training, continued training, and needed training were reviewed. Their views of how they apply de-escalation techniques with students they work with were disclosed in this study. The SROs were also able to provide recommendations to improve the SRO program in Southern Maryland.

Summary of Findings

The findings from the data revealed that SROs in Southern Maryland cover on average 2-3 schools each. They are often assigned to one main school and share time with one or two other schools. If they have one main school, such as a middle or high school, they may serve as adequate coverage for an elementary school. Some counties use an Adopt-a-School program to help get patrol officers in elementary schools to support the requirements of adequate coverage. Out of the ten SROs who were interviewed, only

three served as SROs full-time in elementary school. This is the first year in one Southern

Maryland county that SROs have been assigned full-time in elementary school. While

there were an additional three SROs who were assigned part-time or on an as-needed

basis in elementary school, the remaining SROs were assigned to other levels in public

schools, such as high school, middle school, career-technology academy, charter school,

or another academy.

The ten SROs who were interviewed all had similar perceptions on how they help

build the relationships within the school(s) with the students, staff, and administration. As

SROs, they all value the need to be seen in their building and not to be behind closed

doors of their office. Being seen in their building allows the SROs to be more

approachable by the youth in their building(s). Whether it be a simple hello, high five, or

fist bump, they strive to build positive interactions with their students, staff, and

administration. A common pattern was the use of play to build relationships. Several

SROs would find time to play basketball, dodgeball, or other types of games with

students. Some would use games as an incentive for those students who needed a little

more attention to support their behavior in the classroom. This allowed the SROs to be

seen more as humans and not so much as law enforcement officers. The SROs were all

very compassionate about the job that they do, and they really appeared to understand the

population that they work with. They continue to have open communication with

students, staff, families, and administration as much as they are permitted based on local

policy and law.

The ten SROs who were interviewed all have formal training that is related

directly to their job as a school resource officer. Seven of the ten SROs had training

through the National Association for School Resource Officers (NASRO). Five SROs took the basic course, one SRO took the basic and advanced course, and one SRO took the supervisor course. Their NASRO training varied from in-person or virtual based on when they took the course. The NASRO courses helped the SROs develop successful relationships with diverse students and support students with disabilities and behavioral health challenges. They learned best practices for de-escalation, behavioral threat assessment, emergency operations planning, and armed assailant response.

All ten interviewed SROs had formal training from the State of Maryland. Nine SROs specifically mentioned that they had training through the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) and one SRO had training through the Maryland Police Training and Standard Commission and was unsure if they had any training through MCSS. MCSS staff, along with state and local subject matter experts, provide classroom training to SROs and School Security Employees (SSE). In 2021, MCSS began updating its model SRO and SSE training. The specialized curriculum that was developed includes training on de-escalation, maintaining a positive school climate, constructive interactions with students, implicit bias, and disability and diversity awareness with specific attention to racial and ethnic disparities. The additions and changes will be built into a professional development class that will be made available to previously trained SROs and SSEs.

All ten interviewed SROs shared de-escalation techniques or strategies that they use to help support a student in crisis. Six SROs have Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training. During the CIT training sessions, participants learned about mental health law and emergency petition procedures, verbal de-escalation, traumatic brain injury, and developmental disabilities. Through community partnerships, participants heard personal

stories from individuals and family members living with mental health and substance abuse challenges. Officers also participated in role-play scenarios to demonstrate de-escalation skills and determined the best course of action for the scenario provided.

Four SROs specifically mentioned Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) training. ICAT training is an evidence-based approach to use-of-force. It equips first-responding police officers with the tools, skills, and options they need to defuse a range of critical incidents successfully and safely. ICAT is designed for situations involving persons who are unarmed or are armed with weapons other than firearms, and who may be experiencing a mental health or other crisis.

The ten SROs who were interviewed shared the need for additional support to help with their job function and to help enhance their working relationships within the schools they serve. While each county in Southern Maryland has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the local law enforcement agency (LEA) and local school system (LSS), it appears unclear as to whether each SRO and assigned school administration has a full understanding with the SROs job functions and overall expectations that are based on the MOU. Each year, staffing in the LEA and LSS change, and the MOU needs to be reviewed for accountability, transparency, and accuracy. Any changes need to be made to the MOU if there are discrepancies in the current school year's identified needs.

SROs' lack of access to cameras in their building was a common concern. There are some SROs who have no camera access, while others have live camera access, and some are getting access soon. Some schools only supply camera access to the School Security Employees (SSE), also known as Safety Advocates or Safety and Security

Assistants, who are local school system employees, and not the SRO, who is employed

by the local law enforcement agency. SROs shared that with live camera access, they

would be able to monitor more than one area in their building at once when they are not

actively walking the school campus inside or out or working or playing with students. An

LSS in Southern Maryland requires a court subpoena for an SRO to view recorded video

footage for an investigation, and that can cause a several-week delay in investigations.

While other LSSs, freely share the recorded video footage with SROs with the support of

a school administrator.

SROs' lack of access to Power School eSchool Plus was a common concern.

eSchool is a K-12 student information system. It is fully web-based, highly configurable,

and always accessible to LSS staff. It contains demographic information, parent or

guardian information, student schedules, testing information, and more. Parents and other

staff can be given access with limited configurations. The lack of access to eSchool for

some SROs impacts their ability to get basic demographic information to aid them in any

investigation at school in a timely manner. If they do not have access, they need to

contact a school employee who does have access, and that can cause a delay in the

investigation. It was also brought up as a concern during after-school hours. Examples

were shared about a student getting pulled over by a patrol officer or otherwise having

interactions with an officer for a safety or security concern. The officer may need quick

access to a student's basic demographics to contact a parent or have an address to where

the student lives. There were specific examples of a threat to self or others and lost

individuals with developmental or cognitive disabilities. The officers of some counties

can contact an SRO and the SRO is able to quickly access the information in eSchool. If

an SRO does not have access, the SRO would need to contact a school official in the hopes that they are able to quickly access the information in eSchool and share it with the SRO who would pass it along to the other officer at the scene. This can create a delay in service and could otherwise have serious implications for a student's well-being and safety.

The interviewed SROs shared a common pattern of wanting additional SROs to support schools in their LSS, especially in the elementary schools. The current SROs often support more than one school. Most of the SROs support secondary schools. With the addition of SROs, the LSS would have additional support at more schools in their county. Each county has adequate coverage for each school, under the definition in the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018. Unfortunately, that does not supply an SRO for each school. Some schools use the Adopt-a-School program. This brings patrol officers into the schools, but as soon as they have a call for service, they need to leave the school and respond to the call. This can greatly limit their time in the Adopt-a-School program and, therefore, impacts the relationships that they may be able to build.

The interviewed SROs shared a common pattern of the importance of continued training and conferences. Their in-service training often takes place over the students' spring break or summer break, in the efforts to keep SROs in schools while school is in session. The SROs shared how the NASRO or MCSS conferences were most effective and supported their job as SROs. They were able to choose breakout sessions that supported their personal learning and were able to network with other SROs in the State of Maryland and in the Nation as a whole. They were able to stay up to date on local and

national trends on varied topics in schools and review case studies, and learn about

updated laws regarding juveniles.

The interviewed SROs shared a common pattern of the importance of

administration and SRO collaboration. SROs saw the benefit of their NASRO and MCSS

training and want the administration to attend some of the training with them. This

collaboration would allow the administration and SROs to have a common language and

understanding of SROs in the LSS. NASRO reported that their basic SRO course would

also benefit school administrators and education professionals. The course allows

participants to gain a solid understanding of the responsibilities using NASRO's Triad

model of school-based policing. This categorizes the role of an SRO into three

interrelated concepts: mentor, educator, and law enforcement officer.

Interpretation of Findings

The SROs in Southern Maryland overwhelmingly enjoy building relationships

with the students, staff, and administration that they serve. They see the importance and

benefits of being assigned to one school, instead of sharing their time with multiple

schools. While building relationships within their school, they feel that they can foster

school-based policing and their roles as mentors, educators, and law enforcement

officers. The SROs are there to support students and do not have the mentality of a zero-

tolerance policy that contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline that some stakeholders

may have with the use of SROs in schools. Several SROs noted that it is very important

that an officer volunteer to be part of the SRO program. The local law enforcement

agency should not force any officer to be an SRO.

With the SROs training at the national and state levels and with some SROs having training at both levels, they understand and are equipped to deal with safety and security issues at the school and to support the overall mission of LSS to create lifelong learners who can make appropriate and safe choices. The SROs have crisis training that allows them to appropriately respond to varied situations and environments. Some initiatives within the LSSs have staff training that provides guidance on recognition and initial response to students experiencing mental health crises. Oftentimes, training for both SROs and administration or other school staff is limited due to timing and/or available funding in the operating budgets of both local LEA and LSS. The SROs recognize the additional need for school staff training, including long term substitutes, and additional staff members that are needed in the day-to-day operations in the schools. Although notable, that is out of the scope of this study.

SROs need additional resources to support their daily responsibilities. These vary by county and should be reviewed at least annually. The use of an MOU lays out the responsibilities of each party in the agreement. This would help eliminate most gray areas that may arise in individual school buildings. SRO access to live-feed school cameras should be granted as a safety feature to support the school community. Any need for recorded video should be granted without cause for delay in accordance with state policy. There appear to be varied levels of camera access available between counties in the same state. SRO access to eSchool should be granted if it does not violate FERPA. Each county's LEA and LSS need to work with their Board of County Commissioners or whoever oversees the funding that they receive for operations. The budget should include the resources needed to adequately staff all schools for the overall safety of a lot of

people in a small area that could be a potential target at any time. SROs' views on the continued training that has best supported their job functions should be considered by supervisors. This training should fully include school administration as much as possible for overall cohesiveness and smooth operations.

Implications of Findings

Both school officials and SROs want students to reach their full potential. With Maslow's self-actualization theory and hierarchy of needs, they realize that students need their basic needs met, including food, water, and safety, among other things, before students can prioritize education. All stakeholders need to work together to help with the basic needs, and in theory, the students will be able to build their self-esteem, demonstrate positive behavior, and be available for learning.

Students come to school with various levels of observable behavior. Some of those behaviors may be perceived as inappropriate for the learning environment. Using Freud's iceberg theory of the unconscious mind, stakeholders can start to identify and get to the underlying cause of the behaviors. The use of all resources including mental health professionals, SROs, families, teachers, and others, can come together with different pieces of the puzzle that are needed to support the behavior of students. Oftentimes, there are stakeholders that are not included in these collaborations, and that leaves gaps and room for interpretation that could be alleviated if all stakeholders were included.

The SROs who were interviewed for this study have voiced their perspectives regarding their strengths, weaknesses, concerns, and celebrations as SROs. The officials who are involved in developing policy and MOUs need to consider the staff who work on

the front lines in the school. They see things from a different perspective than a

supervisor or administrator who may not be in the school daily.

> While students do have protections under FERPA (2021), schools are allowed:

> > To disclose directory information without consent to appropriate officials
> > in case of health and safety emergencies and state and local authorities,
> > within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law. However,
> > schools must tell parents and eligible students about the directory
> > information and allow them a reasonable amount of time to request that
> > the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must
> > notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA.

It should be noted that records created by "law enforcement units" are not considered

education records and may not be subject to the privacy protections of FERPA. SROs

may be considered "school officials" with "legitimate educational interests" and have

access to student's education records, but only if they:

> > Perform an institutional service or function for which the agency or
> > institution would otherwise use employees; Are under the direct control of
> > the agency or institution with respect to the use and maintenance of
> > education records; Are subject to the requirements in § 99.33(a) that the
> > personally identifiable information (PII) from education records may be
> > used only for the purposes for which the disclosure was made, e.g., to
> > promote school safety and the physical security of students, and governing
> > the redisclosure of PII from education records; and Meet the criteria
> > specified in the school or LEA's annual notification of FERPA rights for

being a school official with a legitimate educational interest in the

education records.

Schools vary in who they authorize or designate to be their law enforcement unit. This

typically depends on the size and resources that are available. Some schools may

designate an assistant principal or other school official to act as the law enforcement unit

officer. Other schools may use local police officers and SROs as their law enforcement

officials. There appears to be room for interpretation in FERPA related to who and what

the law enforcement unit is and can do.

Maryland Center for School Safety promotes Safe Schools Maryland. This is

Maryland's only official anonymous and free reporting system that is available 24/7 and

365 days a year to students, teachers, school staff members, parents, and the general

public to report any school or student safety concerns, including mental health concerns.

When reports of immediate life threats or crimes in progress are made, the information is

sent to the LEA immediately. In situations where a credible tip is impending but not

immediate or information that is useful to the school, designated school officials are

notified through Safe Schools Maryland. In all situations, designated school officials are

notified for follow-up. The SROs shared that when an anonymous tip is sent in, it is

completely anonymous, and they need to use other investigative tactics in order to gain

knowledge of what happened. One SRO reported that he followed up with Safe Schools

Maryland regarding a tip to ask for additional identifying information and was told no

and to use other means to gain information. This reporting system should be more widely

advertised and used to support the safety of the schools.

Limitations of the Study

This study interviewed ten current SROs in high, middle, and/or elementary schools in Southern Maryland. There were limited SROs who could answer the interview questions based on working full-time in an elementary school. The SROs' answers to the interview questions had to be interpreted for meaning on how they could impact an elementary school.

Other limitations were only two counties in Southern Maryland participated in this study. A third county was contacted several times via email and phone with no return correspondence. The two counties that were included have similar demographics. The third county that was contacted is a very diverse county compared to the other two counties that participated. The varied demographics may have offered a different perspective.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research includes interviewing SROs after counties in Southern Maryland or other counties or states implement SROs full-time in elementary schools. The researcher recommends exploring the support that they give full-time to an elementary school and how the program is going, SRO perceptions, and what additional resources they need at that time.

The second recommendation for future research includes interviewing school staff on their perceptions of SROs in their building. The researcher recommends exploring what additional support the school staff needs to support the MOU and job functions of an SRO. The first and second recommendations could be used in a comparison study of perceptions and further training or needs between the school staff and SROs.

The third recommendation for future research includes interviewing former SROs and allow them to explain why they left their position as SROs. The researcher recommends exploring their perceptions and what support they felt that they needed and may not have received.

The fourth recommendation for future research includes exploring NASRO's triad model and how SROs could be better mentors/informal counselors and educators in schools and not just good law enforcement officers.

The purpose of this study was to fill gaps in the literature about SROs and their perceptions as they work in elementary schools and what additional resources, they need to support the Southern Maryland public elementary school students and staff. At the time of research, there were a limited number of SROs in elementary school to help with perspectives at that level.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that SROs can foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety at any school level that they are assigned to. Their perceptions demonstrate the importance of building relationships through trust, being approachable, having positive interactions with staff, students, and administration, being playful, showing compassion, and having good communication skills. Their formal training through NASRO and MCSS and their crisis training through CIT and ICAT have prepared them appropriately for their job as SRO. There needs to be a solid MOU that both the LEA and LSS can agree to and adhere to and make changes as needed based on current data and practical observations. SROs' access to cameras and eSchool should not be denied as long as it does not interfere with policy or law. Any policy should be

reviewed to see where SROs could be considered school officials or part of the law enforcement unit under FERPA. The LEA and LSS need to work together with any policymaker or budget auditor to see the value in continued training for both LEA and LSS stakeholders and the need for additional SROs to cover all schools on a one-school-to-one SRO basis.

SROs are trained first responders who are capable of handling emergencies of all types. If there was an SRO assigned full-time to all schools, including elementary schools, they would immediately be available to assist students, staff, and administrators during any emergency. With an SRO in each school, they would not need to leave when an off-campus emergency arises locally or at another school. They would be able to keep a safe and secure school campus and provide timely and accurate communications to school officials regarding any critical needs that may be happening on or off campus in the surrounding areas with their police radios, while they stay on the school campus.

SROs should be included in the day-to-day operations in a school setting. That would include committees such as the Crisis Team, School Improvement Team, and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). They would be able to stay up to date on all aspects of the school, including safety. They would be able to build and foster better relationships with all stakeholders. SROs should not be used to discipline students. Instead, used to build relationships within the school that they are assigned to.

Training and collaboration should occur between SROs and administration. The information should be shared equally with other school staff. This training and collaboration should be looked at by both the LEA and LSS. There is similar training that both parties participate in and it appears that neither side has a knowledge of what the

other is trained in. This training needs to continue to cover the diverse students in each school and may contain specific training or collaboration based on individual needs in each school.

In closing, the SROs are in the local schools to keep students safe. They want to keep building the program to the best that it can be in their county. They want to have access to cameras and eSchool, just like any other school official has in the building. SROs want continued training opportunities and collaboration with other SROs and administration to meet the needs of all learners and to keep safety at the forefront of their mission. The experiences and interactions within the school that they serve are abundantly positive. The LEA and LSS need to work together to review the noted strengths, weaknesses, concerns, and celebrations in order to make each county's SRO program stronger than it already is.

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Appendix A: Letter to County Sheriff

Date

Local Law Enforcement Agency
Address

Re: School Resource Officer Program in Elementary Schools Research

Dear sheriff,

I am Lori Lodge, a doctoral candidate with Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. My Ph.D. program is in Criminal Justice with a focus on Behavioral Sciences. I am currently working on my dissertation on School Resource Officer perspectives and how SROs can be effectively used to build positive relationships in all elementary schools in Southern Maryland.

A little bit about myself…I live in Southern Maryland and work for a local school system as a special education lead teacher.

Due to the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018, all our law enforcement agencies/school systems in Southern Maryland have reported adequate law enforcement coverage for elementary schools. Most of our local elementary schools share an SRO with a middle or high school. My research will help bridge the gap and support the use and need for a full-time SRO in all elementary schools in Southern Maryland. Each agency and public school system has reported a slightly different approach to overall school safety. Each one is positive based on the needs of the individual County.

My qualitative research will look at the perspectives of SROs and what additional support they may need to support our elementary schools. I am looking to interview 8-12 current SROs in Southern Maryland. The specific County and SRO personal identity will be confidential in my study reporting.

Please allow me to interview current SROs for my research. Each interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes and would be scheduled at the convenience of the SRO. These interviews could be conducted virtually as well. I am ready and willing to discuss this further with you or any staff to help clarify my intentions.

Respectfully,

Lori B. Lodge

Appendix B: Interview Questions Framework

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS ON THEIR ROLE IN

SOUTHERN MARYLAND PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study aims to investigate the perceptions of SROs regarding the support SROs could provide to elementary schools to foster positive interpersonal relationships while maintaining school safety.

Questions:

1) How many schools are you currently assigned to as an SRO? (Background info for R1)
   a. _____ 1 school
   b. _____ 2 schools
   c. _____ 3 schools
   d. _____ 4+ schools

2) Which school level are you currently assigned as an SRO? (Mark all that apply) (background info for R1)
   f. _____ high school
   g. _____ career-technology academy
   h. _____ middle school
   i. _____ elementary school
   j. _____ public-day school

3) As a School Resource Officer, have you ever been assigned full-time to an elementary school? (Background info for R1)
   a. _____ yes
   b. _____ no

4) If no to number 4, as a School Resource Officer, have you ever been assigned to an elementary school part-time or on an as-needed basis? (Background info for R1, establish adequate coverage)
   a. _____ yes
   b. _____ no

5) What characteristics make you a good law enforcement role model for youth? (R1 – demonstrates SRO's interpersonal skills, character, and ability to interact with children positively)

6) How do you gain the trust of students and staff as an SRO? (R1)

7) What does your typical workday look like as an SRO? (R1)

8) What do you consider to be the most important part of an SRO's job? (R1)

9) What is the most difficult part of your job as an SRO, and how do you handle that responsibility? (R1)

10) What training did you receive to become an SRO? (R2)

11) What de-escalation techniques are you familiar with, and how would you use those with youth? (R2 – demonstrates SRO's interpersonal communication and problem-solving skills)

12) What methods would you use to lessen or prevent bullying in the school? (R2 – demonstrates SRO's problem-solving and critical thinking skills)

13) What training do you have in working with students with disabilities or special needs (IEPs, BIPs, 504s)? (R2)

14) What types of continued training are helpful for SROs? (R2)

15) As an SRO, are you on school committees (School Improvement Team, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, etc.)? (R2)

16) As an SRO, are there any recommendations you would make to improve the program? (R2)

17) Is there any additional information that you would like to share? Comments, questions, or concerns? (follow-up)

If a participant's response to these questions seems incomplete or needs more detail for interpreting meaning, the researcher will use probes or follow-up questions to elicit further discussion.