

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**The Benefits of a School Resource Officer Program
to School Districts and Law Enforcement Agencies**

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ABSTRACT

Recent incidents of violence in public schools within the United States have brought the subject of school violence to the forefront as a major concern for many citizens. Even though recent figures showing a decrease in juvenile violence are encouraging, they have not minimized the concern of the general public for the safety of children on school campuses. Because of this, there has been an increased focus on preventing violence in public schools (Kellam, Prinz, & Sheley, 2000).

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not school resource officers are beneficial to the overall safety of school campuses. In addition, this research will show how having a school resource program is beneficial to police departments to provide these officers in school districts. In order to gather information on this topic, there will be several methods of inquiry used for research. The basic research will consist of an internet search of other articles on school violence and school resource officers. In addition, research will include reviewing any books and periodicals that may have been published on this particular topic. These two strategies may only provide general information on this topic. Therefore, additional information will be provided through the use of surveys. These methods of inquiry will be used to gather all available information to assist with obtaining data to provide current information.

It is anticipated that this research will show that school resource officers are beneficial to school districts in assisting with curtailing school violence, while, at the same time, remaining beneficial to the agencies that employ the officers. School Resource Officers (SRO's) remain beneficial to their respective agencies by providing

invaluable information on any criminal activity that may be occurring not only on school campuses but in the community. In addition, school resource officers show their value to police department administrators by acting as a liaison between the police department and the school district. An effective school resource officer program will assist the department with its relationship with the community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	3
Methodology	9
Findings	10
Discussions/Conclusions	12
References	14
Appendices	

INTRODUCTION

The issue to be examined in this research paper is whether or not school resource officer programs are beneficial to school districts and police departments. This topic is relevant to law enforcement because of the issue of school violence and because law enforcement officers being stationed in schools would deter school violence. School violence is an issue that is at the heart of many parents as they send their children to school each day. With the reports of school shootings and gang activity in the news each day, many school administrators are often faced with violence on their campuses and feel as though their hands are tied when it comes to punishment.

Many students go to school in fear on a daily basis, not knowing what will take place on their school campus on any given day. This fear affects not only the learning environment, but the various functions that schools coordinate for students. It is hoped that this research will demonstrate that an effective school resource officer program will assist school administrators with maintaining order on school campuses and give parents and students a greater sense of security, while still providing valuable intelligence to police agencies. The field of law enforcement will be influenced by the findings of this research by having a better understanding of the benefits of an effective school resource officer program and how it assists with the police department's overall community policing function.

School violence is a serious issue in public schools across the United States. School violence is not only a concern for parents, but for students, teachers, and school administrators as well. Parents are emotionally affected because they are concerned about the safety of their child on the school campus. Teachers are concerned because

school violence disturbs the learning environment as they deal with students who may be affected emotionally by the events that are occurring on their campus. School administrators are affected because they are trying to keep the campus safe and provide an environment where students can thrive. Because of these issues that parents, teachers, and administrators are facing, many are looking to law enforcement to assist with providing a safe learning environment on school campuses. Many police departments have responded to this concern by providing uniform police officers to school campuses to assist school administrators with the growing problem of school violence.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the school resource officer program and to evaluate what advantages it has provided to school districts and police departments. This research will concentrate on whether the SRO program is a vital part of their local police departments and whether or not they have had a positive impact in the school environment. The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, internet sites, books, a survey distributed to 250 faculty members at A&M Consolidated High School in College Station, Texas, and a survey of law enforcement agencies within the state of Texas. The anticipated findings of this research are that teachers, students, school administrators, and police administrators will see the benefits of having a SRO program in local school districts. The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research by having a document that has clearly outlined the purpose of the SRO program and its benefits to the agency and local school districts. This document will assist police administrators with data needed that can be reviewed and assist them with

the overall decision making process as it pertains to funding and allocating personnel to such a program.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

School violence represents a broad range of acts from assault to homicide. School violence involves acts by students that are perpetrated against other students, teachers, and school administrators. In addition, parents, teachers, and school administrators are concerned about drugs, weapons, and gangs on school campuses. Because of these issues, the need for preventive measures has been recognized by everyone. In addition, school administrators and law enforcement has also looked at what factors influence school violence. It has been found that even though one factor in particular has not been found, a number of factors may contribute to violence in schools. Johnson (1999) observed that there are many factors that may contribute to violence in public schools, including poverty, conflicting value systems, materialism, exposure to violence, and a disintegrated home environment. It has also been theorized that violence in schools actually may begin in neighborhoods outside of school and eventually spills over into the school environment. Many schools in metropolitan areas that have neighborhoods that are characterized by poverty, housing projects, and children from low socio-economic backgrounds find that they have problems with drugs and violence in schools

Due to recent reports on school shootings, it appears that school violence may be escalating. Shootings have occurred in high schools, such as Columbine, and in colleges, such as Virginia Tech University. With this increase, school districts have been looking to adapt new programs that may assist teachers and school administrators

with decreasing the fear of violence in schools. Most school districts have implemented programs that introduce police officers as a part of the overall plan to protect students and staff on school campuses. School districts began partnering with local police departments to place officers on campuses to help reduce the fear of crime and to provide a police presence on campuses. These initiatives assist in providing a different variety of strategies to address the numerous factors that may contribute to the source of school violence. One program that involves the placement of officers on school campuses is the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program.

The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO, n.d.) identified that the SRO Program involves the placement of police officers in public schools. One of the first SRO programs in the nation originated in Fresno, California, in 1968. In this particular program, the Fresno Police Department sought to encourage positive relationships with students and assist school personnel with security on school campuses. Through this program, the officers eventually partnered with other community agencies to integrate a variety of services that could be beneficial to the overall objectives of the school district.

NASRO (n.d.) observed that the philosophy of placing officers in schools began with the increase in school violence and the acknowledgement that other resources needed to be examined to assist in establishing methods for the reduction of violent incidents on school campuses. The placement of police officers in public schools began as an unconventional option to assist in the reduction of the various incidents that are occurring on school campuses. The assumption is that when officers are highly visible in schools, then it would reduce and prevent incidents of violence and other crimes on

school campuses. The initial placement of officers in schools was an effort to have officers from the department to act as a liaison between the department and the school district. Because of the collaborative efforts between police departments and their local school districts, school resource officers are now considered a vital part of the security for school campuses and have assisted in providing a sense of safety for students and staff on the campuses.

Burnett (2002) observed that even though officers were placed on campuses, there were still some obstacles that had to be overcome in order for the officers and administrators to work together. Some of the obstacles that had to be overcome dealt with the officers and administrators relationships. Even though they were both there to provide a safe environment on the school campus, they still had to understand the other entity's roles and incorporate that into a good working relationship. One such obstacle was that school administrators were tasked with was the responsibility of introducing the SRO's to the school community in a partnering capacity and not in an adversarial role. In addition, officers and administrators had to work through reporting issues regarding campus offenses.

DeVoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder, and Baum (2005) observed that in the years prior to his report, the trend of students becoming victims of crime on school campuses had decreased. He also mentioned that some students experienced more incidents off of school campuses than they encountered on school campuses. In addition, he found that the amount of non-fatal offenses outnumbered the incidents of student fatalities and that teachers faced instances of victimization from students. DeVoe et al. (2005) also

stated that the instances of teacher victimization occurred more in the higher educational levels of school systems in urban areas.

The presence of officers on school campuses is a trend that has been increasing throughout the country and may have contributed to the decrease in non-fatal offenses mentioned in DeVoe, et al.'s (2005) report. Many school districts have implemented increased security measures on their campuses, which includes providing police officers on a full-time basis to assist school administrators. When officers are on school campuses, they are available to help detect, report, and record any activity that takes place. In addition, officers assist in improving the image of their police department by providing opportunities for community relations through participation in school and student activities.

Finn (2006) observed that having officers placed in schools produced a positive affect with the police department and the local school districts. The officers assisted administrators and also gave the teachers and students a sense of safety on the school campuses. The benefits the SRO program provided was beneficial to all entities involved and assisted in facilitating more collaborative efforts between the police departments and school districts. In addition, the SRO program was so beneficial that school districts would seek to identify various sources of funding to assist with the cost of placing officers in the schools.

Some districts use an alternative method to attempt to reduce the amount of incidents that occur on their campuses by engaging educational programs that are taught by police officers. These programs, such as Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT), Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), and Police Athletic

Teams (PAT) offers advice to youth on resisting gangs, drugs, and handgun violence. The purpose of this research is to examine the impact that School Resource Officer programs are having in schools and whether or not they are beneficial to school districts, police departments, and the community.

As SRO's developed their relationship with school administrators, their roles began to expand, and they became included in more of the daily operations on the school campuses. The main question that must be asked is whether or not the SRO program is effective and whether it has been beneficial to both the police department and school districts. In order to determine whether or not SRO programs are beneficial, this research will examine both the traditional and educational styles of SRO programs.

Jackson (2002) observed that the traditional style SRO program encompasses having school resource officers on school campuses for enforcement purposes. The primary purpose of the SRO, under this style, is to have the SRO's strictly on campus to reduce incidents of school violence and assist school administrators with reducing the fear of crime. In this particular style, SRO's may write students citations for fighting or arrest the student if the altercation leads to an assault incident. In addition, SRO's assist school administrators with incidents involving drugs, gangs, and other criminal activity. The SRO's may guest lecture in classes on topics involving the dangers of drinking and driving, crime scene investigation, and case investigation. It is during these class sessions that many SRO's establish a relationship with teachers as well as students. The SRO's will conduct these duties during the school year and then return to regular patrol duties during the summer months.

When the SRO's return to their agency at the end of the school year, the agency typically places the officers on patrol and uses the officers in that area until the school year begins again. Police administrators normally favor this style of SRO program due to the police officers returning back to patrol during the summer months without being concerned that officers will be busy attending school in-service sessions at school and not be used by the police agency on a consistent basis. The majority of the police departments in the United States that have SRO programs favor the traditional style SRO program. Even though the majority of police departments favor the traditional style SRO program, the educational style SRO Program has been adopted by some agencies as well.

The educational style SRO program involves having police officers become certified school teachers and teach criminal justice classes in the high school. The high school classes offer dual credit to participating students by offering credit toward high school graduation and college credit at a local junior college. This allows students who have a serious desire for a career in law enforcement the opportunity to learn more about the law enforcement field. In addition, the students have the opportunity to be taught by police officers who have many years of valuable experience in the law enforcement field. The law enforcement officers that are in the educational style of the SRO program also perform duties that traditional style SRO's performed. Even though the educational style SRO program is rare among the nation's police departments, many officers appear to like them, whereas administrators have mixed feelings concerning the program. Many officers like the educational style program because it allows the officer more access to students in the classroom, and it allows the student

more opportunities to truly understand what law enforcement is actually about. Many students get their views of police work from popular police shows, such as “Law and Order” or “CSI,” and they have a misperception of what true police work actually entails.

However, many police administrators have mixed feelings about the educational style SRO program. Even though administrators like the idea of having officers in the classroom more under this style, they do not like the idea of the officer not being available during the school year and also part of the summer, when schools are out. SRO’s must spend time during the summer months working on curriculum for the law enforcement classes that they must teach. Because of this, the officers lose time on the streets patrolling and eventually lose valuable law enforcement skills that they have learned through their years in the law enforcement field. Many chiefs express the concern that they lose this officer to the schools for most of the year and have to eventually retrain them in order for that officer to be useful to the department during times of an emergency.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not school resource officer programs are beneficial to both school districts and law enforcement agencies. The researcher hypothesizes that SRO’s are beneficial to both school districts and law enforcement agencies. The methods of inquiry that will be used include a review of school resource officer programs at other agencies, internet sites, and a survey distributed to school district personnel. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher’s findings regarding the SRO program will include a survey of school district teachers and administrators and law enforcement administrators. The size of the

survey will consist of nine questions, distributed to faculty members from A&M Consolidated High School in College Station, Texas. The survey was distributed to 250 faculty and administrators, and 100 surveys were returned for a 40% response rate. The information obtained in the survey will be analyzed by law enforcement administrators to assist in determining the effectiveness of the program in the local high school. In addition, a survey consisting of ten questions will be made available to law enforcement administrative staff through the internet survey tool titled Survey Monkey to determine whether or not they felt the SRO program in their agency was beneficial to the agency. The survey will be posted for 14 days and made available to law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas. Notification of the survey was sent to police administrators at agencies in the Brazos Valley region and on the website for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. There were 16 respondents to the law enforcement administrative staff survey. While it is unknown the number of potential respondents, agency personnel were notified either through email to an administrative assistant or by phoning the agencies administrative personnel directly.

FINDINGS

To assist with obtaining the findings, 250 surveys were given to school administrators and teachers at A&M Consolidated High School. Of the surveys that were handed out, 100 were returned for a 40% response rate. Of the respondents, 98% were aware that there were two SRO's on the campus and 2% were not aware. Ninety-four percent had spoken to an SRO, while 4% had not. Eighty-six percent understood the duties of a SRO, but 14% did not. Eight percent had a SRO speak in their class, and 92% did not. Eighty-six percent stated that they felt the school was safer with

SRO's on the campus, but 4% did not, and 10% did not respond to the question. In addition, 99% stated that they believed that the SRO's demonstrated an effort to build good relationships with teachers and staff at the school, but 1% did not. Ninety-six percent thought the SRO's behaved in a friendly and courteous manner, while 1% did not, and 3% did not respond to the question.

In addition, a survey was conducted amongst law enforcement administrators from surrounding agencies, such as the Bryan Police Department, Brenham Police Department, Caldwell Police Department, and Navasota Police Department as well as accredited law enforcement agencies that are similar in size to the College Station Police Department, which has 114 sworn officers. The survey was offered on the website, Survey Monkey, to allow the administrators easy access to the survey and for assistance with the analysis of the survey results. There were 16 responses to the survey. Of the respondents, 100% had a SRO Program, 93.8% had a SRO Program for over ten years, and 6.2% had a SRO program for between five and ten years. Of these agencies, 100% of the agencies had a traditional SRO Program; 100% believed the SRO's enhanced the safety and security of the school campus; and 100% believed that the SRO's are a vital part of the police agency. It was also found that 87.5% believed that the SRO's shared information on a regular basis, while 6.2% said that they did not, and 6.2% was not sure. Additionally, 93.8% believed that the SRO's were an effective liaison between the police department and the school district, but 6.2% were not sure. One hundred percent believed the SRO's were beneficial to the police department and the school district, and 25% had conducted a survey with their local school district, while 75% did not. Of those who conducted a survey with their local school district, 40% of

the school district staff were between 95 and 100% satisfied with the SRO program, 40% were 90 to 95% satisfied, and 20% were 85 to 90% satisfied. The graphs and tables in Appendix 1 show the breakdown of the survey that was conducted at A&M Consolidated High School. The survey of law enforcement officers in reference to the SRO program is in Appendix 2.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not school resource programs were beneficial to school districts as well as police departments. The purpose of this research was to determine the effectiveness of the SRO program in school districts and police agencies. The research question that was examined focus on whether school district staff felt safe with SRO's on their campus and whether police agencies felt that SRO's were a vital part of the police agency. The researcher hypothesized that SRO programs are beneficial to school districts and police departments. The researcher concluded from the findings that SRO Programs are beneficial to school districts and police agencies. The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to the presence of police officers on campus causing school district staff to have a better sense of security than if officers were not present. Many times just having an officer present can provide a sense of safety to someone in the vicinity of the officer. In addition, having police officers in the local schools allows administrators to have a sense of security in believing that if a major incident did occur on a school campus, there is a trained officer present to deal with the situation.

Limitations that might have hindered this study include that not all of the respondents conducted a survey of their local school districts. Of the respondents who did conduct a survey, they stated that at least 85% of their school district's faculty was satisfied with the SRO Program. In addition, another limitation that might have hindered this study is the limited amount of administrative personnel in neighboring police agencies. Many of those agencies are smaller in size in comparison with the College Station Police Department and may only have two or three upper-level administrators in their agency. The survey was not made available to all officers because they do not oversee the program within the police agency and are not responsible for the overall budgetary considerations concerning the program as a whole. Therefore, there are many factors that may have limited the number of responses to the law enforcement portion of the SRO survey. In addition, even though the survey was sent out on Survey Monkey to other agencies within the state of Texas, other agencies may not feel the obligation to respond to the request to complete the survey.

The study of the effectiveness of the SRO Program is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it provides another resource of information for law enforcement agencies who may be considering implementing a SRO program in their agency. Contemporary law enforcement stands to benefit from this research because it will allow them to have additional information concerning the SRO program and assist in making a determination as to whether or not to implement such a program in their agency. This will assist them in making a sound decision as well as limit the possibility of wasting valuable tax dollars on a program that may not succeed.

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APPENDIX 1

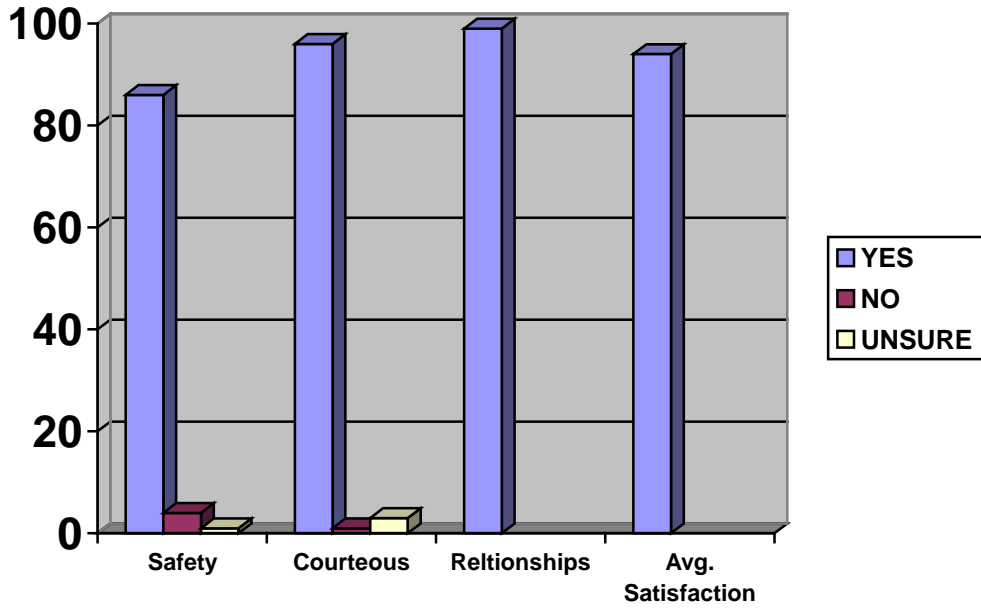


Figure 1. A&M Consolidated High School Survey Responses

Table I. A&M Consolidated High School Survey Responses

	Safety	Courtesy	Relationships	Average Satisfaction
YES	86	96	99	94
NO	4	1	1	
UNSURE		3		

APPENDIX 2

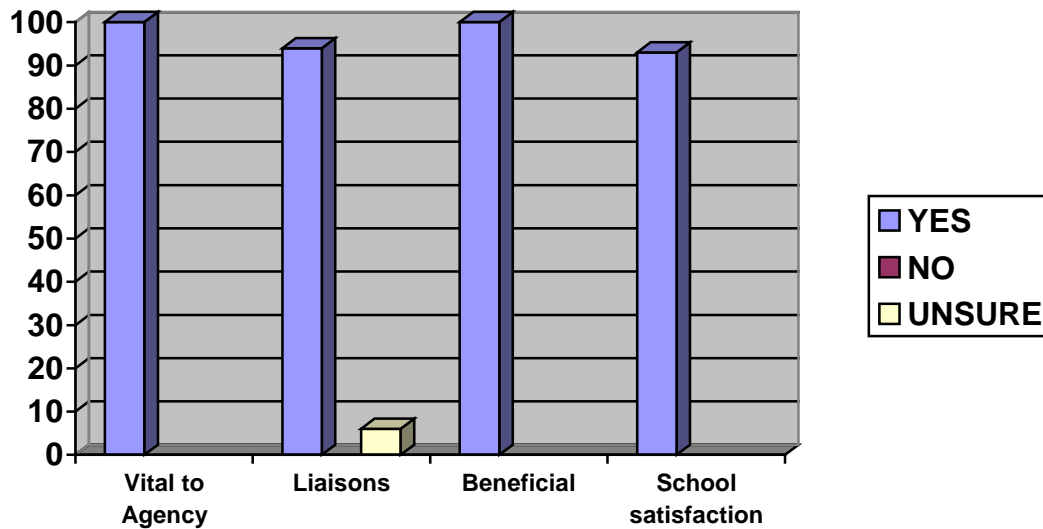


Figure 2. Law Enforcement Agency Survey Responses

Table II. Law Enforcement Agency Survey Responses

	<u>Vital to Agency</u>	<u>Effective Liaisons</u>	<u>Beneficial</u>	<u>Avg. School Satisfaction</u>
<u>Yes</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>94%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>93%</u>
<u>No</u>				
<u>Unsure</u>		<u>6%</u>		

APPENDIX 3

College Station Police Department Teacher Survey – School Resource Officer Program

As a part of city government, the College Station Police Department submits quality management statistics as an indication of customer service satisfaction. With this requirement in mind, we are asking for your response to the following survey. The purpose of the survey is to assess the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program and to determine where better quality of services may be provided. Please answer the following questions by circling the appropriate answer. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this survey.

1. Were you aware that a SRO was assigned to your school?

Yes

No

2. Have you had an opportunity to speak with a SRO?

Yes

NO

3. Do you understand the duties of the SRO?

Yes

NO

4. Has a SRO spoken in your class?

Yes

NO

If yes, how would you rate the SRO's presentation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Poor Fair Excellent

5. Do you feel that the school campus is safer with a SRO?

Better Worse No Change

6. Do you think the SRO demonstrates an effort to build good relations with the teachers and staff on campus?

Yes No No Opinion

7. Do you think the SRO behaves in a friendly and courteous manner?

Yes No No Opinion

8. In your opinion, has the SRO had a positive effect on the student body?

Yes No No Opinion

9. Overall, what is your opinion of the SRO Program?

Satisfactory Unsatisfactory No Opinion

10. Please write any additional comments you may have.

APPENDIX 4**POLICE DEPARTMENT ADMINISTRATORS – SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER SURVEY**

1. Does your agency currently have a School resource Officer (SRO) Program?

YES

NO

2. If so, how many years has your agency participated in the SRO Program?

1-5 years

5-10 years

10 or more years

3. Is your agency's SRO Program considered a traditional program or are the SRO's primarily teachers in the classroom (educational)?

Traditional program

Educational program

4. Do you believe that the SRO's enhance the safety and security of the school campus they are assigned to?

YES

NO

NOT SURE

5. Do you believe that the SRO's are a vital part of the police agency?

YES

NO

NOT SURE

6. Do the SRO's and patrol officers share information on a regular basis?

YES

NO

NOT SURE

7. Do you believe that the SRO's serve effectively as a liaison between the police department and the local school district?

YES

NO

NOT SURE

8. Do you believe that the SRO Program is beneficial to the police department and the local school district(s) it serves?

YES NO NOT SURE

9. Did your agency conduct a survey of the SRO Program with the local school district(s) it serves?

YES NO

10. If so, what percentage of the faculty and staff were satisfied with the SRO Program?

95-100% 90-95% 85-90%