

**The Bill Blackwood
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Police Departments in Independent School Districts

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ABSTRACT

Should school districts implement their own police department in school districts? Is there a difference in having an independent school district police department, compared to having a school resource officer on campus, or not even having a police officer on campus at all?

Since the tragic event in Columbine High School, on April 20, 1999, more and more citizens within a community are being overly concern with safety issues when it comes to their children in educational atmospheres. In 2004, more and more citizens are forced in being concerned with safety issues involving foreign terrorist attacks and threats towards human nature and our children today.

In reviewing the methods of research you will find that there are several types of books, magazines and websites supporting the concerns on safety issues in educational atmospheres, rather it is in homeland security, major universities or in with my paper suggestions, secondary schools.

In conducting several surveys throughout the school districts, you will find that the results are basically the same when it comes to safety concerns. You will find that it doesn't matter rather there is an independent school district police department on campus or even if there is a contractible school resource officer on campus, the major focus is having a safety educational atmosphere.

The conclusion is simple, noncomplex and in today's society, people would rather have some type of law enforcement official on campus to assist administrators in communicating with safety issues, and protecting tomorrow's future leaders, today.

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INTRODUCTION

There are several types of law enforcement agencies throughout the state of Texas. Police Departments such as municipal police departments, county sheriff's departments, state police departments, and in today's society, one commonly known as independent school district police departments. There are several reasons why independent school districts should form their own police department. This paper is intended to provide the benefits of having a police department and officers in the independent school district.

Since the tragic event in Columbine High School, on April 20, 1999, in Littleton, Jefferson County, Washington, two students went on a shooting spree. Another reported incident where disgruntled students smuggled high-powered weapons on to a high school campus and carried on a shooting spree, leaving dead bodies and bloody carnage behind. (Hasday, 2002) It happened in Moses Lake, Washington, West Paducah, Kentucky, Jonesboro, Arkansas, San Diego, California, and in Springfield, Oregon. Since these tragic events, citizens have changed their outlook on having police officers in public schools. These events would change everyone's life and safety concerns in public schools today. Parents no longer feel that schools are the safest place for their children. In the 1960's and through the 1970's more reports of school shootings were being reported through worldwide news media, making citizens aware of school violence.

One of the first American high-profile schools shootings took place in Grover Cleveland Elementary, San Diego, California, on Monday, January 29, 1979, involving a sixteen-year-old female, identified as Brenda Spencer. It was reported that sixteen-year-old Brenda Spencer, stated that she did not like Monday's and decided to take aim using a high power scope on her .22 caliber rifle, shooting at the school, across the street, from her home (Grapes, 2000). School board members are feeling the pressures of citizens in the community requesting law enforcement throughout public schools. More and more independent school districts are forming police departments for concerns of human safety. There are several reasons for having an independent school district police department. Police officers in school districts play a major role in the deterrence of school violence among students today. In providing police officers in school districts, they're able to provide comfort to staff members feeling vulnerable as victims of school violence. School districts are now implementing new policies into their procedure manuals such as the zero tolerance policy for students (Ayers, 1997). Independent school district police departments are now requiring more in-service training for officers, such a first responder training and homeland security training. Since the 1980's and the early 1990's, reports of more and more students are committing acts of violence within public schools today. In the new millennium, it seems students are no longer are afraid of bringing weapons to school and carrying out threats of violence against classmates and professional educators.

Student involved in classroom disruptions are also the rise. Administrators and educators are being discouraged from performing "paddling" as a form for discipline today. School administrators and educators are now relying on another form of discipline; know as "law enforcement". Students deciding to continue the path of

misbehaving and causing classroom disruptions are being faced with opinions in receiving school discipline and also receiving a municipal citation given by officers in the school district (Fein, 2002). Independent school district police officers are responsible for a larger jurisdictional area and tend to have greater authority involving school issues, compared to districts contracting municipal officers known as “SRO’s” school resource officers. Independent school districts typically contract SRO’s due to budget restraints, with a one time annual cost to the district and no employee benefits. In comparison to independent school district officers, the district is accountable for salaries, benefits and providing a percentage of the cost in health insurance. In listing one of the benefits of having an independent school district police department, the officers have the authority of assisting administrators with enforcing student code of conduct. The independent school district officer relies more on enforcing the education code, but also have the authority to enforce all other Texas statutes. If research shows correctly, then it will be beneficial for all school districts to formulate their own independent school district police department, opposed to contracting outside agencies to police independent school districts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The benefits of having an independent school district police department are much greater today, than it has been proven in history years. There are several benefits to having an independent school district police department, in which I am going to list a few in detail and the justifications in having a department within a school district. In having an independent school district police department, the officers are able to build a rapport with the students that attend the district. Students looking for advice, tend to feel much

more at ease in talking with an officer that they see everyday. Students tend to build a comfort zone with an officer that they can trust and confide in. It has been a prove fact that students who build-up anger or depression, will tend to keep their feelings inside and keep more to themselves. In doing this, most students that decide to release this type of feeling build-up, usually will seek revenge or commit some type of illegal form of violence in seeking approval or acceptance among their peers. Some students will also look for a way out and try to escape this type of feelings, instead of talking to someone and will attempted suicide. Furthermore, it has been proven that students who tend keep to themselves usually will be labeled as a “loner” and sometimes find themselves as a victim of “bullying” among other students who feel that the loner are somewhat different or even better than they are (Law Advisory Group, Inc 2003). In building a student and officer relationship, students will have another alterative to speak to someone about problems other than just counselors.

Students who seek professional advice tend to shy away from counselors, afraid of being seen going into counselors office, and later being criticized by other students, thus becoming another form of “bullying”. The response time of an officer responding to a call within the district is much less than having to wait for an officer to respond from outside the district. Another advantage in having an independent school district police department, the officer will have a first hand knowledge of the structure and lay out of the school. With having knowledge of the structure in the school, will benefit if a crisis were to occur within the school district, giving the advantage to the officer, and not the person within the school attempting to commit the violent act. The school district officer will be considered as the first responder and in having previous training, in first responder school, will benefit for the district officer and other resources responding for

assistance. The school district officer will have first hand knowledge in every point of entry and exits of the school, including hallways of the school. School district officers should have keys to every school and a master pass code for disarming and arming alarms. School district officer will be able to coordinate a system in case an intruder is trespassing within the school district, known as “shelter in place”. School district officer will be responsible for patrolling around the school district and knowing what vehicle should and should not be on school property, by some way of form of authorization such as assign parking space, within the school parking lot.

School district officers will be able to coordinate any type of disasters with school administrators and other resources, such as nature disasters, thus utilizing the “shelter in place” in more than just a trespasser on school grounds. School district police officers are responsible for many duties within the school districts such as, patrolling the outside and the inside perimeters of the schools. The school district officers are also responsible for responding to calls of service, which include investigating criminal offenses. School district officers also prepare offense reports and complaints provided by students and members of the community. School district officers also prepare reports for prosecution and for court purposes. School district officers as a last resort arrest students for violating the law and arrest perpetrators of offense. While conducting random patrols of all district facilities, school district officers also enforce traffic laws and issue misdemeanor traffic citations (Katy ISD Police Department, 2004). School district officers also provide a crime stoppers phone line for students wishing to report a crime on or off campus, thus receiving an anonymous reward for their tip. School district officers furthermore, assist bus drivers who are having problems with students not wanting to listen to the driver and/or not following instructions or rules of the

transportation code. School district officer will go to the location where the bus driver has to stop and assist the driver in keeping order on the bus, so that other students can get home or to school in a timely manner. School district officers can also take off the bus any student not wanting to follow directions given by the bus driver and can issue a citation for the offense of disruption of transportation.

School district officers will have the parent's pick-up the student from the police department after that student is removed from the bus. School district officer are also able to fill out school discipline on the student who was removed from the bus and the recommend that the student receive bus suspension for disruptive behavior. School district officers are responsible for investigating any threats made against the school, including bomb threats or threats made from students to students and/or school administrators. School district officers also are able to provide (k-9) drug-sniffing dogs to search the outside perimeters of the school such as, vehicles, lockers and even the hallways including the bathrooms for illegal contraband within the school. Drug-sniffing dogs can even be use as a deterrent, if no contraband is found. If a school district chooses not to purchase a drug-sniffing dog, then they have an opinion to contract a k-9 from an independent agency, in which the school district officer will escort the k-9 handler throughout the school advising the person where the administrator would like for them to search the school. If the k-9 alerts on a specific area or locker than it is the school district officers responsibility to contact the administrator and have that student called out to conduct a search of his or her belongings. Furthermore, if the k-9 alerts on a vehicle outside in the parking lot area, it is the administrator responsibility after receiving information, to call out the student and request permission to search his or her vehicle. School district officers also have access to computer cameras that are

mounted throughout the school district for security concerns and safety reasons. If a criminal case has to be prepared for court purposes, then it is the school district officer responsibility to look in the computer camera and retrieve the image for trail against the accuser.

All evidence found on suspects is kept in a safe coded evidence room for trial purposes and are prepared by the school district officer. The school district officer also maintains control of all metal detectors throughout the school for students to enter through in searching for weapons on or about his or her person. School district officers are also equipped with hand held metal detectors for searching students in extra-curricular activities, such as sports or dances provided by the school district (Trump, 1998). School district officers will also make appearances in school board meetings to maintain security and peace among the school board members and the community. School district officers are trained to handle angry parents or members of the community, when school issues arise that are not resolved in an adult manner, thus also maintaining a peaceful solution. With school district officers reduce the victimization with staff administrators and students, thus making the school a reduce crime free educational atmosphere. School district officers are trained to use the minimal force necessary when the potential of severe injury occurs to students, or when a staff member acts in anger, or when an action is disproportionate to the need. School district officers prepare and handle all truancy cases throughout the district. School district officers will go to the residences to pick-up students who miss their transportation or if they are refusing to come to school. In preparing truancy, the school district officer will be a representative of the school and will also take an administrator being that of a

principal or assistant principal to appear in court. Fines will be assets to the parents who are in violation of the law in refusing to send their child to school.

Students will be put on probation through was is called a fail safe program, in which students will have to sign in for the morning hour, the noon hour and after school, showing they were present during school, until there probation is completed. Violating such probation will put the student enrolled in boot-camp for a period of 3 to 13 weeks as punishment. The parents can also be ordered by the Justice of Peace, to attend classes with the student, thus having them go to every class with their child to make sure they are attending each period, so that the student will not skip class. In doing this, the Justice of Peace can also order that the parent take their child to and from school everyday, thus leaving the responsibility to the parent, to be a parent. School district officers also provide perfect attendance awards to students to who attend school daily without missing a day throughout the year, and this is a positive reassurance to the students and the to the members of the community and not just using the district officers as a disciplinary person for the school district. School district officers are a positive role model for the students in assisting in their decision when they complete their senior year and are confused as to what life holds for them. School district officers attend the graduation and congratulate the students who have completed their years in grade school and also hold a presence as deterrence to those who choose to violate the law. School district officers maintain traffic control during the graduation ceremony, thus making the entry and exit of all members of the community safe, including the students attending. School district officers play a major factor in the safety of all members and students within the community, making it a positive and a more of a relaxed educational atmosphere.

METHODOLOGY

School district officers are the first line of defense for any school administrator, student and member of a community. The benefit of forming a school district police department compared to contracting school resource officers is a major decision for any school district board. School districts do not have to make a determination as to what officers are patrolling the district, if a school district chooses to have their own police department. There are several times that school resources officers, tend to get “burned out” of working in the school atmosphere and usually request to change their setting and return back to the streets, to regain their mentality in law enforcement. With a school district officer, the district will usually have the district officer on an on call basis to reassure that someone is capable to respond to all district calls, including alarms. Furthermore, with a school district officer, that officer will stay with that department and not have the option to leave the department and be transferred back to the community or street atmosphere. In forming a school district police department, the school district will gain more with the community, students and staff members of the district. This costing the district more money to establish the school district police department, but soon will save the district money when the department is organized and managed properly. The students and members of the community will appreciate the safety concerns the district has for the future leaders of America. In making the school setting a better, safer, and less vulnerable of a crisis occurring. Research will suggest to show this benefit of having a school district police department opposed to hiring a contractible school resource officer from outside the school district.

Research will suggest that having a school district police department is that much greater than not have an officer, in the school district at all. Research will suggest that

having a school district police department is even much greater in today's society, than having a security officer in the school district. Research will predict that my findings will show all these listed factors by conducting several surveys. One survey will be prepared and presented to the student body of the senior class and the same survey prepared and presented to the freshman class. This survey will show that the results will be the same for both classes in having a school district police department, than having a contracted school resource officer and greater than having security guard or not having an officer on campus at all. Researcher will prepare and present a second survey to the administration and the same surveys presented to the staff (teachers) of the school district and predict that the results will be the same as the student body. Researcher will also review books that have been written about the presence of the having a school district police department and the results are the same benefits as the surveys presented. Researcher will search magazines and newspaper articles and find that the results match all listed materials. Researcher will review pamphlets presented by the secret service with surveys as to the importance of having a school district police department, compared to not an officer in the school district. All findings will show that the community also feel the importance of safety within the school district is imperative and of the utmost importance to having a safe educational atmosphere. This is what the findings will show with no question as to why each school district should and will, in the future to come in having a school district police department.

FINDINGS

In reviewing the benefits of having an independent school district police department in comparison to having a contracted school resource officer, or having a security guard and even having no officer on campus, the results are unanimous. A

survey was conducted and research was reviewed on all findings. In survey 1, which was conducted by students in the ninth and in the twelfth grade, the compared results showed that there is a higher need for the independent school district officer, than the contracted school resource officer, the security officer and even the non-officer on campus. In survey 2, which was conducted by administrators and teachers, the compared results again showed that there is a higher need for the independent school district officer, than the contracted school resource officer, the security officer and even the non-officer on campus. In reviewing survey #1, 20 out of 50 students, felt safe with school district officers on campus, compared to not agreeing, rarely agreeing, likely agreeing and sometimes agreeing, which was 40% of the votes in favor of school district officers on campus. Furthermore, in survey #1, students would rather have school district officers on campus in favor of 32%, which were 16 out 50 votes. In reviewing survey #2, 11 out of 20 administrators and teachers, felt safe with school district officers on campus, compared to not agreeing, rarely agreeing, likely agreeing and sometimes agreeing, which was 55% of the votes in favor of school district officers on campus. Furthermore, in survey #2, administrators and teachers would rather have school district officers on campus in favor of 45%, which were 9 out of 20 votes. According to the Family Education.Com, there were 10,355 cast votes on School Police.

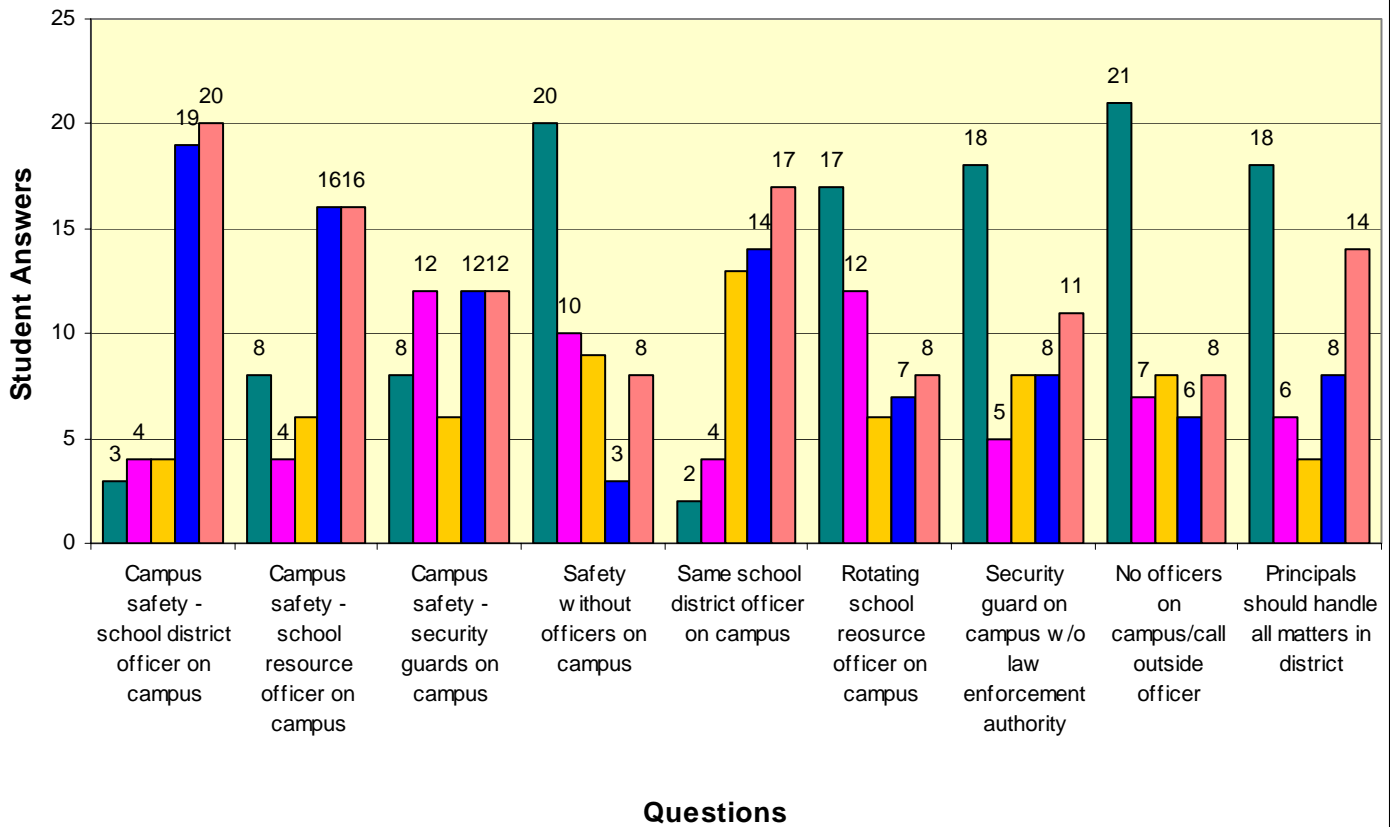
The question asked was, “Do you favor assigning police officers to public schools to increase security and reduce the threat of violence? In the survey conducted, 66% voted yes in favor and 29% voted no and 3% voted no opinion (Family Education, 2000-2004). In the context of Preparing Police to Work in Schools, it was quoted that, “today, more than ever, it is essential that communities, businesses, parents, and students work together to develop a disciplined environment where learning can take place” (Cusi,

2001). It has been stated on the topic of School police force a powerful tool for state's largest system in the Gwinnet Daily Post, that after forming a school resource officer in March 13, 1979, that Justin Bush, 16, stated that having a resource officer on campus doesn't really make him feel any safer. But, saying that there are not as many fights on campus. According to the Justin Bush in the interview, he stated that "having the resource officer around doesn't make that much of a difference to him". According to the school incidents for the year of 2002 discipline, violations reported as 598 disorderly conduct incidents and 642 threats made for that year (Sarrio, 2002). As an educator, a parent a member of the community, you have to ask the question, is there a need for law enforcement on school grounds? There are more and more crimes committed each year against school students, rather it is in Lawrenceville, or even in Angleton, Texas, the need for law enforcement is critical. The school safety is important for everyone attending public school today.

SURVEY 1

<u>QUESTIONS/ANSWERS</u>	<u>Do Not Agree</u>	<u>Rarely Agree</u>	<u>Likely Agree</u>	<u>Sometimes Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
Campus safety - school district officer on campus	3	4	4	19	20
Campus safety - school resource officer on campus	8	4	6	16	16
Campus safety - security guards on campus	8	12	6	12	12
Safety without officers on campus	20	10	9	3	8
Same school district officer on campus	2	4	13	14	17
Rotating school resource officer on campus	17	12	6	7	8
Security guard on campus w/o law enforcement authority	18	5	8	8	11
No officers on campus/call outside officer	21	7	8	6	8
Principals should handle all matters in district	18	6	4	8	14

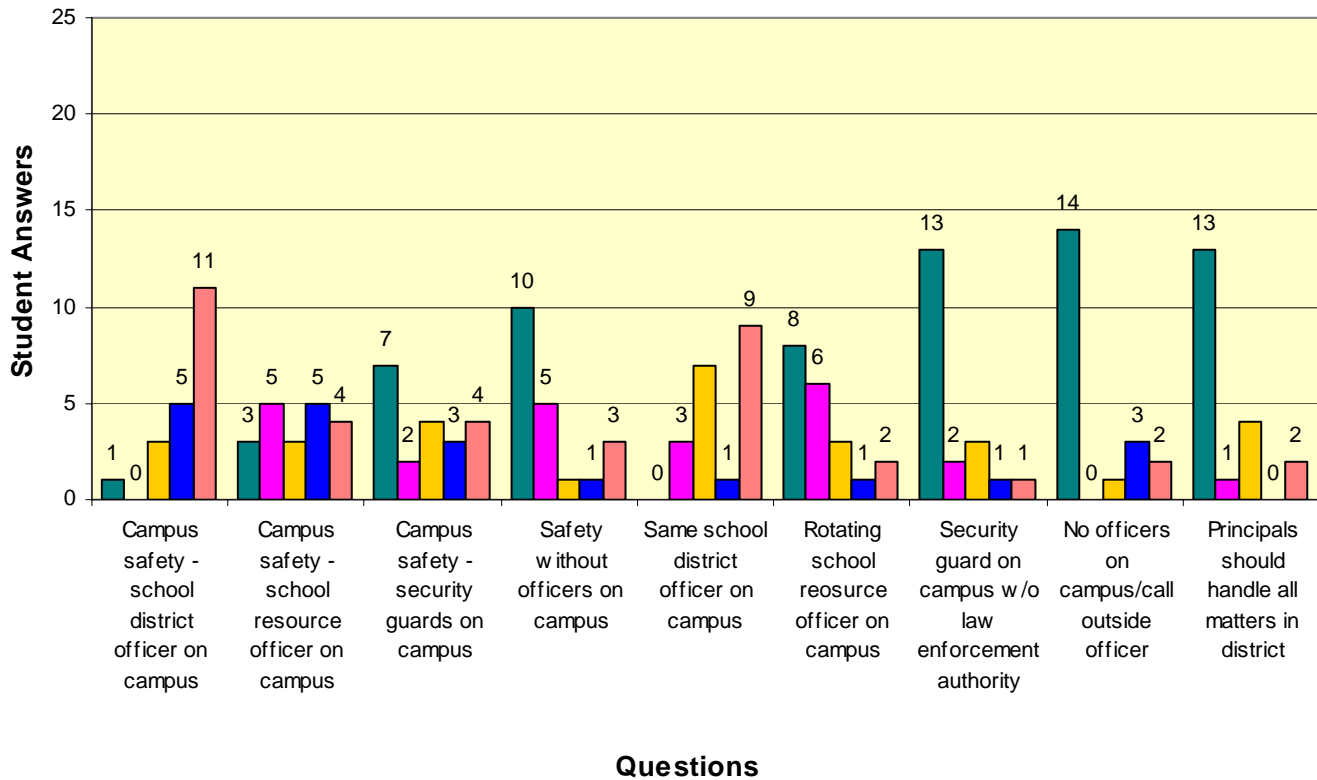
<u>Student Answers</u>	<u>Do Not Agree</u>	<u>Rarely Agree</u>	<u>Likely Agree</u>	<u>Sometimes Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
I feel safe with ISD Police Officers on Campus.	6%	8%	8%	38%	40%
I feel safe with SRO on School Campus.	16%	8%	12%	32%	32%
I feel safe with Security Guards on Campus.	16%	24%	12%	24%	24%
I feel safe without an officer on School Campus.	40%	20%	18%	6%	16%
I would rather have ISD Officers on Campus.	4%	8%	26%	28%	34%
I would rather have rotating SRO on School Campus.	34%	24%	12%	14%	16%
I would rather have Security Guards on Campus.	36%	10%	16%	16%	22%
I would rather have no officers on campus and call outside officer to campus.	42%	14%	16%	12%	16%
I think School Principals should handle matters on campus.	36%	12%	8%	16%	28%

Survey 1

SURVEY 2

<u>QUESTIONS/ANSWERS</u>	<u>Do Not Agree</u>	<u>Rarely Agree</u>	<u>Likely Agree</u>	<u>Sometimes Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
Campus safety - school district officer on campus	1	0	3	5	11
Campus safety - school resource officer on campus	3	5	3	5	4
Campus safety - security guards on campus	7	2	4	3	4
Safety without officers on campus	10	5	1	1	3
Same school district officer on campus	0	3	7	1	9
Rotating school resource officer on campus	8	6	3	1	2
Security guard on campus w/o law enforcement authority	13	2	3	1	1
No officers on campus/call outside officer	14	0	1	3	2
Principals should handle all matters in district	13	1	4	0	2

<u>Student Answers</u>	<u>Do Not Agree</u>	<u>Rarely Agree</u>	<u>Likely Agree</u>	<u>Sometimes Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
I feel safe with ISD Police Officers on Campus.	5%	0%	15%	25%	55%
I feel safe with SRO on School Campus.	15%	25%	15%	25%	20%
I feel safe with Security Guards on Campus.	35%	10%	20%	15%	20%
I feel safe without an officer on School Campus.	50%	25%	5%	5%	15%
I would rather have ISD Officers on Campus.	0%	15%	35%	5%	45%
I would rather have rotating SRO on School Campus.	40%	30%	15%	5%	10%
I would rather have Security Guards on Campus.	65%	10%	15%	5%	5%
I would rather have no officers on campus and call outside officer to campus.	70%	0%	5%	15%	10%
I think School Principals should handle matters on campus.	65%	5%	20%	0%	10%

Survey 2

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Research after research has shown that the times have changed from the past to the present. The need for law enforcement in public schools is now. In surveys, in books, magazines or newspapers, it has been shown that school violence occurs everywhere there is a diverse community. The threat of school violence is here and no one or community is immune to the violations of the law. The threat of violence is being committed, not just with adults but more so with children, teenagers and young adults. To answer the question in the introduction page, should school districts have independent school district police departments or contracted school resource officers, or security guards (non-law enforcement) or not even have law enforcement on school grounds. The answer is simple, rather it is independent school district police departments or contracted school resource officers, every school should have some type of law enforcement on campus. Should law enforcement be on campus one day out of the week or everyday of the week, the community makes the decision and the need is always left up to the school district and officials. The benefits of having an independent school district police department or having a contracted school resource officer, is one in the same, depending on much money a district wants to spend in there annual budget. The districts will pay every year once a year for the law enforcement officer on campus and with this will be able to gain response to incidents, conducts investigations as needed, make arrests and referrals, works with juvenile authorities and communication with other agencies and lastly and most importantly, is a link between the police and the school community.

The law enforcement officer acts as a deterrent and along with the staff, and often mediates problems that arise between students. The administrators, teachers and the students make up the community in the school district and the school board answers to the demands of the school community, thus making the school districts a safer and learning educational atmosphere.

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