

Improving School Resource Officer Programs to Address Issues Posed
by School-to-Prison Pipeline Research

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Improving School Resource Officer Programs to Address Issues Posed
by School-to-Prison Pipeline Research

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ABSTRACT

In response to mass shooting incidents and the perception that overall school crime and violence was increasing, many schools in the United States felt compelled to respond with strategies designed to improve school safety and climate. One strategy that has experienced a significant increase in popularity since the 1990s is the presence of sworn law enforcement officers on school campuses through school resource officer (SRO) programs. While SROs enjoy broad support among stakeholder groups and are credited with improving school safety and climate, school-to-prison pipeline research has asserted that SROs may unnecessarily criminalize acts of student misconduct which should be handled only as school disciplinary matters. This paper will discuss research regarding SRO programs and the school-to-prison pipeline with the goal of identifying methods to improve SRO programs in order to mediate any negative impacts that SROs may have on the students with whom they interact.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Approval Page | 1 |
| Title Page | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Abstract | 4 |
| Table of Contents | 5 |
| I. Introduction | 7 |
| II. Literature Review | 9 |
| a. School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs | 9 |
| i. Defining SROs | 9 |
| ii. History of SRO Programs | 11 |
| iii. Growth of SRO Programs | 14 |
| iv. Roles of SROs | 16 |
| v. Data Supportive of SRO Programs | 22 |
| vi. Data Unsupportive of SRO Programs | 27 |
| b. The School-to-Prison Pipeline | 31 |
| i. Defining the School-to-Prison Pipeline | 31 |
| ii. The Role of Zero Tolerance Disciplinary Policies | 34 |
| iii. The Role of SROs | 37 |
| iv. The Role of Increased Security Measures | 39 |
| v. Adverse Impacts of the School-to-Prison Pipeline | 41 |
| vi. Criticism of School-to-Prison Pipeline Research | 43 |
| III. Theoretical Framework | 46 |

| | | |
|-----|---|----|
| a. | Differential Association Theory | 46 |
| b. | Labeling Theory | 48 |
| IV. | Suggestions for Improving SRO Programs | 50 |
| a. | Implementing Memoranda of Understanding | 50 |
| b. | Improving SRO Selection Processes | 54 |
| c. | Training Enhancements for SROs | 57 |
| d. | Improved Evaluations of SROs | 60 |
| V. | Conclusion | 63 |
| VI. | Reference List | 66 |

INTRODUCTION

The position of School Resource Officer (SRO) has become an important fixture in many American educational settings. In many cases, SROs are brought into schools as a remedy to real or anticipated safety concerns. While the presence of police officers in educational environments is hardly a new development, the growth in the popularity of full-time SRO programs over the past quarter-century has been exponential. SROs provide a variety of important services at their assigned schools, many of which are intended to increase school safety by addressing and preventing incidents of student misconduct. However, some researchers have indicated that the presence of an SRO in a school may lead to the unnecessary criminalization of some acts of student misbehavior. These researchers assert that the increase in the number of SROs in American schools has resulted in students being referred to the juvenile justice system for actions which previously would have been handled only as school disciplinary matters. Often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, this practice is believed to have multiple negative, long-term consequences for justice-involved students. In response, some school-to-prison pipeline research has called for the discontinuation of most police-school partnerships, including the removal of SROs from American schools.

Research regarding SRO programs and the school-to-prison pipeline has identified potential improvements to SRO programs which could alleviate some of the issues proposed by school-to-prison pipeline research, including the possible criminalization of student misconduct by SROs. These program improvements have the potential to provide a more formalized structure for SRO programs, codify intergovernmental agreements between school districts and law enforcement agencies, ensure that SROs are well-suited and properly-trained for their unique duties, and allow for both SROs and SRO programs to be evaluated in an appropriate manner. In addition, these improvements can enhance the transparency of SRO programs by allowing more stakeholders to be involved in the implementation and evaluation of SRO programs. If properly implemented, these improvements could forestall efforts to remove SROs from

American schools and allow SROs to continue their efforts to enhance school safety and improve opinions about the police among school-aged youth.

This paper will seek to address the concerns raised by school-to-prison pipeline research through improvements to SRO programs in American schools. First, SRO programs will be discussed by exploring the history of SRO programs, the various roles played by SROs, the growth of SRO programs in the United States, the many different definitions applied to SROs, and data regarding the value and effectiveness of SRO programs. Next, school-to-prison pipeline research will be explored, including the definition and history of the school-to-prison pipeline, the role of zero tolerance discipline policies, the impact of enhanced school security measures, the role of SROs and the police, criticism of school-to-prison pipeline research, and the potential adverse impacts that the school-to-prison pipeline can have on students who are referred to the justice system for school-based offenses. Criminological theories relevant to SRO programs and the school-to-prison pipeline will also be discussed. Lastly, research-based recommendations for improving SRO programs in response to school-to-prison pipeline concerns will be offered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SRO programs have become important parts of schools' overall approaches to enhancing school safety and improving school climate. Thousands of SROs are currently assigned to work in schools in United States and around the world. There are many different definitions for the SRO position, reflecting the numerous and varied roles that are performed by SROs. Research has demonstrated broad support for SROs' abilities to prevent and reduce delinquency, improve feelings of safety at schools, and build positive relationships with students and staff members. However, some research has demonstrated that SRO programs may not be as effective as believed and that the implementation of SRO programs may have been haphazard, leading to role confusion and conflict.

School-to-prison pipeline research has expressed concerns that the combination of zero tolerance discipline policies, enhanced school security measures, and increased police involvement in matters of student misconduct may have long-term negative consequences for students who are excluded from school attendance and referred to law enforcement for school-based incidents. These consequences are believed to impact poor, minority, and disabled students both adversely and disproportionately. Some research has asserted that the increased popularity of SRO programs was directly responsible for the school-to-prison pipeline because SROs criminalized acts of student misconduct which otherwise would have been handled only as school discipline matters. Other research has disputed these claims.

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAMS

Defining School Resource Officers

Among the biggest challenges when discussing SROs was locating a common definition for the position. Due to the lack of a nationwide framework, SRO programs have a variety of different definitions. Coon and Travis (2012) and Girouard (2001) noted that definitions often varied from one jurisdiction to the next and Robles-Piña and Denham (2012) added that the many different ways that SROs were contracted have led to the lack of a common definition for the SRO position. For example, the National Association

of School Resource Officers (NASRO) limited its definition to commissioned or sworn law enforcement officers who worked under the title of SRO, campus police officer, or school safety liaison (Canady, James, & Nease, 2012). President Obama's administration defined SROs as specially-trained police officers whose actions should supplement evidence-based school discipline policies (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). The most commonly cited definition (Carroll, Ben-Zadok, & McCue, 2010; Girouard, 2001; May, Fessel, & Means, 2004; Merkwae, 2015; Theriot & Cuellar, 2016) came from the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act which classified an SRO as "a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with school and community-based organizations." This definition reflected that most SROs worked in educational settings on a full-time basis, but were employed by, and subject to the requirements of, their employing law enforcement agencies. Most SROs were employed by municipal or county law enforcement agencies, but assigned to work with one or more schools following models that ranged from crime prevention approaches to traditional reactive enforcement (May et al., 2004). The purposes assigned to SRO programs also varied. According to Brown and Benedict (2005), the main purpose of SRO programs was to increase the amount of communication, contact, and cooperation between juveniles and the police. From a social control perspective, the presence of police in schools was viewed in terms of using an educational setting to identify and address delinquency (Burton, 2017). NASRO stated that the goal of SRO programs was:

to provide safe learning environments in our nation's schools, provide valuable resources to school staff, foster a positive relationship with our nation's youth, and develop strategies to resolve problems affecting our youth with the objective of protecting every child so they can reach their fullest potential. (Canady et al., 2012, p. 3)

SRO programs were often viewed as an extension of the community policing efforts which have dominated the American law enforcement community for over two decades. SROs were employed as resources to not only the school itself, but to the entire school community as an important part of many

community policing programs (Denham, Robles-Piña, Polnick, & Webb, 2016; Lamont, Macleod, & Wilkin, 2011) and have been implemented by school districts to reduce crime and the fear of crime on their campuses (Maskaly, Donner, Lanterman, & Jennings, 2011). Canady et al. (2012) stated that SRO programs were part of a collaborative effort between police departments, schools, and the community to provide safe learning environments and ensure that the needs of all students were addressed. According to Carroll et al. (2010) and Coon and Travis (2012), SRO programs were often considered a part of agencies' crime prevention approach to juvenile problems encountered by communities. Under this rationale, SROs were part of a long-term crime reduction plan which started with efforts to change attitudes within the community, then moved on to strategies to prevent and reduce juvenile delinquency, and concluded with the outcome of producing productive, law-abiding adults (Carroll et al, 2010). However, Myrstol (2011) found that the majority of the public continued to view SRO programs primarily as a crime control strategy.

History of School Resource Officer Programs

Although SRO programs may still be viewed by some as a fairly recent development in American policing, there was a long and extensive history of partnerships between law enforcement agencies and educational institutions. According to Burton (2017), the first documented police-school partnership occurred in California during the Progressive Era of policing in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Referred to as Coordinating Councils, law enforcement and educators worked collaboratively to detect delinquency, obtain information to assist street-level policing, and control juvenile behavior through legal judgments. Led by well-known police reformer August Vollmer, Coordinating Councils focused on behaviors such as truancy, untruthfulness, and theft, leading to a peak of 253 delinquency referrals to the police from Berkeley schools in 1926. Although the main function of these initial police-school partnerships was for educators to provide intelligence about delinquent behavior to the police, it also led to beneficial delinquency prevention initiatives such as police-organized youth sports leagues and rehabilitation-focused juvenile justice efforts.

The popularity of Coordinating Councils waned in the 1950's, but the concept of police-school partnerships had gotten its start. The San Francisco Police Department began regularly assigning officers to work in schools in 1942 and the Los Angeles School Police Department was established in 1948 (Watkins & Maume, 2012). In comparison, the United Kingdom did not begin assigning officers to work full-time in schools until 2002 (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). The first SRO-style program was initiated in Flint, Michigan in 1958 and was followed by a similar program in Fresno, California in 1968 (Canady et al., 2012). However, the term SRO was first employed by the Miami Police Department sometime in the 1960's (Coon & Travis, 2012). Other early-adopting agencies of SRO programs were located in Tucson, Minneapolis, and Cincinnati (Watkins & Maume, 2012). Student rights movements in the 1960's and 1970's brought the police into schools more frequently as school administrators sought to maintain their legitimacy through delinquency-control techniques which viewed juvenile delinquents as future criminals as opposed to youths in need of rehabilitation (Burton, 2017). The Charlotte Police Department created the Officer Friendly Program in 1971 to place officers in classrooms with the intent of reducing racial tensions and promoting a positive image of the police with the city's youth population (Coon & Travis, 2012). The number of SRO programs grew in the 1960's and 1970's, especially in Florida, but stagnated in the 1980's (Girouard, 2001). However, an emphasis on police-school partnerships continued. For example, in 1984, Congress passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act which mandated that schools receiving federal funding create multidisciplinary teams which included law enforcement representation to combat crimes against youthful victims (Canady et al., 2012). Police Foundation (2016) added that the advent of programs such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) and Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) also increased the involvement of police officers in schools.

Despite these developments, the full-time presence of sworn law enforcement officers in schools was not predominant prior to the 1990's. The number of SROs increased throughout that decade based on several factors. First, the public began to view schools as unsafe due, in part, to a media-driven perception that violent crime in schools was rampant, but mostly due to 15 active-shooter incidents which occurred on

American school campuses between 1993 and 1999 (Canady et al., 2012). Among these acts of school violence were shootings which occurred at schools in West Paducah, Kentucky in 1997, Springfield, Oregon and Jonesboro, Arkansas in 1998, and the well-publicized incident at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999 (Myrstol, 2011). These incidents damaged the perception that schools were sanctuaries of safety and learning which were immune to the violence present in surrounding communities and students' homes (Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, & Donner, 2011) and impacted students, staff members, and parents both physically and emotionally (May & Higgins, 2011). Price (2009) stated that increased school violence caused crises at many school districts and negatively impacted teachers' morale. As a result, "the SRO is becoming a vital agent into accomplishing increased safety from violence" (Shuler-Ivey, 2012). Swartz, Osborne, Dawson-Edwards, & Higgins (2016) concluded that the influence of school violence continued to play an important role as mass shooting incidents, such as the 2013 attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School, persisted in occurring.

Second, in 1998, the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services began offering grants of up to \$125,000 to departments that deployed officers to work in schools. The grant program had awarded over \$400 million by 2000 through the Cops in Schools program (Briers & Dickmann, 2009), was extended in that year with another \$68 million in funding (Girouard, 2001), had awarded over \$420 million to 1,800 law enforcement agencies to place 3,800 SROs by 2001 (May, Hart, & Ruddell, 2011), and was credited with placing over 6,500 SROs in schools by 2005 (Coon & Travis, 2012) at a total cost of over \$750 million (Merkwae, 2015). Myrstol (2011) stated that the primary objectives of Cops in Schools programs were increasing student and campus safety and encouraging collaboration between schools and the police on issues of school safety.

Third, the increase in SRO programs was part of the wave of community policing programs that were instituted at departments across the country in the 1990s and driven by the over \$8.8 billion in community policing grants that were issued by the federal government starting in 1994 (Carroll et al., 2010). Denham et al. (2016) stated that crime prevention may have been the initial intent of school-based policing

programs, but concluded that community policing made SROs a permanent presence in America's schools. Today, the popularity of SRO programs has led many state legislatures to include SROs in school-safety legislation and mandate the reporting of specified offenses on school properties to law enforcement (Canady et al., 2012). Finally, according to Theriot and Cuellar (2016), President Barack Obama's 2013 plan for increased school safety proposed funding for an additional 1,000 SROs nationwide.

Growth of School Resource Officer Programs

The many different variations of SRO programs made it somewhat difficult to conduct an exact count of the number of SROs in the United States. According to Girouard (2001), "the concept of what constitutes an SRO varies from one State or local jurisdiction to another, making counting of the number of SRO's difficult" (p. 1). However, some data existed to document the growth in the number of SROs, beginning with the inception of such programs several decades ago. According to Brown and Benedict (2005), the number of police officers assigned to work in schools in the United States far exceeded the number in any other country. As of 1975, only 1% of schools had SROs, but that number grew to 36% by 2004 and 40% by 2008 (Merkwae, 2015). Data from the US Department of Education (USDOE) report, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2017*, showed that, in 2016, 42% of schools reported having an SRO, which was a 10% increase over the 32% who reported having an SRO 10 years prior (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Canady et al. (2012) stated that school-based policing was the fastest growing area of law enforcement.

The first attempt to quantify the number of SROs occurred in the late 1970s. At that time, there were approximately 100 SROs in the United States, but that number grew to about 2,000 by the mid-1990s (Coon & Travis, 2012; Jennings et al., 2011). From 1997 to 2003, the number of SROs in the United States increased from 9,400 to 14,337 (Shuler-Ivey, 2012). In 2000, over one-third of sheriff's departments and nearly half of local law enforcement agencies had at least one full-time SRO, totaling over 17,000 SROs nationwide (Brown & Benedict, 2005). NASRO placed its total membership at around 10,000 SROs

(Theriot, 2009) and it was estimated that there were currently about 20,000 SROs in the United States (Maskaly et al., 2011); Swartz et al. (2016); Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). In 2003, approximately 47% of sheriff's departments and 43% of local police departments had SRO programs (Myrstol, 2011). In 2007, 38% of local police departments surveyed reported having full-time SROs working in their schools (Police Foundation, 2016). The number of law enforcement agencies whose sole purpose was policing K-12 school campuses had also grown significantly. In 1996, there were 117 such agencies, but this number grew to 162 in 2000, 183 in 2004, and 250 in 2008 (Watkins & Maume, 2012). Theriot and Cuellar (2016) noted that the number of SROs had continued to grow even though school violence, a purported justification for SRO programs, had been declining steadily since 1993.

Data reported by Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) indicated that most SROs were assigned to work in high schools, although the number of SROs working in elementary and middle schools was growing. In fact, the number of SROs serving elementary and middle schools had grown more quickly than the number serving in high schools during the past decade. In 2006, just 18% of elementary and middle schools reported having an SRO, but that number increased to 30% by 2016. In comparison, the percentage of high schools with SROs grew by only 6% - from 52% to 58% - during the same time period. The majority of SROs were stationed at schools with larger enrollments. In 2016, 84% of high schools with student populations in excess of 1,000 reported having an SRO present compared to 65% of high schools with enrollments between 500 and 999 students, 51% of schools having between 300 and 499 students, and 30% of schools with fewer than 300 students. 86% of elementary and middle school SROs and 93% of high school SROs were armed while on-duty and on-campus. Data also showed that SROs were most commonly found in larger jurisdictions. According to Myrstol (2011), 80% of police departments and 73% of sheriff's departments serving populations exceeding 100,000 had SRO programs and 90% of agencies serving between 250,000 and 499,999 residents had SRO programs. Of schools that reported having an SRO, the most common reason reported by school administrators for this decision, according to Coon and Travis (2012), was assistance in addressing issues of student disorder. In contrast, school administrators whose schools did

not have an SRO stated that this decision was based on either a lack of funding or a belief that an SRO was unnecessary.

Roles of School Resource Officers

Some of the confusion regarding the value and necessity of SROs came from the many different ways that SRO programs were implemented and the resulting variances in the roles that SROs played in their assigned schools. According to Schlosser (2014), SROs' multiple roles had a high potential of conflicting with each other. Disagreement between the police and school systems about what an SRO's role should be was commonplace and led to problems when SROs were deployed prior to a consensus being reached (Coon & Travis, 2012). A major reason for role confusion and conflict in SRO programs resulted from the fact that SROs often remained employees of the local police or sheriff's department despite working full-time in educational settings (Theriot, 2009). Integrating an outside police officer into a school setting was difficult because law enforcement agencies tended to be closed organizations while educational organizations trended toward openness and transparency (Coon & Travis, 2012; Denham et al., 2016). Brown and Benedict (2005) stated that the duties of SROs employed by law enforcement agencies differed greatly from those of SROs employed directly by school districts and that having to contend with the influences of different political forces impacted how SROs performed their functions. Shuler-Ivey (2012) stated that, while police departments viewed law enforcement as a last resort in response to school-based problems, school administrators often sought to utilize SROs with a policing-first mentality.

Another source of role confusion and conflict for SROs resulted from resistance to their presence by school administrators. Many school administrators believed that agreeing to having a police officer assigned to their schools equated to an admission that their campuses were unsafe and were concerned that SROs might usurp some of their leadership authority (Brown & Benedict, 2005; Coon & Travis, 2012). Theriot and Cuellar (2016) concluded "the heterogeneity of schools, school districts, law enforcement agencies, training standards, and funding sources for SRO programs across the United States makes it

unlikely that uniform and universally applicable definitions of SROs and their responsibilities will be created” (p. 375). Jennings et al. (2011) and Shuler-Ivey (2012) described the SRO position as a hybrid of policing, corrections, and education. While concurring that SROs had diverse roles which were dependent on numerous factors, Police Foundation (2016) stated that most SROs performed five common functions: mentoring, relationship-building, establishing partnerships, teaching, and ensuring safe school environments.

Because SROs’ roles varied so greatly, it was challenging to articulate the functions that they performed on a day-to-day basis. Lamont et al. (2011) stated that there was no single model, or even group of similar models, to quantify how SROs performed their work in schools and Schlosser (2014) added that, unlike DARE or GREAT instructors, the primary purpose of SRO programs was school safety and not classroom instruction. The most commonly cited framework (Canady et al., 2012; Coon & Travis, 2012; Denham et al., 2016; May et al., 2004; May & Higgins, 2011; Merkwae, 2015; Police Foundation, 2016; Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012; Shuler-Ivey, 2012; Swartz et al., 2016) of SRO roles was NASRO’s Triad Model of SRO Responsibility. According to Canady et al. (2012), “the Triad model divides the SRO’s responsibilities into three areas: Educator, Informal Counselor, and Law Enforcement Officer” (p. 3) with the goals of providing a safe and secure learning environment, mentoring students, and educating on law-related topics. This model was also reflected in Britain’s School Liaison Officer program which listed their roles as law enforcement, resource development, and teaching youth about the consequences of criminal behavior (Briers & Dickmann, 2009) through increased cooperation, contact, and communication between police and juveniles (Brown & Benedict, 2005). Some researchers, such as Girouard (2001) and May et al. (2004), have added a fourth SRO role of acting as liaison between the school, police, and community, but the three prongs of the Triad model dominated most discussions of SROs’ roles.

The SRO’s law enforcement role has expanded from simply preparing for and responding to incidents of school violence to becoming an integral part of their schools’ safety teams by partnering with educators, parents, students, and the community to address a wide range of challenges facing education

today. SROs' knowledge of the law, specialized training, experience with the local juvenile justice system, and increased awareness of the surrounding community's population and safety concerns made them invaluable resources to schools, especially in the areas of crisis planning and school-safety policymaking. Denham et al. (2016) found that SROs nationwide divided their time between the three prongs of the Triad model as follows: 50% engaging in law enforcement, 25% acting as informal counselors, and 13% in teaching roles. The remaining 13% was spent in unspecified meetings. In comparison, SROs in North Carolina stated that they divided their time at rates of 50% law enforcement, 30% counseling, and 20% teaching and SROs in Kentucky reported spending 55.6% of their time on law enforcement, 26.1% on counseling, and 17.3% on teaching. A case study by Schlosser (2014) found that the SRO shadowed by the author spent 70% of his time on law enforcement, 16% of his time teaching, and 14% of his time counseling.

Data reported by Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) indicated that 42% of schools in the United States had an SRO present and that the five most common activities performed by those SROs were coordinating with local first responders (73% of schools), patrolling school campuses (67% of schools), identifying problems in order to address them proactively (64% of schools), traffic control (59% of schools), and mentoring students (59% of schools). High schools reported that their SROs engaged in each of these activities at a higher rate than middle- and elementary-school SROs and included providing legal advice and reporting school code infractions as additional functions commonly provided by high school SROs. The least common activity performed by SROs at all grade levels was classroom teaching.

Although SROs were not deployed in a manner consistent with the public's typical view of the police role, law enforcement activity continued to play an important part in the day-to-day work of SROs in the United States. On a fundamental level, an SRO was a highly-visible presence which reassured students, staff members, and parents that the school environment was safe and secure (Lamont et al., 2011). The primary goal of most SRO programs was to reduce delinquent behaviors by students while also attempting to improve students' attitudes about the police (Watkins & Maume, 2012). The Chicago Police

Department's SRO program focused primarily on traditional law enforcement goals by listing SROs' priorities as ensuring student safety, preventing disruptions to the educational environment, and addressing trespassing incidents (Lipari, 2018). According to Canady et al. (2012), many authors have found that law enforcement activities dominated most SROs' workdays. Often, this involved responding to criminal incidents on campus in which students and staff members were either offenders or victims (Lamont et al., 2011). Coon and Travis (2012) found that law enforcement occupied approximately 50% of SROs' time, but added that this varied depending upon the grade levels at the schools to which SROs were assigned.

However, the range of these policing activities often differed from those performed by police officers in more traditional positions. In addition to enforcing criminal laws in relation to on-campus incidents, SROs also engaged in school-safety planning, monitored hallways and parking lots, scheduled emergency drills (Canady et al., 2012), conducted security assessments, provided assistance at special events such as athletic events, enforced truancy laws (Coon & Travis, 2012), acted as a liaison between the school and other law enforcement agencies, developed crime prevention programs for students and staff members (Lipari, 2018), transported students, broke-up student altercations (May & Higgins, 2011), provided information to students and faculty about police matters (Police Foundation, 2016), addressed bullying incidents (Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012), and trained security staff members (Swartz, 2016). The area of school safety planning has become a crucial part of SROs' law enforcement function in response to mass school shooting incidents. According to Coon and Travis (2012), over half of school administrators reported working directly with SROs to establish school-safety plans and 86% stated that they had an emergency plan in place with their local policing agency. SROs also acted as trainers for school staff members and police personnel regarding how best to respond or react to active shooter incidents.

The second part of the Triad model – teaching – was also an important factor to consider when discussing the roles that SROs played in their assigned schools. May & Higgins (2011) found that SROs performed some type of classroom instruction at least once per week. While police officers have been acting as classroom teachers for several decades under programs such as Officer Friendly, DARE, and

GREAT, the concept of having an SRO instruct on a topic which correlated directly with the school's regular curriculum was a totally different construct. SROs regularly created classroom lessons and initiated opportunities to engage in classroom instruction as a way to build relationships with school staff members (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). Canady et al. (2012) described the value of classroom teaching by SROs by stating that "through regular teaching, the SRO imparts valuable, specialized knowledge to students and staff, builds relationships with students as they come to understand and respect the officer's knowledge and commitment, and improves students' perceptions of law enforcement in general" (p. 26). Areas of instruction commonly covered by SROs included: bullying, drug and alcohol use, careers in law enforcement, driving safety, dating violence, Constitutional law, internet safety (Canady et al., 2012), victimization prevention, students' legal rights and responsibilities, firearm safety (Denham et al., 2016), the consequences of criminal activity (Lamont et al., 2011), and criminal investigation (Police Foundation, 2016). Some states have encouraged SROs to become active classroom instructors through legislation. For example, Arizona required its state's SROs to log at least 90 teaching hours each semester (Denham et al., 2016). Briers and Dickmann (2009) stated that American SROs engaged in substantially more classroom instruction activity than their British counterparts.

Counseling, the third section of the Triad model, was perhaps the SRO role least associated with traditional law enforcement, but also the most important because it facilitated the relationship-building that made an SRO's job unique from others in policing. In some cases, SROs' counseling role was downplayed even though the rapport-building that it facilitated was an important SRO function (Schlosser, 2014). Police Foundation (2016) stated that SROs were in a unique position to recognize students in vulnerable or at-risk situations. Shuler-Ivey (2012) described counseling as "the most dynamic aspect of the SRO's assignment" (p. 553), asserted that law enforcement should be an SRO's secondary responsibility behind counseling, and concluded that an SRO's counseling role had the potential for a more positive impact on at-risk students than the law enforcement role. SROs regularly engaged in meetings with school and community resources in an effort to develop and provide options to keep at-risk youth out of the criminal justice system. Such

options included restorative justice programs, youth courts, peer mediation, and similar diversionary programs (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). Employing these diversionary programs allowed SROs to mediate disputes between students, encouraged the use of conflict resolution techniques, and potentially prevented school-based crimes (Lamont et al., 2011). By developing relationships with students, SROs proactively identified safety threats, prevented acts of on-campus criminal activity from occurring, and coordinated the appropriate community resources to address the issues which led to the threat. Counseling ranged from more formal discussions about academic performance or ongoing disciplinary issues to informal talks about extra-curricular activities or interests that the SRO and the student had in common (Canady et al., 2012). By acting as counselors, SROs also addressed issues of ongoing bullying through empathy reinforcement, friendship circles, collaborative problem-solving, and teaching assertiveness to bullying victims (Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012). Denham et al. (2016) found that 65% of SROs engaged in some type of counseling activity on a daily basis and that this included assisting students who were bullying victims, pregnant, suicidal, experiencing some form of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or in need of enhanced conflict resolution or problem-solving skills.

An area of the SRO function that often became controversial was the SRO's role in the school disciplinary process. Denham et al. (2016) described this conflict by stating:

Reacting to behavior of students that is clearly a violation of law in [a] school setting is a relatively clear matter. However, it becomes increasingly more difficult for the SRO to separate the role of educator from police officer when responding in good faith to students who are in violation of school board regulations that do not rise to the level of violation of law. (p. 7)

While SROs often embraced their teaching and counseling roles, some school administrators wanted SROs' more active assistance with school disciplinary matters and were resistant to SROs who sought to expand their efforts beyond law enforcement (Denham et al., 2016). Shuler-Ivey (2012) stated that SROs played an important part in all stages of the discipline process, but according to Coon & Travis (2012), many SROs

believed that it was simply not their responsibility to enforce parts of school disciplinary codes that had no relation to criminal law violations. This led to disagreements between SROs and school administrators who often viewed SROs as added muscle to their own code enforcement efforts. Research has found that a primary cause of this disagreement came from the differing views of SROs and school administrators on the purpose of SRO programs generally. This led school staff to sometimes make unrealistic demands on SROs, such as providing classroom support or acting as a security guard as opposed to a sworn police officer (Lamont et al., 2011). Coon and Travis (2012) added that, while SROs viewed their role from a broader perspective of long-term crime prevention and community engagement, school administrators tended to be more focused on short-term school safety concerns.

Confusion about SROs' roles in school discipline existed not only in the educational and law enforcement communities, but also in America's courts of law. While some courts viewed SROs as school employees, thus lessening their legal burden of proof in areas such as questioning and searching students, other courts viewed SROs in the same light as other police officers without any special consideration of their educational roles (Price, 2009). Other courts have recognized SROs' hybrid roles of police officer and school authority and allowed SROs to take police actions under modified legal standards when working at the behest of, or in direct partnership with, school authorities (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). Merkwae (2015) stated that, when SROs were involved in school disciplinary matters, it was unclear where an SRO's role as school disciplinarian stopped and an SRO's responsibilities as a law enforcement agent began. It was this intersection of school disciplinarian and law enforcement official where some researchers have indicated that SRO programs have run afoul of students' rights and best interests, leading to a school-to-prison pipeline, which will be discussed later.

Data Supportive of School Resource Officer Programs

In general terms, there was abundant research in favor of SROs and their efforts to improve school safety and overall school climates. Merkwae (2015) reported that an overwhelming majority of adults

considered SRO programs to be effective at improving school safety. Parents studied by Myrstol (2011) reported believing that SROs reduced juvenile delinquency, improved police-community relations and school climate, enhanced quality of life in the community, helped students better understand the law, and helped the police department by exposing police personnel to a different part of the community. In addition, assigning SROs to schools gave parents the perception that school safety was a priority in their community (Watkins & Maume, 2012). May et al. (2004) found that 87.5% of school administrators in Kentucky believed strongly that their SROs had been effective at reducing student misbehavior, especially in the areas of marijuana use, theft, bomb threats, weapons possession, and fighting. Over 57% of those school administrators could not identify anything negative about their schools' SRO programs. The same school administrators supported SRO programs with 98.4% stating that all high schools should have SROs, 93.5% stating that all middle schools should have SROs, and 92.7% stating that all alternative schools should have SROs. Lamont et al. (2011) stated that evidence dating back to the 1990's demonstrated that SROs were effective at addressing and reducing problems associated with juvenile delinquency due to their ability to engage in early intervention techniques with at-risk students.

Support for SRO programs was not limited to school administrators. Coon and Travis (2012) found that both teachers and administrators favored a police presence at their schools and rated their schools' SROs highly. Teachers studied by Denham et al. (2016) rated their SROs' impact on school climate positively. 82% of teachers in Virginia believed that fighting incidents had been reduced after an SRO was assigned to their school and 99% of school staff members were supportive of their schools' SRO programs (Maskaly et al., 2011). Students were also supportive of SRO programs. Students had positive views about SROs and regularly used them as a resource to report problems or obtain counseling about personal and legal matters (Myrstol, 2011). According to Watkins and Maume (2012), a majority of students viewed SROs favorably and often regarded them more like school administrators than police officers. Two-thirds of students in Jennings et al.'s (2011) study reported that their SROs were effective at improving school safety. 91% of students in Virginia were supportive of their schools' SRO programs (Maskaly et al., 2011).

Surveyed students also considered their SROs to be fair, respectful, sincere, and approachable (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). From a different perspective, a study of SRO programs by Carroll et al. (2010) found that SRO programs were cost effective based upon their ability to reduce the short-term costs associated with juvenile crime and because they were successful at preventing at-risk students from dropping out of school and becoming career criminals, which could cost taxpayers between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million per non-graduating student.

As an advocate for SRO programs, NASRO – in research authored by Canady et al. (2012) - argued forcefully in favor of SRO programs, stating that “SROs experience a distinctive and welcomed role in the campus community and enjoy an effective relationship with the school officials with whom they serve” (p. 6) and added that “collaboration between school officials and school resource officers is an effective component to preserving the right of boys and girls to attend schools that are secure and peaceful” (p. 19). The authors continued by stating that SROs were effective at reducing disruptions at their schools, increasing feelings of safety by students, parents, and staff members, reducing victimization of students and staff members, increasing school attendance rates, and generally improving learning environments through enhanced teacher and student morale and promoting an atmosphere of trust, caring, and respect. They added that SROs and school administrators used a professional, collaborative approach to balance the priorities of education, students’ rights, and school safety. Parents were also supportive of SRO programs with 75% agreeing that SROs improved police-community relations, 70.4% believing that SROs improved students’ attitudes about the police, and 80% agreeing that SROs improved the educational environments at their children’s schools. Calling school safety a human rights issue, the authors opined that eliminating SRO programs could have negative consequences on student welfare through a perception of indifference toward victims of school-based crimes, encouraging selective enforcement of school rules, increasing disruptions that impeded students’ rights to an education, and encouraging school administrators to cover-up incidents which occurred on their campuses (Canady et al., 2012). From a police management perspective, SROs had a positive impact on their employing agencies’ effectiveness by reducing the number

of calls-for-service on school campuses that regular patrol units were required to respond to, allowing those units to concentrate on other departmental priorities (Canady et al., 2012; May et al., 2011; Watkins & Maume, 2012). Not surprisingly, 99% of SROs surveyed at an annual NASRO conference by May et al. (2004) felt that SROs improved school safety. Two-thirds of SROs stated that they had prevented an attack on a staff member and about 50% stated that they had prevented at least 11 violent crimes during the previous school year.

School crime statistics were also supportive of SROs' efforts to improve school safety. Empirical evidence has demonstrated that SROs were effective at increasing school safety and preventing school-based crimes (Maskaly et al., 2011), possibly because increased monitoring by SROs had a deterrent and preventative effect (Swartz et al., 2016). Theriot (2009) stated that this deterrent effect had the greatest impact on incidents which occurred in locations that had previously lacked consistent monitoring, such as parking lots and hallways and on incidents involving weapon possession or physical aggression. Since data regarding school-based offenses was first collected in 1992, overall school crime as well as the number of school-based arrests and student disciplinary violations have persisted on a steady downward trend, coinciding with the increased deployment of SROs at schools in the United States. These included incidents involving deaths at schools, violent crimes, non-fatal victimizations, and thefts. In addition, juvenile arrests decreased by 50% from 1994 to 2009, a period when the number of SROs was rising steeply (Canady et al., 2012). Studies cited by Canady et al. (2012) which were based on school crime and discipline data from both pre- and post-SRO deployment found that the presence of an SRO coincided with reductions in expulsions, suspensions, office disciplinary referrals, disruptions to the educational environment, and arrests of students. Watkins and Maume (2012) also found that total student suspensions declined following the implementation of SRO programs. Theriot (2009) found that the presence of an SRO reduced arrests for assaults by 52.3% and arrests for possessing a weapon on school property by 72.9%. Jennings et al. (2011) found that the presence of an SRO had a significant negative effect on the prevalence of school-based violent crime, indicating that SROs provided a valuable deterrent effect to violent criminal activity.

In a study comparing schools with and without an SRO, Lamont et al. (2011) found that SROs prevented about 45 crimes annually at each school, a reduction of 24%. Swartz et al. (2016) stated that SROs had decreased criminal offenses by 17% at 27 studied middle and high schools and added that, while crime was often more prevalent at schools with larger enrollments, SROs appeared to moderate the impact of school size on crime rates.

However, school crime statistics alone were likely insufficient for quantifying the many intangible positive impacts that SROs had on their schools. For example, Denham et al. (2016) found that increased counseling activity by SROs led to improved student and staff morale, enhanced communication between students and adults, the enforcement of clear rules and expectations, and promoted a positive school climate. Similar positive impacts were found to result from SROs' participation in extracurricular events, school safety planning, and classroom teaching. Briers and Dickmann (2009) stated that SROs were focused on students' welfare and recounted the story of a student who credited the interventions of his school's SRO with redirecting him from a delinquent lifestyle. The deployment of SROs also increased the number of positive, non-confrontational contacts that juveniles had with the police. Such positive contacts have been found to improve opinions about the law enforcement community (Shuler-Ivey, 2012; Watkins & Maume, 2012). Regular contact with an SRO was found by Jennings et al. (2011) to reverse the negative views toward police held by most juveniles due to a better understanding of the law and the police's role in enforcing laws. These improved relationships benefited both the police and students. Students became more trusting of the police and more willing to utilize the police as a helpful resource in times of need or crisis. The police benefited because students became sources of intelligence about their peers' delinquent behavior, which allowed the police to engage in more proactive and preventative activities (Lamont et al., 2011). In addition, Lamont et al. (2011) found that the presence of an SRO resulted in increased accessibility and improved relationships between the police, school staff, and students, which led to better attendance rates and improved academic achievement.

A common intangible result of SRO programs was an increased sense of safety among students and faculty members. Having an SRO assigned to their school reassured teachers that a police officer would already be present in the event that a mass shooting incident were to occur at their workplace (Watkins & Maume, 2012). This was important because research has found that feelings of unsafety were a key factor in low teacher morale and high staff turnover (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Student evaluations of SROs found that students considered their SROs to be polite, treated students fairly, helped to keep their schools safe, and increased students' feelings of safety through their presence. 69% of students stated that their SRO's presence made them feel safer at school, especially by mitigating the impact of gang activity (Brown & Benedict, 2005). Theriot (2009) found that an SRO's presence led to an increased feeling of safety which caused students to feel better about school generally, feel more connected to their school, and have a more positive opinion about their school environment, leading to decreased aggression and fewer physical altercations among students. Theriot and Cuellar (2016) stated that these factors, especially school connectedness, were crucial for preventing school-based violence. 73% of surveyed students stated that the presence of an SRO caused them to be less concerned about bullying, thefts, violence, and intruders while at school (Lamont et al., 2011). Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) found that, from 1995 to 2015, a period during which the popularity of SRO programs increased significantly, the percentage of students who reported being afraid of being physically attacked while at school decreased from 12% to 3%, including decreases across all races, genders, and grade levels.

Data Unsupportive of School Resource Officer Programs

Not all research has been supportive of the value of SRO programs. Some studies have resulted in negative findings or mixed results. One argument against the increased deployment of SRO programs was that their necessity was not supported by school crime statistics. Maskaly et al. (2011) stated that there was limited empirical evidence indicating that SROs were effective at improving campus safety or reducing school crime. Most studies on SROs focused on stakeholder satisfaction with SRO programs as opposed to objectively determining whether SROs actually reduced school crime rates (Merkwae, 2015). According

to Bracey et al. (2013), school violence in the United States was currently at its lowest level since the early 1990s, thus contradicting the need to increase the number of SROs. May et al. (2004), asserted that the types of offenses with which SROs were credited with reducing were already on the decline prior to the popularity of SRO programs, so SROs' impact on those offenses was negligible. Instead, the growth of SRO programs was driven primarily by a questionable perception that school violence was increasing in the 1990's, causing parents and school administrators to demand additional protection (May & Higgins, 2011). Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) opined that this perception was often based on the large amount of attention given to isolated incidents of mass violence, which complicated efforts to accurately determine the scope and nature of school crime.

Some research has asserted that the presence of an SRO may actually make a school less safe. According to Schlosser (2014), schools with a regular police presence were 18% more likely to experience a violent incident and 13% more likely to experience a serious violent incident than schools without a regular police presence. Swartz et al. (2016) stated that schools with a regular police presence reported more violent crimes, more drug offenses, and more incidents involving weapons possession than schools without a regular police presence. The authors added that schools with SROs had double the rate of assaults when compared to schools without SROs and that SROs facilitated more efficient reporting of school crime, but were ineffective at reducing or preventing crimes on school campuses.

The manner in which SROs' time was allocated was also questioned. At schools with SROs, the SROs' perceptions of their involvement in activities covered by all three prongs of NASRO's Triad was almost always higher than administrators' perceptions of SROs' involvement (Coon & Travis, 2012). Other administrators complained that their SROs spent too much time away from school for other police duties to be effective (May et al., 2004). SROs also placed a higher value on their involvement in teaching and counseling activities than school staff members while educators placed more value on SROs' involvement in law enforcement matters and did not endorse the Triad model as a good framework to conceptualize SROs' roles (Denham et al., 2016). In addition, Brown and Benedict (2005) found that SROs failed to

deter school crime because students' opinions about the consequences of offending or the likelihood of being caught were unchanged by the assignment of an SRO to their school. This was especially true of students who had been the victims of a violent crime while at school or had observed other students using drugs on school property. Students who reported having previously been in trouble with the police (Merkwae, 2015) or had a negative interaction with their SRO (Shuler-Ivey, 2012) also expressed negative opinions about SROs at higher rates than other students. Jennings et al. (2011) and Maskaly et al. (2011) also stated that SROs failed to impact students' opinions about delinquent behavior and added that SROs were ineffective at reducing students' fear of crime or victimization while at school.

Another argument was that the lack of clearly defined roles for SROs and goals for SRO programs made their implementation haphazard. Unlike the United Kingdom, where SRO program goals have been established through legislation, SRO programs in the United States suffered from a lack of such clarity, which had a side-effect of hindering innovation by individual SROs (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). Unclear SRO role definitions caused confusion, concerns about SRO autonomy, and either a lack of accountability or excessive restrictions on SROs' actions (Lamont et al., 2011). This lack of role clarity led to distrust between SROs and school administrators, causing administrators to not fully utilize SROs as a resource in the day-to-day operation of the school. Educators were also concerned that SROs represented an additional authority figure whose imposing presence hindered the environment of openness desired on school campuses (Coon & Travis, 2012). Denham et al. (2016) concurred by stating that "external agents of law enforcement would experience a cultural clash when confronted with the humanistic, open, and informal public school settings" (p. 6). Swartz et al. (2016) described SROs as superfluous, symbolic figures whose authority was redundant to that of teachers and administrators.

Other research has found that contact with SROs does not actually improve youths' opinions about the police. Instead, students tended to differentiate between SROs and other police officers. Students often viewed SROs positively; however, they equated SROs as similar to school administrators such as deans or principals. As a result, youths' positive opinions about SROs did not carry over to the remainder of the

police force, whom they continued to view as oppressive and overly authoritative (Brown & Benedict, 2005; Lamont et al., 2011; Watkins & Maume, 2012). Some students also complained that their SROs were overly authoritative, aggressive, and often treated students like criminals (Myrstol, 2011). Other students only viewed SROs as police officers in a traditional law enforcement role and not as teachers or counselors (Shuler-Ivey, 2012). Theriot and Cuellar (2016) reported that some students complained that their SROs were rarely visible, that they did not understand why their school had an SRO, that they did not support the adding of more SROs to their schools, and that some SROs caused additional anxiety and misbehavior through their aggressive demeanor. Employing excessively strict measures has been shown to cause an adversarial relationship between students and school authority figures and led to disruptions to education (Theriot, 2009). Price (2009) stated that a consistent police presence in students' lives had been shown to lower their respect for the police.

Parental opinions about SRO programs were also not unanimously positive. Myrstol (2011) found that adults' confidence in SROs' abilities to improve school safety, reduce delinquent behavior, enhance police-community relations, and enhance overall quality of life in the larger school community was mixed and that confidence was markedly lower in disadvantaged communities. School administrators also expressed concerns about the presence of SROs in their schools. Watkins and Maume (2012) stated that some administrators were concerned that having a police officer in the building could undermine their disciplinary authority, give students the incorrect impression that the SRO had the final say on disciplinary matters, and cause students to become unresponsive to other school authority figures.

Researchers were also concerned about a lack of data to support the continued, or increased, use of SROs in American schools. Most SRO programs were implemented without any plan for evaluation or even a process for collecting data which would make a useful evaluation possible (Myrstol, 2011). Merkwae (2015) also stated that law enforcement agencies rarely collected data about SROs' activities and Swartz et al. (2016) added that there was minimal data available showing how SROs performed their duties on a day-to-day basis. SRO programs were rarely evaluated (Coon & Travis, 2012; May et al., 2011) and,

when they were, they were evaluated using standard law enforcement measures such as citations and arrests instead of SRO-based measures such as interventions or preventative actions (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). There was also a lack of data showing that SROs were effective at reducing school crime (Maskaly et al., 2011), improving students' and staff members' feelings of safety while at school (May et al., 2004), or positively altering student behavior (Myrstol, 2011). Data assessing SROs' teaching and counseling functions was almost nonexistent (Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012). Quantifying the many intangible things that occupied an SRO's workday was considered to be difficult (Lamont et al., 2011) due to the complex nature of the SRO function (Merkwae, 2015). Furthermore, the perception of imminent danger at American schools – an oft-cited reason for increasing the number of SROs - may not be supported by school crime data. According to Jennings (2011), a student's chance of being murdered at school was 1 in 2,000,000, representing less than 1% of homicides in which school-aged children were victims. In addition, almost two-thirds of violent crimes against middle- and high-school students and nearly half of all crimes against middle- and high-school students occurred away from school.

THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Defining the School-to-Prison Pipeline

In order to understand the school-to-prison pipeline and the potential impacts of SRO programs, it was necessary to define the school-to-prison pipeline and understand the history behind school-to-prison pipeline research. The school-to-prison pipeline was a problem created by the combination of zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, increased school security measures through physical changes to school structures and the use of surveillance technologies, and the prevalence of police-school partnerships including the increased presence of armed police officers at American schools (Burton, 2017). These elements combined to cause acts of student misconduct which previously resulted only in school consequences to also result in students being referred to law enforcement for punishment via the juvenile justice system. This trend was commonly referred to as the criminalization of student misconduct (Denham

et al., 2016). The criminalization of student misbehavior has resulted in numerous students, especially poor, disabled, and minority students, being referred to the juvenile justice system for school-based incidents, resulting in a school-to-prison pipeline (Merkwae, 2015). Theriot (2009) stated that studies regarding the school-to-prison pipeline had consistently shown that poverty was a significant predictor of exclusionary discipline practices and that poor and minority juveniles were referred to the juvenile justice system at higher rates than their White peers.

Initiatives to place more SROs in American schools were often blamed for the increased criminalization of student misconduct. This has occurred even though SRO programs were never intended to be used as a part of the normal school disciplinary process and despite the well-documented negative consequences associated with a juvenile criminal record (Denham et al., 2016). According to Theriot and Cuellar (2016), “as SROs become more prevalent at schools, discipline problems traditionally handled by school principals and teachers now are more likely to be handled by SROs with law enforcement interventions” (p. 369). For example, fights between students were turned into incidents of assault and classroom disruptions were translated into disorderly conducts (Theriot, 2009). Swartz et al. (2016) referred to this as a net-widening effect in which the placement of SROs in schools had created a direct link between school discipline and the juvenile justice system and led to an increase in school arrests. Theriot and Cuellar (2016) connected the growth in the number of SROs to the increased use of punitive school discipline practices and added that the presence of an SRO in a school inhibited educators’ ability to use discretion in disciplinary matters. This fostered an environment dominated by formal responses even in cases where there was no threat to school, staff, or student safety. School-to-prison pipeline research often supported the discontinuation of SRO programs and the removal of any regular police presence from school environments. Instead, according to Lamont et al. (2011), it suggested that funding currently directed toward SRO programs should be directed toward restorative justice programs to avoid criminalizing student misbehavior.

School-to-prison pipeline research has traced the history of the school-to-prison pipeline as far back as the first police-school partnerships. The educational system was always an agent of social control, but it accomplished that goal utilizing less punitive measures than those associated with policing (Burton, 2017). Today, the social control methods employed in schools were similar to those used in correctional settings (Merkwae, 2015) and were based primarily on theories of deterrence and incapacitation (Swartz et al., 2016). Instead of education being schools' primary goal, Price (2009) asserted that the education system had prioritized keeping students under control, especially those considered to be dangerous. According to Burton (2017), beginning with the Coordinating Councils in the Berkeley School District in the 1920s, public schools became avenues for delinquent students to be referred to law enforcement for school-based incidents. The main function of the Coordinating Councils was to rehabilitate delinquents, but as the 20th century progressed, juvenile delinquents have increasingly been treated like future criminals in need of punishment.

The broken windows model of policing, which became popular in the 1980s, contributed to the increased use of law enforcement and zero tolerance policies to address student misbehavior. As educators prioritized combating minor disciplinary matters in an effort to prevent more serious problems in the future, schools adopted stricter student discipline policies, incorporated the use of additional security technologies such as cameras and metal detectors, and increased the number of sworn law enforcement personnel assigned to schools (Coon & Travis, 2012). The 1980s were also a decade when school crime and illicit drug use was high and teacher morale was low, causing school systems to react with strategies intended to show that they would not tolerate student misconduct (Price, 2009). This continued into the 1990s as the get-tough-on-crime philosophy of the preceding decade became codified through three strikes laws and mandatory minimum sentences. Subsequently, the same types of policies and practices trickled down into school discipline codes (Schlosser, 2014). Watkins and Maume (2012) stated that the first academic study regarding possible negative impacts of police-school partnerships was published in the early 1970s, but the term school-to-prison pipeline was not coined until much later.

School-to-prison pipeline research cited a variety of statistics to demonstrate that the presence of SROs had led to the increased criminalization of student misconduct, especially for minor, non-violent offenses. Most of these statistics illustrated that the number of school-based arrests increased at roughly the same time as the number SROs also increased. This was based upon practical reasoning indicating that an increased police presence at schools led to increased police awareness of incidents occurring on school campuses and, consequently, an increase in police responses to those incidents (Theriot, 2009). Denham et al. (2016) cited statistics from three different states. In South Carolina, the most common offenses charged in juvenile court referrals were Disorderly Conduct, Class Disruption, and Misconduct during the 2007-2008 school year; in Colorado, juvenile court referrals for Misconduct increased 71% from 2000 to 2004; and in Texas, Disorderly Conduct was the most common charge listed on juvenile citations or delinquency petitions during the 2006-2007 school year. In the 1996-1997 school year, 61 of the 158 arrests made at a single Chicago high school were for pager possession and 21 other arrests resulted only in Disorderly Conduct charges (Theriot, 2009). Merkwae (2015) referred to statistics from three different locations in an effort to demonstrate the existence of a school-to-prison pipeline. In Chicago, school arrests increased from 7,851 to 8,539 between 2001 and 2003; in a Georgia county, juvenile court referrals for school-based incidents increased from 46 in 1996 to 1,147 in 2003; and in Denver, referrals to the police for incidents that occurred in the city's schools rose from 818 in 2000 to 1,401 in 2004. Theriot and Cuellar (2016) discussed information from two studies. In Miami-Dade County, school arrests tripled from 1999 to 2001 and in an Ohio county, school arrests increased by almost 500 from 2000 to 2002. However, none of the above-cited authors provided information showing that those jurisdictions started new SRO programs or increased the number of SROs during the time periods referenced.

The Role of Zero Tolerance Disciplinary Policies

One factor pointed to by school-to-prison pipeline research was the increased implementation of zero tolerance discipline policies and the negative consequences associated with their application. Under zero tolerance disciplinary policies, school administrators were often required to exact harsh punishments

against students who engaged in certain violations of school rules. In many cases, zero tolerance policies mandated the use of exclusionary discipline such as suspensions or expulsions. Administrators had little or no discretion under zero tolerance policies regardless of the circumstances surrounding the rule violation. Zero tolerance policies provided just one example of harsh discipline practices introduced by schools during the past few decades in an effort to better control students. Merkwae (2015) defined a zero tolerance policy as one “mandat[ing] the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (pp. 153-4). The first zero tolerance policies were implemented in California, New York, and Kentucky in 1989 and became nearly universal nationwide within 4 years (Price, 2009). Similar to the increased deployment of SROs, the increased use of exclusionary discipline was also related to the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994. Zero tolerance policies were originally intended to be applied only to rule violations involving illicit drugs, weapons, fighting, or gangs (Price, 2009). However, they were quickly expanded to include non-violent infractions related to theft, dress codes, vandalism (Merkwae, 2015), tobacco use, alcohol consumption, verbal threats, profanity (Price, 2009), or any disruptive behavior demonstrating a potential for violence (Schlosser, 2014). Watkins and Maume (2012) and Theriot and Cuellar (2016) posited that a factor in the increased popularity of zero tolerance policies was federal education laws which placed a strong emphasis on the results of standardized testing and graduation rates. The authors asserted that zero tolerance policies provided school administrators with an expedited avenue to expel students who were likely to perform poorly on such tests or fail to graduate.

If the purpose of zero tolerance policies was to increase the number of students excluded from school attendance for violating school rules, then they were rather successful. As a result of zero tolerance policies, over 3 million students were suspended and over 106,000 students were expelled in the United States in 2004, which was double the number of suspensions and expulsions issued in the 1970s (Price, 2009; Schlosser, 2014). During the 1998-1999 school year, Black children represented only 17% of total national enrollment, but 32% of total suspensions (Schlosser, 2014). Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) stated that,

in the 2015-2016 school year, over 31,000 schools in the United States issued at least one suspension lasting 5 days or more, constituting 72% of all serious disciplinary actions taken during that school year. The authors added that 78% of high schools, 61% of middle schools, and 18% of elementary schools took at least one serious disciplinary action during the 2015-2016 school year.

These policies were widely utilized despite well-documented negative consequences related to exclusionary discipline. Examples of these negative consequences included poor academic performance, stunted social and emotional development (Bracey et al., 2013), and an increased risk of dropout or delinquency, marginalization, alienation (Denham et al., 2016), and incarceration (Swartz et al., 2016). Studies have shown that poor, minority, and disabled students were subjected to exclusionary discipline under zero tolerance policies more often than their White peers. For example, Black students were suspended at a rate triple that of White students and disabled students were suspended at rates double that of non-disabled students (Merkwae, 2015). Schlosser (2014) added that homeless students, those in foster care, and those with learning disabilities were the most likely to receive harsh discipline. Burton (2017) cited zero tolerance policies as an example of the increasingly punitive and controlling nature of American education.

Zero tolerance policies have been of questionable effectiveness in halting the types of school rule violations that they were intended to combat, such as student drug use. According to Price (2009), youth drug use was declining before zero tolerance policies were implemented, but has alternately either remained steady or even increased since zero tolerance policies became popular. Instead of zero tolerance policies, research has suggested utilizing restorative justice programs, delinquency prevention programs, and assessment-based interventions (Denham et al., 2016). When discussing the school-to-prison pipeline, researchers often tried to draw a connection between the negative impact of zero tolerance policies and the presence of SROs in schools. However, Canady et al. (2012) noted that zero tolerance policies required certain penalties for certain rule violations regardless of who investigated the incident, so the involvement of an SRO had no bearing on the implementation of zero tolerance discipline.

The Role of School Resource Officers

A second factor in the school-to-prison pipeline was the increased law enforcement involvement in daily school operations associated with the popularity of SRO programs. One common belief among school-to-prison pipeline researchers was that SROs played a crucial role in facilitating the increased number of students being referred to the juvenile justice system for school-based incidents. Summarizing this assertion, Canady et al. (2012) wrote, “the SRO has been impugned for being ill-suited to the education environment, a source of confusion and intimidation on campus, and responsible for an increase in the number of referrals from schools to the juvenile justice system” (p. 11). They added that SROs were easy to blame for the school-to-prison pipeline because they were highly visible and actively involved in investigating incidents of student misconduct. Price (2009) stated that the intentions behind SRO programs were admirable, but that the practical result was to eliminate barriers which previously separated school discipline from the juvenile justice system. Schlosser (2014) noted that, despite the unique nature of their assignment, SROs retained the same authority and discretion as patrol officers and were free to arrest students for any criminal violation without seeking permission or guidance.

While studies regarding SROs’ effectiveness at reducing school-based crimes have achieved mixed results, many studies have shown that the involvement of an SRO increased the likeliness of a student being formally referred to law enforcement. In 2012 alone, 260,000 American students were referred to law enforcement for school-based incidents, resulting in 92,000 student arrests (Merkwae, 2015). Coon and Travis (2012) found that schools with SROs experienced more frequent law enforcement involvement than those without SROs. As SROs became more involved in day-to-day school operations, the likelihood of incidents being resolved through intervention by law enforcement, and related criminal charges, had increased (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). Theriot (2009) found that the presence of an SRO resulted in a 197.7% increase in arrest rates per 100 students, a 122.1% increase in arrests on any charge, and a 402.3% increase in arrests for Disorderly Conduct prior to controlling for economic disadvantage. Even after controlling for school-level poverty, student arrests for Disorderly Conduct at schools with SROs still increased by

122.1%. Bracey et al. (2013) stated that the increase in school-based arrests was not caused by worsening student misconduct, but by how adults, including SROs, were reacting to student misbehavior and that juvenile court referrals had wrongly become a default response to students' behavioral issues. Adding to criminalization concerns, Small (2014) wrote that the increased deployment of SROs had caused school safety concerns to take priority over students' rights. As a hybrid police officer/school official, SROs were often free to conduct searches and interviews under less rigorous standards than other law enforcement personnel, making it easier for SROs to justify criminal charges against students (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). SROs often overstepped their intended roles and involved themselves unnecessarily in school matters beyond their expertise as a result of a lack of consensus between law enforcement and educators about SROs' exact roles and purposes (Coon & Travis, 2012). Denham et al. (2016) wrote that, even though SROs were never intended to be school disciplinarians, the presence of an SRO caused educators to become reliant on the police to handle problems that they previously handled informally.

Consequently, many school districts came to recognize SROs as quasi-employees of the school district by granting them full disciplinary authority, which encouraged SROs to criminalize student misbehavior and led to the school-to-prison pipeline. While such a designation might be legally allowable, SROs should only take the lead on disciplinary matters in which they were better trained than school administrators (Small, 2014). An SRO's decisions about how to address student misbehavior were often based on conscious or unconscious biases and had long-term effects ranging from a verbal warning, to exclusionary discipline, to criminal charges (Merkwae, 2015). May et al (2011) and Theriot (2009) stated that inserting SROs into schools intuitively led to the criminalization of certain student behaviors that should have been handled informally. Denham et al. (2016) posited that this was because SROs had a professional predisposition to translate student misbehavior into criminal activity and reacted with enforcement instead of education. SROs were prone to employing a more punitive response than the minor offenses which occupied most of their time required, pushing students into the juvenile justice system unnecessarily (Lamont et al., 2011). Price (2009) asserted that SROs were pressured to justify their

positions through measurable acts, leading them to criminalize student misconduct in order to generate arrest statistics to show their supervisors. Merkwae (2015) reported that one study found that SROs' arrest decisions were based primarily on the nature of a student's violation, but were also discretionary and rarely considered the long-term impacts of the arrest on the arrestee's future. 68% of SROs stated that they had arrested a student to teach them that actions had consequences; 77% had made an arrest in an effort to calm the student down; and 55% had made an arrest solely because a staff member requested that the student be arrested.

Improper implementation of SRO programs may also be responsible for a connection between SROs and the school-to-prison pipeline. Myrstol (2011) found that citizens were often concerned about the negative consequences of SRO programs on police-community relations and community quality of life. A report by the City of Chicago's Office of the Inspector General found that the Chicago Police Department's "lack of guidance and structure for SROs amplifies community concerns and underscores the high probability that students are unnecessarily becoming involved in the criminal justice system, despite the availability of alternate solutions" (Lipari, 2018, p. 2). Before implementing SRO programs, little consideration was given to concerns that an SROs' actions could facilitate a division between students and the police or undermine the authority of school officials (Myrstol, 2011). According to Canady et al. (2012), many school-to-prison pipeline researchers have supported education policy changes in which SROs were removed from schools and school administrators only contacted the police for serious offenses.

The Role of Increased Security Measures

The third element of the school-to-prison pipeline was the increased use of security technologies and practices on school campuses. While this element had received less research attention than SROs and zero tolerance policies, it was still often cited in school-to-prison pipeline research. Enhanced security measures included security cameras inside and outside of school buildings, limited ingress and egress to schools through locked doors, requiring students and staff members to wear identification badges, metal

detector screenings, dress codes or school uniforms, policies requiring clear-sided backpacks, random searches of students' possessions and lockers, sweeps by police canine units, and the employment of non-sworn security guards. Theriot (2009) described many schools as prison-like settings based on a proliferation of secured doors, metal detectors, security cameras, and armed authority figures. According to Myrstol (2011), enhanced security measures were initially used only at schools in high-crime, urban neighborhoods, but these security measures have spread rapidly to suburban and rural schools.

The process of target hardening became a trend at school campuses over the past two decades, primarily in response to mass school shooting incidents. 90% of schools surveyed by Jennings et al. (2011) used security cameras, 82% had a closed-circuit surveillance system, 50% had security guards, 60% had student dress codes, 30% conducted random backpack or locker searches, and 23% utilized metal detectors. Data reported by Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) from the 2015-2016 school year showed that enhanced security measures were most prevalent at schools with enrollments over 1,000 students. Of all public schools in the United States, over 99% of middle and high school students reported seeing at least one security measure in use at their school, 81% of schools had security cameras, 94% of schools controlled access to school buildings, 96% required visitors to sign in/out during the school day, 68% required students and staff members to wear ID badges, 53% enforced a dress code, 25% conducted sweeps by police canine units, 78% kept exterior doors locked or monitored during the school day, 12% had metal detectors, and 70% had either security guards or SROs.

This has occurred despite hesitation among educators that the utilization of enhanced security measures could negatively affect school climate. Theriot (2009) stated that increased security measures had caused schools to have a prison-like atmosphere and multiple authors (Merkwae, 2015; Shuler-Ivey, 2012; Theriot & Cuellar, 2016) added that enhanced security was especially prevalent at schools with high minority populations. Research has found mixed results about the effectiveness of enhanced security measures (Theriot, 2009) and Price (2009) added that, out of all the above-mentioned security measures, the only one empirically proven to be effective was the implementation of school uniforms. In contrast,

studies of New York City’s public schools, which spent over \$28 million to install metal detectors, found that they intercepted over 2,000 weapons in 2001 and were effective at reducing both the number of weapons in schools and students’ fear of violence while at school (Jennings et al., 2011). Canady et al. (2012) supported the focused use of surveillance technologies because they enhanced safety by facilitating the observation and documentation of incidents, especially in difficult-to-monitor areas like hallways, cafeterias, and parking lots.

Adverse Impacts of the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The reason that much attention was paid to the school-to-prison pipeline was because the combination of increased SRO deployment, enhanced security measures, and more punitive discipline policies was believed to have long-term negative consequences for students, especially for students who were poor, disabled, or minority. These consequences included the loss of educational rights, difficulty in gaining admission to college, denial of employment opportunities, eviction from public housing (Merkwae, 2015), poor academic performance (Schlosser, 2014), quitting school, future incarceration (Swartz et al., 2016), and other obstacles to a student’s future potential. Of special concern was that the school-to-prison pipeline negatively impacted students and families who were least-equipped to challenge harsh school discipline or law enforcement action and were ill-situated to weather the school-to-prison pipeline’s long-term consequences.

SRO programs were often considered responsible for many of the school-to-prison pipeline’s adverse impacts on poor, minority, and disabled students. Critics asserted that SRO programs had failed at their intended purposes, referred an excessive number of youths to the juvenile justice system, and created an environment of fear in American schools (Canady et al., 2012). Merkwae (2015) stated that minority and disabled students were subjected to a disproportionate number of school-based arrests as a result of an increased police presence in schools. After finding that schools with high minority populations were mostly likely to have SROs and enhanced security measures, Theriot and Cuellar (2016) wrote that “the

deployment of SROs or other school security personnel in school settings with a large percentage of minority students might condone the targeting of minority populations and lead to disproportionate arrest rates” (p. 371). Schools with high minority populations were reluctant to request an SRO due to perceptions in the community that the police were racist (Lamont et al., 2011). According to Bracey et al. (2013), about 65-70% of youth detained in juvenile correctional facilities had a mental health condition and Merkwae (2015) added that Black youth constituted 29% of juvenile court referrals, 27% of students referred to the police, and 31% of students arrested at schools despite only representing 16% of the total youth population. Statistics from Chicago’s public schools were more concerning because 75% of arrested students were Black during the 2011-2012 school year even though they only represented 42% of the city’s total enrollment. Regarding students with disabilities, they accounted for only 12% of the total American student population, but 25% of students referred to law enforcement or arrested. Furthermore, youth in juvenile correctional facilities were 4 times more likely to require special education services and, in some facilities, almost 100% of the detained juveniles had a diagnosed mental health issue (Merkwae, 2015).

However, SROs were not receptive to accounting for a student’s special education status in their decision-making process. 55% of SROs believed that special education students were responsible for a disproportionate amount of student misconduct; 79% of SROs disagreed with the idea that special education students should be treated differently than regular education students with regard to discipline; and almost 85% believed that special education students intentionally used their status to avoid accountability for misbehavior (Merkwae, 2015). Impoverished students were also impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline. Theriot (2009) found that schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods experienced an increase in the criminalization of student misbehavior and Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) reported that enhanced security measures were most common at schools where over three-quarters of the student population qualified for government subsidized school meals.

In addition, the implementation of zero tolerance policies caused the use of exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, to increase dramatically. In 1974, 1.7 million students were suspended,

representing 3.7% of students nationwide. As a result of zero tolerance policies, 3.2 million students, 6.8% of the national enrollment, were suspended in 1998 (Schlosser, 2014). Consistent with school-to-prison pipeline research, the increased use of exclusionary discipline adversely impacted poor, minority, and disabled students. Minority students, especially Black and Hispanic males, often received more severe school discipline than their White peers, even for the same offenses (Bracey et al., 2013). Black students were suspended at a rate triple that of their White peers and students with disabilities were twice as likely to be suspended when compared to their non-disabled classmates (Merkwae, 2015). The percentage of Black students who were suspended in the 1998-1999 school year was nearly double the percentage of Black students enrolled nationwide, but White students represented just 50% of suspensions despite constituting 63% of nationwide student enrollment (Schlosser, 2014). Theriot (2009) stated that poverty was a significant predictor of student suspensions and expulsions and that there was a clear connection between race and poverty in the United States. This led the author to conclude that exclusionary discipline which disproportionately impacted minorities also disproportionately impacted low socioeconomic status students.

Criticism of School-to-Prison Pipeline Research

While some authors asserted that the existence of a school-to-prison pipeline was undeniable and that the connection between SROs and the school-to-prison pipeline was clearly established, other researchers were skeptical. Authors such as Canady et al. (2012) and Theriot and Cuellar (2016) have criticized school-to-prison pipeline researchers' methodology. Denham et al. (2016) wrote that they were only able to locate one methodologically sound SRO/school-to-prison pipeline study and stated that study found that SROs did not criminalize student misbehavior and concluded that SROs had a positive impact on schools. Burton (2017) stated that any connection between the educational system and incarceration was indirect. Regarding SROs specifically, Denham et al. (2016) stated that "empirical support to the direct impact of SROs on the school-to-prison pipeline remains scant" (p. 9). Canady et al. (2012) stated that studies had failed to establish any clear relationship between SROs and increased student arrests, including

any racial disparity in student arrest rates, and that most arrests made by SROs were for serious offenses which would have resulted in an arrest even without an SRO being present. The authors added that claims about the school-to-prison pipeline confused policymaking and that efforts to remove SROs placed schools at an increased risk of liability from students and staff members when untrained educators attempted to address dangerous incidents instead of utilizing an SRO. Furthermore, attempts to connect SROs to a school-to-prison pipeline were considered superficial and demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding of SRO programs and interagency partnerships.

In addition, confidentiality rules often limited researchers' ability to access to juvenile court records and determine an exact number of school arrests made by SROs as opposed to non-SROs. As a result, most articles purporting to connect SROs to the criminalization of student misconduct were based on speculation and anecdotal evidence (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). Anecdotal accounts were common in articles about the school-to-prison pipeline. For example, Price's (2009) article shared the story of a kindergartener who was handcuffed for a three-hour period following a temper tantrum; Merkwae's (2015) article began with 3 tales of elementary school students with mental health issues who were handcuffed or arrested for disruptive behaviors; and Theriot (2009) described incidents in which one student was arrested for a dress code violation and another for allegedly stealing \$3. While concerning, these stories were more indicative of poor discretion on the part of individual SROs and not necessarily evidence of a widespread endeavor to criminalize student misbehavior.

Regarding school arrests, Theriot (2009) found that school-to-prison pipeline studies often comingled data on school arrests without making an effort to separate which arrests were made by SROs and which were not, rarely focused on theories of criminalization, and concluded that SROs did not engage in discriminatory enforcement practices. The author's study showed that SROs did not discriminate against poor students and that SROs' arrest rates were actually lower at schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students. Lastly, Swartz et al. (2016) questioned studies asserting that the presence of an SRO caused an increase in school-based violent crime. Instead, they postulated that SROs

merely facilitated more reporting of crimes on school campuses and that any increase represented a more accurate depiction of school-based crime.

The popularity of SRO programs has grown significantly in the past two decades. SROs enjoy broad support from school administrators, teachers, students, and parents and research has demonstrated that SROs can reduce school crime and student misconduct while strengthening police-community relations and improving opinions about the police by youth. Perhaps due to rushed efforts to implement SRO programs, implementation has occurred without giving proper consideration to how inserting law enforcement personnel into educational settings could negatively impact school climate, especially in the area of student discipline. As a result, research has suggested that SROs - in concert with zero tolerance discipline policies and enhanced school security measures - have created prison-like school atmospheres, facilitated the excessive use of exclusionary discipline practices, and permitted the criminalization of student misconduct. Referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, this condition has been shown to have long-term negative consequences, especially for at-risk student populations such as economically disadvantaged, minority, and disabled youth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two criminological theories can be applied to SRO programs and the school-to-prison pipeline. Differential association theory can be applied to SRO programs because a primary objective of SRO programs is to build positive relationships with students. Through these relationships, SROs are able to transmit anti-crime information to students with the goal of tipping the balance against pro-crime information that students may be receiving from other sources. Labeling theory applies to the school-to-prison pipeline. Students who are suspended, expelled, or arrested for school-based incidents are often stigmatized and subjected to increased scrutiny by SROs, school administrators and staff members, and classmates. As a result, these students may feel that they have been irreparably labeled as delinquent and engage in behavior verifying that status.

Differential Association Theory

Regarding SRO programs, an applicable criminological theory describing how relationship-building between SROs and students can positively affect students' lives is differential association theory. SRO programs place police officers in schools on a daily basis to provide increased opportunities for police officers to interact with youths in an informal, non-confrontational manner. This is done not only with the intent of encouraging positive opinions of the police among juveniles, but also with the goal of having SROs establish positive relationships with students, especially those at a higher risk of delinquency, and act as mentors and role models for those students. Differential association theory applies to these SRO-student relationships because differential association theory draws a connection between personal relationships and criminal activity. According to Tibbetts and Hemmens (2015), differential association theory was developed in the 1930s by Edwin Sutherland, who proposed that criminal behavior was learned primarily through one's interactions with others. The basic idea of his theory was that an individual was more likely to engage in criminal activity if they associated with persons who exposed them to more information that was in favor of crime than opposed to crime. In contrast, if an individual associated with

persons who provided information that was predominantly anti-crime, they were less likely to engage in criminal behavior. While Sutherland focused primarily on an individual's intimate relationships, such as family members and close friends, differential association theory research has been expanded to include a broader scope of relationships. A positive relationship with an SRO, and the associated anti-crime information, can have the beneficial result of redirecting an at-risk student away from delinquency. The counseling prong of the Triad model provides bountiful opportunities for SROs to act as mentors and role models for students.

Research has supported the positive benefits of relationship-building between SROs and students. Schlosser (2014) described counseling, mentoring, and acting as a role model as some of the primary goals of SRO programs. Jennings et al. (2011) found that SROs provided an opportunity for students to communicate with an authority figure other than their parents, which reduced their likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior. Through their daily presence at schools, SROs were accessible to students on a long-term basis. This provided opportunities for SROs to give advice to students, target programs to the specific needs of a school's students and families, and work with at-risk students over a period of several years instead of through a short-term initiative (Lamont et al., 2011). By acting as mentors and counselors, "SROs, by their environmental proximity and consistent, prolonged exposure to school populations, may contribute to protective mechanisms and resilience of youth... through fostering attachment relationships and providing structure and control" (Denham, et al., 2016, p. 11). This was important because many at-risk students lacked structure or stability in their home lives, so an SRO was in a position to fill some of that void. Many principals surveyed by May et al. (2004) indicated that the most positive impact of the SRO programs at their schools was either positive interactions between SROs and students or SROs' ability to act as positive role models for students. Similarly, Merkwae (2015) stated that almost 62% of school administrators reported that SROs engaged in mentoring activities with students and Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) reported that 59% of American middle schools indicated that SRO-student mentoring was a common

activity. By mentoring and acting as positive role models for at-risk students in an effort to reduce their future delinquency, SRO programs illustrated an application of differential association theory.

Labeling Theory

The criminological theory with the most obvious correlation to the school-to-prison pipeline is labeling theory. School-to-prison pipeline research is especially concerned with the long-term negative impacts of school arrests and exclusionary discipline practices on students as they progress into adulthood. Of special concern to school-to-prison pipeline researchers is that students who are arrested, suspended, or expelled will have difficulty later in life because of the stigma associated with those punishments. Such students may decide that society has labeled them as delinquent and subsequently engage in behavior which makes that label a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to Tibbetts and Hemmens (2015), labeling theory was based on work by George Mead and Charles Cooley in the 1930s. They proposed that individuals' self-identities were influenced greatly by how society categorized them. When an individual, especially a juvenile, finds themselves categorized as an offender, they tend to confirm that status by engaging in more frequent and more serious criminal activity. Consistent with school-to-prison pipeline research, studies regarding labeling theory have found that minorities and lower-class individuals were more likely to find themselves labeled as criminals than their White or more affluent peers. Applying labeling theory to the school-to-prison pipeline demonstrates how students who are defined as delinquent by SROs and school administrators become likely to identify with that label and continue to engage in misconduct despite any potential consequences.

Research has also supported the negative impacts associated with the elements of the school-to-prison pipeline on students. Theriot (2009) discussed labeling theory and stated that arresting students for minor offenses could create a delinquent where one previously did not exist. Apprehension about labeling students was one of the concerns that many school administrators had in common when discussing SRO programs (Coon & Travis, 2012). According to Theriot and Cuellar (2016), the stigma and humiliation that

students who were arrested at school faced from classmates and teachers often led to increased surveillance and scrutiny from school staff members and caused many arrested students to drop-out of school to avoid constant suspicion and harassment. Zero tolerance policies were criticized for being too punitive, failing to address the causes of student misbehavior, and leading to student marginalization and labeling (Denham et al., 2016). Theriot (2009) stated that discrepancies in student discipline could be attributed to cultural differences between educational systems dominated by the middle-class and students who resided in lower-class communities. Canady et al. (2012) acknowledged the negative impact of labeling students as delinquent and noted that properly-functioning SRO programs focused not only on remediating student misbehavior but also on protecting juveniles and changing their behavior for the better. By demonstrating how the stigma associated with school-based arrests and exclusionary discipline caused long-term negative consequences, school-to-prison pipeline research was an illustration of labeling theory.

Differential association theory posits that criminal behavior is learned through an individual's relationships with others. On a daily basis, SROs attempt to build constructive relationships with students on their assigned campuses. Labeling theory postulates that an individual's self-identity is greatly influenced by how society categorizes them. When powerful forces in a student's life - such as school authorities or the police - label them as an offender, a student may resign themselves to that status and engage in continued and escalating delinquent behavior. By examining differential association theory and labeling theory as they relate to SRO programs and the school-to-prison pipeline, it has been shown how a positive relationship with an SRO can be a preventative factor against delinquency and how the stigma associated with exclusionary discipline and school-based arrests can have long-term negative consequences for at-risk students.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAMS

By exploring research about SRO programs and the school-to-prison pipeline, methods for improving SRO programs can be identified. Four such improvements are proposed here: implementing memoranda of understanding, improving the SRO selection process, training enhancements for SROs, and improved SRO evaluation procedures. These suggestions are supported by research and designed to bring SRO programs into compliance with best practices from the fields of education and law enforcement. The successful implementation of these suggestions may mediate concerns about SRO programs presented in school-to-prison pipeline research.

Implementing Memoranda of Understanding

As was discussed previously, role conflict is a common problem with SRO programs and often a cause of disagreements between SROs, school administrators, and school-to-prison pipeline researchers. For example, while some SROs are eager to engage in all aspects of school discipline and numerous school administrators often seek SROs' assistance with disciplinary matters, many school-to-prison pipeline researchers view this as an unacceptable invasion of law enforcement into rule violations which rarely pose a danger to school, student, or staff safety. In contrast, many other SROs believe that day-to-day school discipline is not a part of the SRO function and that SROs should only be involved in rule violations which also constitute violations of criminal statutes. In an effort to more clearly define SROs' roles and responsibilities, define what disciplinary situations they should and should not be involved with, and mitigate the risk of criminalizing student misbehavior, school districts and police departments have turned to memorandums of understanding. Also referred to as an intergovernmental agreement, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) establishes ground rules to govern the police-school relationship, outlines the duties and responsibilities of school administrators and SROs regarding school discipline, and clarifies areas of common disagreement between SROs, police agencies, school administrators, and education systems. Writing for the Illinois Association of School Boards, Small (2014) stated that MOUs should, at

minimum, delineate the goals, structure, mission, and procedures of SRO programs and may also address funding sources, proper locations for SROs' offices, recordkeeping responsibilities, and issues pertaining to the selection, training, and supervision of SROs.

MOUs have broad support from both the law enforcement and educational communities including NASRO, USDOE, and the US Department of Justice. NASRO describes MOUs as being essential to all SRO programs and as a type of hybrid insurance policy and policy document which provides consistency regardless of personnel changes, compliance with applicable statutes, a method for on-going program evaluations, and an overall sense of balance in the police-school partnership (Canady et al., 2012). USDOE (2017) stated that an MOU should be in-place prior to the placement of an SRO in any school, that all MOUs should be based on an approved framework, that a process for periodic review and updating of MOUs should be established, that MOUs should create a process to collect data to be used in the evaluation of SRO programs, and that MOUs should allow for school authorities to request the removal or reassignment of individual SROs. MOUs should be developed with input from the police, schools, and community to ensure that they provide SROs with guidelines allowing them to foster safe schools without violating students' rights (Lipari, 2018; USDOE; 2017). MOUs should also ensure that students' due process rights are ensured throughout any disciplinary or law enforcement process (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). Some states have mandated MOUs or similar agreements in legislation governing SRO programs within their jurisdictions (May et al., 2004; Merkwae, 2015; USDOE, 2017). In the 2015-2016 school year, 70% of high schools and 51% of middle and elementary schools with SRO programs had MOUs or similar agreements (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). While the content of MOUs varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, several common elements are believed to be necessary for an MOU to be effective at addressing school-to-prison pipeline concerns without unnecessarily handcuffing SROs in the performance of their duties.

The first area of police-school relations that MOUs should attempt to address is student arrests for school-based incidents, especially for minor, non-violent offenses which pose little or limited danger to

school safety. By appropriately restraining SROs' arrest powers without stripping them away entirely, MOUs can mitigate some of the negative consequences associated with the school-to-prison pipeline. Some authors (Bracey et al., 2013; Theriot & Cuellar, 2016; USDOE, 2017) strongly suggested that arrest should be the option of last resort for school-based offenses. Instead, MOUs should encourage SROs and school administrators to develop in-school strategies and progressive disciplinary processes to address student misconduct and only turn to formal law enforcement intervention when all school- and community-based options have been exhausted and proven ineffective (Bracey et al., 2013). Theriot and Cuellar (2016) stated that trained educators were better prepared to address routine student misbehavior and that an SRO's authority should only override that of school officials when a criminal law has been violated or there is an immediate danger to school safety. Lipari (2018) suggested that school administrators should only request SRO involvement in emergency situations or when criminal activity has occurred. The author added that administrators should also consider a student's age, whether any injuries occurred, and the seriousness of the offense before contacting an SRO because, in some cases, an SRO might be required by police department policy to make an arrest. Small (2014) proposed that school administrators should be given limited supervisory authority over SROs in their schools to ensure that SROs do not take law enforcement action in situations better handled with school-based discipline. However, Lamont et al. (2011) cautioned against placing excessive restraints on SROs' arrest powers. They stated that SROs should be able to exercise the same discretion that they would utilize in other law enforcement duties with the added option of employing school-based restorative interventions as alternatives. Bracey et al. (2013) found that schools whose SRO programs included MOUs addressing alternatives to in-school arrests experienced a 50-59% decrease in student arrests and an 8% reduction in suspensions. Overall, a well-worded MOU can ensure that SROs can still perform their vital school safety and law enforcement duties while minimizing student arrests and avoiding the negative consequences associated with the criminalization of student misconduct proposed in school-to-prison pipeline research.

A second element of SRO programs that can be improved through the use of MOUs is an agreement on how SROs spend their time. MOUs can clarify how SROs are expected to divide their day-to-day activities between each of the three prongs of the Triad model. An MOU can ensure that SROs are not entirely consumed with law enforcement duties so that they can spend an adequate amount of time teaching and counseling while still allowing the flexibility to adapt when an unexpected incident occurs. MOUs' should establish clear protocols and expectations that have been collaboratively developed, but also include flexibility (Lamont et al., 2011). Denham et al. (2016) suggested that MOUs should specifically acknowledge the value of SROs' counseling role. A common complaint of school administrators was that SROs were often called-away for law enforcement duties which were not school-related, which limited their ability to be effective in the SRO function (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). MOUs can mitigate this concern by delineating what types of duties, such as court appearances or serious incidents, will cause the SRO to be absent from the schools while ensuring that they are not pulled from the schools to handle routine calls for service or relieve manpower shortages.

A third component of SRO programs that MOUs can better define and improve is SRO involvement in school disciplinary matters. School administrators will often seek SRO assistance in matters which constitute clear violations of a school's student code of conduct, but which do not violate any criminal statute. This is an area where MOUs can clarify how involved, if at all, SROs should be in such matters. As sworn law enforcement personnel, it would seem that their involvement should be very limited, but SROs are often considered by students and staff to be similar to school administrators, leading to expectations that they will actively enforce all school rules, not just those which also constitute criminal offenses. This is a common area of conflict because school administrators often became upset when they sought SROs' assistance in non-criminal disciplinary matters and SROs declined to get involved (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). A common reason that SROs declined to become involved in school discipline was a concern that a disciplinary matter would turn into an undesired arrest if the student became aggressive or otherwise responded inappropriately to the SRO's presence (Coon & Travis, 2012). Police Foundation

(2016) encouraged MOUs which moved SROs away from a rule enforcement role toward a role focused on acting as resources for students, parents, and staff members. Going a step further, Lipari (2018), Price (2009), and USDOE (2017) proposed a bright-line rule in which SROs would not be involved in routine school discipline matters in any way. NASRO suggested the following compromise position:

A best practice for discipline issues has emerged nationally over the past decade and has been endorsed by the courts: an SRO who observes a violation of the school code of conduct, preserves a safe and orderly environment by taking the student(s) to where school discipline can be determined solely by school officials. (Canady et al., 2012, p. 23)

In this manner, an SRO can help maintain a safe school where all rules are followed equally and retain student and staff respect by demonstrating that they are concerned with all forms of student misconduct without becoming directly involved in determining discipline in matters outside the scope of their expertise.

Improving School Resource Officer Selection Processes

Another area where SRO programs can be improved is the process for selecting SROs. In many cases, these processes are conducted internally by the SRO's employing law enforcement agency and without substantive input from the community or any personnel from the school or schools to which the SRO will be assigned, including the school administrators with whom the SRO will collaborate on a daily basis. This type of closed process may lead to the types of conflicts between SROs and school administrators that are common to many SRO programs. In addition, failing to utilize SRO-specific selection criteria may reduce the likelihood that the process will result in the selection of an SRO with the appropriate personality, attitude, and mentality required to work full-time in an educational environment. Inadequate SRO selection processes were identified by Briers and Dickmann (2009) as an obstacle to SRO program effectiveness. Three suggestions for improving SRO selection processes are: developing SRO-specific selection criteria, allowing school personnel to participate in selection processes, and obtaining input from the school community.

One way to improve SRO selection processes is to develop criteria to ensure that the right police officer is selected for this important position. Working as an SRO is unique within the law enforcement profession. Instead of having a geographical area as one's beat, an SRO's beat consists of one or more school campuses. Instead of collaborating with other law enforcement personnel, SROs must work in concert with educators and adjust their demeanor and decision-making to an educational environment. Isolation from other police officers was identified as a common complaint from many SROs (Briers & Dickmann, 2009; Lamont et al., 2011). Police supervisors were also concerned about isolation because, in their opinions, some SROs spent so much time in school settings that their perspective became unbalanced and they began to react more as an educator instead of as a police officer (Lamont et al., 2011). SROs must enjoy working and interacting with juveniles on a daily basis and must be able to work autonomously because police agencies depend on SROs to address school-related issues and incidents with minimal support or assistance. Coon and Travis (2012) stated that SRO selection was an area of importance because not all police officers were well-suited for the position. Traits believed to be essential for a good SRO were identified as a desire to work with youth, an ability to adapt to working in an educational setting, good communication skills (Coon & Travis, 2012), openness, honesty, a proactive mentality, a demonstrated ability to interact appropriately with juveniles (Lamont et al., 2011), a willingness to work cooperatively with school administrators, specialized SRO training, and a professional appearance (May et al., 2004). Other desirable attributes for SROs were prior experience working with youth such as coaching or mentoring, a positive attitude, an ability to work autonomously, a willingness to develop partnerships with all parts of the school community, knowledge of local social service resources, an understanding of child development and psychology, and competency in the areas of crime prevention strategies and technologies (Police Foundation, 2016). It may be unlikely that any one officer will possess all of these characteristics, but this list can be used as a foundation for the creation of SRO-specific selection criteria and standards to ensure that officers who are well-suited to the position are assigned to work in schools.

Second, school personnel should be given an opportunity to actively participate and provide input into the selection of SROs. It is unlikely that a law enforcement agency would allow an outside entity to place an individual into their workplace without having any input, yet this is what many police organizations do when selecting and assigning SROs. At minimum, the school administrators with whom the SRO will collaborate on a daily basis should be allowed to partake in the selection process. Theriot and Cuellar (2016) suggested that school administrators be included in all steps of the recruitment and selection of SROs at their schools. According to Coon and Travis (2012), participation by school administrators reduced the likelihood of conflicts and increased the chances that the SRO-administrator partnership would be successful. Allowing school-level personnel to have input increased the likelihood that the SRO would be compatible with a school's staff, students, and mission (Lamont et al., 2011). School administrators also provided context for SRO selection processes because of their intimate knowledge of the school, its students, and its families (Police Foundation, 2016). Although their employers may be different, SROs and school staff members share the same workplace and essentially become co-workers. This is especially true in the case of the SRO-administrator partnership. To ensure that this partnership is effective and conflict-free, school administrators- and possibly other school personnel - should be involved in SRO selection processes.

In addition to school personnel, obtaining input from the wider school community should also be part of SRO selection processes. Parents send their children to school each day expecting that they will be educated, nurtured, and kept safe. Through the Triad model, SROs play an integral role in each of these areas, but especially in the area of student safety. Because student safety is of paramount concern to SROs, parents and other concerned stakeholders from the community should be allowed to partake in SRO selection processes. Examples of stakeholders included students, parents, other community members, and experts in youth development (Lipari, 2018). Involving members of the community increased transparency, built trust, and encouraged community support of SRO programs (Police Foundation, 2016). Outside input will also provide an element of oversight for SRO selection processes. Some individual officers apply for

SRO positions solely because they desire the more normal work schedule associated with the position or because they want a break from traditional police work. In addition, some departments used SRO positions as a sort of dumping ground for officers in their final years before retirement (May & Higgins, 2011). The job of an SRO requires an officer who is willing to be active and engaged with students and staff members every school day. Community input and oversight can help safeguard against the selection of SROs based on dubious motivations.

Summarizing the importance of having a good SRO selection process, Coon and Travis (2012) wrote, “school resource officers may become invaluable to the larger school community, but this seems most likely when the officer and school are well matched...and there is both input and support from a wide variety of sources” (p. 28). Developing an SRO selection process which includes SRO-specific selection criteria, allows for input from all stakeholders in the school community, and encourages active participation and input from school personnel – especially administrators – will help police agencies ensure that their SRO programs will be successful police-school partnerships and reduce the likelihood of assigning an SRO whose approach to the position could contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Training Enhancements for School Resource Officers

Another area where SRO programs can be improved is training. SRO training ranges from well-organized courses offered by NASRO and similar organizations to piecemeal on-the-job training provided to new SROs by experienced SROs. Some states mandate that SROs receive certain training prior to beginning their assignment or within a period of being appointed, but others have no training requirements. Working as a law enforcement officer in an educational setting is a unique experience that is not covered by traditional police training courses. Girouard (2001) wrote, “the SRO’s multifaceted role—as law enforcement officer, counselor, teacher, and liaison between law enforcement, schools, families, and the community—requires training beyond that traditionally offered in police academies” (p. 1). To ensure that SROs understand and can perform their myriad roles effectively, they should receive comprehensive

training on topics germane to the SRO function. Comprehensive training is essential to protecting students' rights and is vital to successful SRO program implementation (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). Several authors (Briers & Dickmann, 2009; Denham et al., 2016; Lamont et al., 2011; Merkwae, 2015; Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012) identified a lack of comprehensive, standardized SRO training as a weakness in the implementation of SRO programs in the United States. It was also noted that, while police agencies were readily willing to provide specialized training for other positions within their organizations, SRO positions failed to receive the same respect or attention (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). The importance of SRO training should not be discounted because May et al. (2004) found that school administrators ranked specialized training as the second-most important trait of a good SRO. A primary obstacle to SRO training is funding for SROs to attend training courses. When funds for SRO training are cut, SROs are forced to rely on their background of traditional law enforcement training, making the success of the SRO program dependent on individual officers' personalities and level of experience (May et al., 2011). Regardless of these challenges, it is important for SROs to be properly trained for their positions and that SRO training be both continuous and developed collaboratively.

To be properly prepared for their jobs, SROs should be trained in a number of areas which are specific to the SRO function and untypical of most law enforcement work. As experienced police officers, SROs are likely already trained in some school-related areas, such as responding to active shooter incidents, crisis intervention, and appropriate reporting of sexual- and child-abuse cases. While understanding that no training course can be all-inclusive, SRO training should cover as many youth- and school-related topics as possible. Training for SROs should cover topics including: youth development and psychology, working with youth, building relationships and partnerships with educators (Briers & Dickmann, 2009), the distinct nature of educational settings, identifying students' needs, balancing the priorities of safety and education (Canady et al., 2012), classroom instruction (Coon & Travis, 2012), diversionary options such as restorative justice practices, students' rights, issues regarding disabled and special education students, de-escalation techniques, bias-free policing (Lipari, 2018), anti-bullying interventions, school districts' policies and

student codes of conduct (Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012), cultural competence, and community-based resources (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). Merkwae (2015) stated that concerns pertaining to disabled and special education students should be emphasized in SRO training courses because their behaviors could be caused by their conditions, they were more susceptible to SROs' authority, and because they were entitled to special protections under federal education laws. By providing comprehensive training to SROs, police departments can increase the effectiveness of their SRO programs and reduce the possibility that an SRO will contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Similar to SRO selection processes, the development of training curricula for SROs should also be conducted collaboratively with input from a variety of stakeholders. In Florida, where the first week-long SRO training course was developed in 1985, the curriculum was established with input from the Florida Association of SROs, Department of Education, Department of Law Enforcement, and Attorney General's Office with the intent of providing SROs with the baseline skills needed to work in school settings (Canady et al., 2012). Coon and Travis (2012) advocated for the inclusion of school administrators in the development of SRO training courses because doing so gave them a better understanding of what training SROs received and allowed them to adapt the training as schools' needs changed. Input from parents, students, teachers, and other members of the school community can also assist in the development of an effective SRO training program.

Lastly, SRO training should be an ongoing process consisting not only of initial, basic SRO training courses, but regular updates and refreshers to ensure that SROs are aware of relevant changes in statutes, court decisions, and best practices. Lipari (2018) advocated for annual refresher trainings for SROs in addition to any initial specialized training. SROs should receive 40 hours of training before beginning their assignments and at least 10 hours of annual refresher training (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). According to Small (2014), ongoing training requirements provided important protections against litigation by ensuring that SROs were equipped with the most up-to-date information. Both Small (2014) and USDOE (2017) recommended that basic and ongoing training requirements should be included in MOUs. Through ongoing

training programs, SROs will be better prepared to perform their roles effectively and can avoid school-to-prison pipeline concerns.

Improved Evaluations of School Resource Officers

Evaluation processes for SROs are another area which can be improved. In most cases, SROs are employed by a local policing agency, such as a police or sheriff's department, and assigned to work full-time as an SRO in one or more schools. This leaves SROs in a type of supervisory limbo where they are officially within their agency's chain-of-command, but lack regular contact or observation by their police supervisor. In contrast, school administrators have daily interactions with the SROs at their schools and are well-situated to provide valuable input during the evaluation process. The lack of a targeted and consistent methodology for SRO evaluations has been identified as a weakness of SRO programs (May et al., 2011; Merkwae, 2015; Myrstol, 2011). To improve SRO evaluations, school administrators' input should be included in the process and mechanisms for gathering useful data should be implemented.

SROs and school administrators work closely together each school day. In contrast, SROs may not have contact with their superiors at the police department for several days. This places school administrators in a position to act as an important source of information when police supervisors are conducting SROs' performance evaluations. Merkwae (2015) stated that police supervisors often failed to adequately monitor SROs and Coon and Travis (2012) suggested that school administrators should take full responsibility for SRO evaluations. However, this position failed to recognize that SROs were employed by and ultimately responsible to their police supervisors. Police supervisors should take the lead in evaluating SROs, but do so with substantial input from school administrators. Lamont et al (2011) stated that SROs should be supervised by their employing police agency, but that there should be formalized methods for school administrators to report information to an SRO's supervisor. To accomplish this, an SRO's supervisor should meet with school administrators regularly. However, this is rarely the case. 47.1% of school administrators surveyed by May et al. (2004) stated that they had never met with their

SRO's supervisor and less than 10% indicated meeting with their SRO's supervisor at least monthly. Regular meetings between police supervisors and school administrators have been found to bolster police-school partnerships (Lamont et al., 2011), increase administrators' confidence in the SRO program, and ensure transparency and interagency cooperation (May et al., 2004). SRO evaluations should include input from not only school administrators, but also teachers and parents (Lipari, 2018). It also may be useful to survey students to determine their opinions about the SRO's performance and solicit information about the SRO's competence as a teacher and counselor. By obtaining information from a variety of sources, but especially school administrators, police supervisors can negate the impact of SRO isolation and effectively evaluate SRO performance.

Without useful data, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of an individual SRO or an overall SRO program. However, few police agencies or school districts gather data about SROs' activities, even though the Triad model provides a framework upon which to construct an SRO-specific evaluation. Many SRO programs are established without an assessment plan or a way to gather data to make an evaluation possible (Myrstol, 2011). One issue is that police supervisors attempt to employ traditional police evaluation practices to SROs. Instead of measuring the number of interventions an SRO has conducted or estimating the number of incidents those interventions may have prevented, SROs continue to be evaluated based on citation and arrest statistics (Briers & Dickmann, 2009). To improve SRO evaluations, police departments should tailor them to SROs' unique roles and gather data measuring an SRO's ability to de-escalate situations, employ alternatives to student arrests (Lipari, 2018), and achieve positive outcomes in their interactions with students and staff members (Small, 2014). To accomplish this, SROs should maintain activity logs documenting what law enforcement, counseling, and teaching activities they engage in on a daily or weekly basis as well as any positive or negative outcomes perceived to be related to those activities. In addition, a survey instrument should be developed to gather data from students, teachers, school administrators, parents, and other stakeholders regarding their perceptions of an SRO's activities and their effectiveness at improving school safety and climate.

The popularity of SRO programs grew exponentially during the past few decades. This rapid expansion in the number of SROs has shown positive results in many areas. However, this swift growth may have occurred in a manner which caused law enforcement agencies and school districts to implement SRO programs without taking proper steps to ensure that SRO programs were properly administered and that SROs were appropriately selected, trained, and evaluated. These factors may contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline through the criminalization of student misconduct by SROs who are ill-suited or unprepared for their positions or are part of SRO programs which fail to sufficiently define their roles or evaluate their performance. By implementing the suggestions discussed here, SRO programs can be improved to the benefit of all stakeholders while also alleviating concerns posed by school-to-prison pipeline research.

CONCLUSION

An SRO's job is unique within the law enforcement community. They work more regularly with educators than they do with other police officers. Their beat consists of one or more school campuses instead of a specified geographical area. Contact with juveniles is persistent instead of sporadic and something to be embraced instead of avoided. Determinations of an SRO's performance are based primarily on their ability to intervene and prevent incidents instead of on enforcement statistics. In fact, the position of SRO is likely the only assignment in policing where the ideal number arrests, citations, or other formal law enforcement actions during any statistical period is zero. During any given shift, an SRO may be expected to repeatedly switch between policing, teaching, and counseling. An SRO must be responsive to divergent expectations from their employing agency, school officials, administrators, and staff members, students, parents, and other concerned members of the school community. Despite these challenges, thousands of police officers have chosen to step away from traditional law enforcement and work as SROs with the goals of ensuring school safety and improving students' opinions about the police.

However, school-to-prison pipeline research has demonstrated the possibility that the increased police involvement in schools associated with the popularity of SRO programs may have caused the unnecessary criminalization of incidents of student misconduct, especially in cases involving minority, disabled, or economically-disadvantaged students. It is believed that the mere presence of an SRO at a school may cause student misbehavior that was previously addressed only through schools' disciplinary processes to be treated as criminal activity requiring formal law enforcement action. The criminalization of student misconduct can lead to early justice system involvement, which has been shown to have numerous long-term, negative consequences. School-to-prison pipeline research also questioned whether SROs were actually effective at enhancing school safety or improving students' perceptions of the police.

While there are disagreements about the methodology and conclusions of school-to-prison pipeline research, it has unquestionably revealed areas where SRO programs can be improved. The four

improvements suggested in this paper are: implementing MOUs for SRO programs, improving SRO selection processes, enhanced SRO training, and the development of SRO-specific evaluation methods. Through the widespread implementation of MOUs, police-school partnerships can be formalized and issues of role conflict and ambiguity can be reduced. MOUs can be especially effective at reducing opportunities for the criminalization of student misconduct by SROs. By separating the types of misbehavior that should be handled only as school discipline issues from those requiring police involvement, MOUs can ensure that SROs are only called-upon for incidents which constitute criminal behavior or pose a legitimate threat to school safety. By improving SRO selection processes, it can be ensured that the right police officer is chosen and that the SRO is well-matched to the school and its administration. The involvement of stakeholders from all parts of the school community will be essential to improving SRO selection processes. At minimum, an administrator from each school where an SRO will be assigned should be included because effective SRO/administrator partnerships are essential to the success of SRO programs. Consideration should also be given to including teachers, parents, and students in the SRO selection process to obtain their input and promote transparency. Through improvements in SRO training, SROs will be better prepared to work as teachers, counselors, and law enforcers in an educational setting while being regularly updated about relevant changes in laws and policies. Training for SROs should cover a variety of areas often lacking in standard law enforcement instruction, such as: youth psychology, relationship-building, classroom instruction, alternatives to arrests, students' rights, de-escalation techniques, and special education laws. Lastly, by developing SRO-specific evaluation methods, SROs' performance can be assessed in a manner that is more accurate and in a way that allows for the gathering of the data needed for effective program evaluation. Supervisors of SROs should recognize that standard police evaluation data, such as citations and arrests, fail to adequately measure an SRO's effectiveness at proactively intervening before incidents occur, improving students' opinions of the police, or improving school safety and climate. Instead, SRO evaluation procedures should utilize the Triad model as a framework and include data from multiple sources, such as: SRO activity logs, input from school administrators, and surveys of students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Overall, research is supportive of SRO programs and SROs' abilities to make schools safer so that students can focus on learning and educators can focus on preparing the next generation of American youth. Research also supports the concept that SROs can enhance police-community relations by improving students' opinions about the police. However, law enforcement programs should always be looking for ways to improve so that current best practices are followed and the public continues to receive quality police services. SRO programs are not exempt from this expectation and school-to-prison pipeline research has identified ways in which SRO programs should be improved. Law enforcement agencies, in conjunction with their partners in education, should codify their relationships through MOUs, ensure that SROs are properly selected and trained, and establish SRO-specific evaluation methodologies. The implementation of these improvements can improve SRO programs in ways that benefit the entire school community while also addressing concerns posed by school-to-prison pipeline research.

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