

Who are School Resource Officers?

A School Resource Officer, also known as an SRO, is defined by the United States Department of Justice as "career sworn law enforcement officers with arrest authority who have specialized training and are assigned to work in collaboration with school organizations. The National Association of SROs has defined a "triad" of common duties of SROs. This triad is comprised of "the roles of law enforcer, counselor/ mentor and teacher." (Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018)

However, the duties of SROs vary depending on the school districts and schools to which they are assigned. All schools want SROs to contribute to student safety through law enforcement. Some also emphasize establishing a positive relationship between the SROs and students. For example, some schools have SROs teach a class so they can have an opportunity to interact with students in a positive way.

Data collected by the United States Department of Justice found that the most prevalent duties of SROs reported by both primary and secondary schools were "coordinating with local police and emergency teams, enforcing security/patrolling, and identifying problems in the school and proactively seeking solutions." (Musu-Gillette et al., 2008)

How Many Schools Have SROs?

The presence of SROs has steadily increased. According to United States Department of Justice statistics, 72% of high schools in 2015-2016 school year had SROs, compared to 63% in 2005-2006. The same trend was found in primary schools (45% during the 2015-2016 school years, 26% in the 2005-2006). Secondary schools in suburbs and cities have more SROs than those in rural areas or towns.

And, schools with a higher percentage of minority students have more SROs. The data indicate that 58% of secondary schools with less than 5% designated as minorities had SROs. while 82% of those with more than 50% minority students had security staff.

Are SROs Armed?

While the data on are limited, the figure on the next page graphically suggests percentages of SROs who routinely carry specific types of weapons when on duty. This set of data indicates that 86-96% of SROs and other security staff in secondary schools carry a firearm; in both primary and secondary schools, it is the most common weapon; a large percent also carry chemical aerosol sprays such as pepper spray and a stun gun.

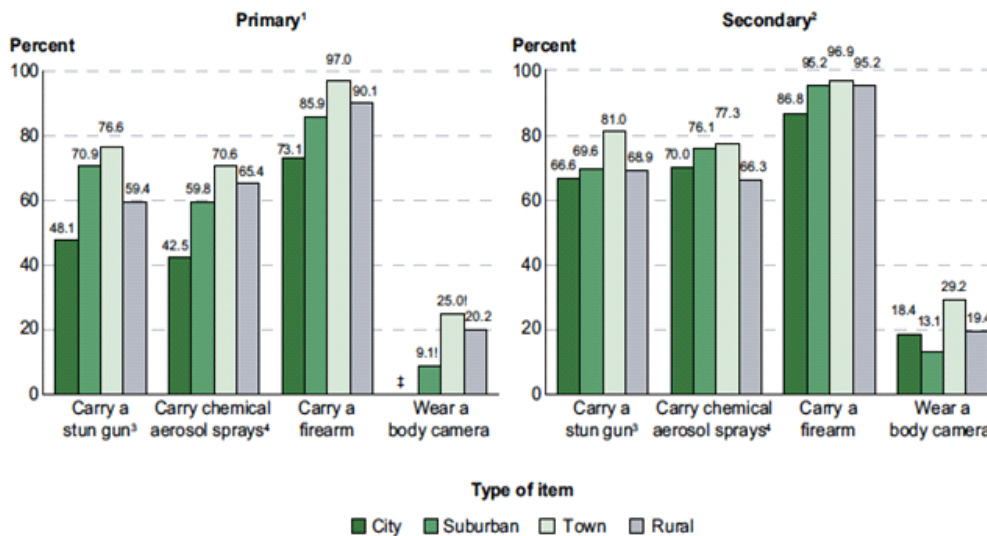
Question: *Given the instances of police officers shooting unarmed minorities, how does the presence of armed police officers at schools make students of color feel?*

*The material in this document reflects work done by Allegra Collins as part of her involvement with the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA.

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¹ Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
² Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.
³ Primary schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not higher than grade 3 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 8.
⁴ Secondary schools include both middle and high schools as well as combined schools. Middle schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 4 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 9. High schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 9 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 12. Combined schools have any combination of grades (including K-12) that is not defined specifically as primary, middle, or high school.
⁵ The questionnaire cited a Taser gun as an example of a stun gun.
⁶ The questionnaire provided the following examples of chemical aerosol sprays: Mace and pepper spray.
 NOTE: Sworn law enforcement officers include School Resource Officers as well as other sworn law enforcement officers who are not School Resource Officers. School Resource Officers are sworn law enforcement officers with arrest authority who have specialized training and are assigned to work in collaboration with school organizations. Responses were provided by the principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. "At school" was defined to include activities happening in school buildings, on school grounds, on school buses, and at places that hold school-sponsored events or activities.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015-16 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2016.

What are the Rights of Students at School?

Students have less rights on a K-12 school campus than off. While the United States Supreme Court decided in *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969) that students do not "shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate," subsequent cases have imposed limits. For example, the standard for a school official to search a student is lower than for police searches. To avoid violating the fourth amendment, police need probable cause (i.e., that the person "has committed a crime, is about to commit a crime, or that evidence of a crime will be found in the search" (Bracy, 2010). However, the U.S. Supreme Court (in the case of *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*) ruled that schools only need to have reasonable suspicion that a school rule has been broken to search a student. The Court reasoned that school officials need a lesser standard in order to have the "flexibility to maintain order and discipline in their buildings while still protecting students' legitimate expectations of privacy" (Bracy, 2010).

Concerns have been raised that the school setting is enabling police officers to get around their constitutional restraints. A study conducted by Brady (2010) found that schools had policies that allowed SROs to frequently circumvent the "probable cause" standard. For instance, some had policies that allowed SROs to be present when school officials searched students, even when the violation of school rules did not break a law (e.g., leaving school during school hours). Then, if the searcher found drugs on the student, the observing officer would have evidence of an illegal act.

Schools also circumvent student's rights when questioning them about school rule violations. While police officers have to read a suspect their Miranda rights before questioning, school officials do not have to caution students. Brady (2010) notes that this freedom from cautioning students has been extended to SROs in their capacity as school representatives.

The problem, of course, is that, as sworn police officers, SROs are mandated reporters. So when they learn a crime has been committed, they must arrest the person and the justice system takes over.

Concluding Comments

School Resource Officers (SROs) in K-12 schools are intended to make schools safer, possibly deter crime, and enhance feelings of safety. Their presence on campuses accomplishes this for some students. However, concerns have been raised about the impact on some subgroups.

Given that significant subgroups of students have reason to fear and distrust police, schools can expect conflicts that are generated by the tension between these students and SROs. Such conflicts usually result in negative actions and exacerbate negative feelings *on all sides*. This is a dilemma school districts increasingly wrestle with as SROs become a major presence.

Also see

>the Hot Topic entitled *More Police on School Campuses?* by Allegra Collins –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/hottopic.htm>

>the School Practitioner Community of Practice & Exchange discussion of
School Resource Officers
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner\(10-17-18\).pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner(10-17-18).pdf)

Some References Used in Preparing this Information Resource

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