

Recommendations for Implementing and Improving a School Resource Officer Program

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to provide recommendations for implementing and improving School Resource Officer (SRO) programs. Law enforcement agencies across the country continue to struggle with providing school safety for students and educators. As law enforcement budgets continue to tighten, and federal grants becoming difficult to obtain, there has been a shortage of SROs in the nation's schools. It is incumbent upon law enforcement administrations to place emphasis on funding and implementing quality SRO programs in their jurisdictions.

Methods

The methods used in this paper will involve an extensive literature review of empirical studies and reports through the University of Wisconsin – Platteville Karmann library. Academic sources, such as journal articles and book reviews, along with government sources such as the National Institute of Justice, the US Department of Justice, and the National Center for Education will be used. These studies and reports relate to school safety and SRO programs in order to provide recommendations to improve or implement SRO programs. The significant components of SRO programs will be identified and highlighted throughout the paper to ground the recommendations of this study in both empirical and academic findings. Labeling theory will be used to define how frequent juvenile interactions with SROs involving school disciplinary actions or criminal offenses tends to categorize the juveniles as being delinquent.

Key Findings

There are several important findings of this paper. First, the importance of selecting the best qualified SRO. Having officers who are a good fit for the position is crucial in ensuring a successful SRO program. Second, defining the role of the SRO with the school administration and providing a clear distinction between school discipline and criminal acts. This would include drafting a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the school administration and the law enforcement agency which specifies who has authority in individual situations. As there are always budgetary concerns for both the law enforcement agency and school administrations, funding solutions for a successful SRO program would also be determined. Third, providing that SRO with inclusive ongoing pertinent training in how to successfully deal with juvenile matters. Fourth, having regular scheduled meetings with both the school administration and the law enforcement supervisors to discuss how the SRO program is progressing, and provide ways to resolve possible conflicts with the SRO and the school staff. This would include providing meaningful evaluations and supervision for the SROs. Fifth, provide scheduled meetings with the parents regarding the activities the SRO was involved with at the school in order to provide transparency to parents about what is occurring at their school. Lastly, law enforcement administrators and school administrator with a trained and dedicated SRO will be able to ensure that safety for students and staff remains at the highest level. A properly administered SRO program will assist with the day to day operations at the law enforcement agency, provide continuity of law enforcement services to the juveniles at these schools and ensure that the schools have the highest level of safety available. Through the implementation of an SRO program or enhancing an existing SRO program, law enforcement agencies can ensure a safer environment for students and staff.

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Section 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Law enforcement agencies across the country continue to struggle with providing school safety for students and educators. Parents have an expectation that the law enforcement community and schools will keep their children safe. As law enforcement budgets continue to tighten, and federal grants becoming difficult to obtain, there has been a shortage of SROs in the nation's schools. It is incumbent upon law enforcement administrations to place emphasis on funding and implementing quality SRO programs in their jurisdictions. Law enforcement administrators and school district administrations must find ways to collaborate in both successfully funding a SRO program and ensuring that the goal of providing safe schools is completed.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this seminar research paper is to provide an overview of the School Resource Officer (SRO) position employed at American schools in order to encourage more schools to review or implement an SRO program at their school. This study will describe how implementing an SRO program or enhancing an existing one can assist jurisdictions with providing quality police services to their school communities. Further, it will discuss how a trained SRO can assist local law enforcement agencies, along with their corresponding school districts, with such issues like fighting, damage to property, bullying, teen social media issues, drug and alcohol issues; while also providing in-classroom education in a variety of subjects.

Budgetary constraints on many law enforcement agencies have required law enforcement administrators to either remove the SRO from the school or curtail the amount of time a SRO spends at the schools. In many instances, school districts and law enforcement agencies split the cost to operate the SRO program (May, Hart, & Ruddell, 2011). Both law enforcement agencies and school districts continue to look for alternative solutions in order to keep SROs in schools.

Law enforcement agencies that do not have SROs in their schools, still have to assist with calls for service at these schools. As described in a Department of Justice (2005) report, some police department personnel believe the SRO program takes away too many patrol officers from patrol operations. What these personnel do not fully understand is that SROs handle and deal with school issues that would have otherwise been a call for service for the patrol officers (Finn, McDevitt, Lassister, Shively, & Rich, 2005). Not having a SRO in schools leads to issues of continuity and places additional stress on patrol operations for day and afternoon shifts that would naturally be completed by the onsite SRO (Finn et al., 2005). Improving or establishing a SRO program is an effective way to reduce response time to the school for critical incidents while providing the safest environment.

Methods

The methods used in this paper will involve an extensive literature review of empirical studies and reports through the University of Wisconsin – Platteville Karmann library. Academic sources, such as journal articles and book reviews, along with government sources such as the National Institute of Justice, the US Department of Justice, and the National Center for Education will be used. These studies and reports relate to school safety and SRO programs in order to provide recommendations to improve or implement SRO programs. The significant components of SRO programs will be identified and highlighted throughout the paper to ground

the recommendations of this study in both empirical and academic findings. Labeling theory will be used to define how frequent juvenile interactions with SROs involving school disciplinary actions or criminal offenses tends to categorize the juveniles as being delinquent.

Limitations

The limitations of this paper included no original research. Gathering primary data from local SROs would have provided another avenue to learn about successful components of SRO programs. Further, the studies reviewed in this paper were conducted on larger police agencies with numerous SROs in several schools, which is not represented of a majority of school districts in the country.

Section II: Literature Review

Introduction

The following literature review is divided into twelve sections which include defining the SRO, history of the SRO program, age and experience level differences in SROs, perceptions of fear at schools, financial requirements to fund an SRO program, challenges for SROs, the SRO and the school-to-prison pipeline, zero tolerance policies, school issues becoming police matters, constitutional rights, students with disabilities, and diversion programs.

Definition of the School Resource Officer (SRO)

According to the National Association of School Resource Officer (NASRO), a SRO is by federal definition, a career law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is deployed and employed by a police department or agency in a community-oriented policing assignment to work in collaboration with one or more schools (NASRO, 2019). NASRO describes the goals of the SRO program 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 (NASRO, 2019). This accomplishes the three functions of the SRO as educator, informal counselor, and law enforcer.

As an educator, SROs serve as classroom speakers for a variety of disciplines to include science, math, juvenile law, the constitution and local government, substance abuse, conflict resolution, and teenage driver's education to name a few. Further, SROs assist with school functions such as sporting events and dances, and are guest speakers in classrooms or school assemblies. Law related questions and law related teaching occupy the SROs at schools. SROs

proactively promote safety by building trusting relationships with students, staff and other stakeholders.

SROs also provide training to school staff members about crime prevention, critical incidents, and school safety. As the informal counselor, the SRO provides positive reinforcement to students who can guide the students in a variety of situations. This allows the SRO to intervene early with the student before they become introduced to the juvenile justice system. Finally, as the law enforcement representative on campus, they protect the students and staff and can respond quickly to critical incidents and making required arrests (Rosiak, 2014) by patrolling the school building and grounds, investigation of criminal acts, working with school staff to enhance crime and violence prevention, and acting as mentors to students with whom they are in contact. The SRO position can vary in concept from one jurisdiction to another. In short, SROs assume a variety of roles that range from strict enforcers of rules and laws to surrogate parents, to counselors and coaches, and to an extra pair of hands for school administrators (Thurau & Wald, 2010).

SROs are employed by law enforcement agencies to work in collaboration with schools to reflect the values of community oriented policing to include proactive and preventative crime prevention (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). SRO programs were designed to be part of a collaborative effort between police departments, schools, and the community to ensure the needs of the students were addressed along with providing a safe learning environment (Canady, James, & Nease, 2012).

SROs have been succeeding in addressing community issues through programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention programs, Second Step, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program and Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) (Weiler & Cray,

2011). Further, SROs coordinate with school officials to conduct drug sniffs of school lockers and school parking lots while school is in session. Random drug testing of students who are engaged in school athletics or clubs is also used, along with metal detectors, bag searches, and security cameras.

History of the School Resource Officer program

Law enforcement agencies and educational institutions have had an extensive history of collaboration since the late 1910's. Beginning with Berkley, CA. Police Chief August Vollmer, who is credited with modernizing American policing, was the first in the United States to introduce a juvenile division to the Berkeley Police Department in 1914 (Dinkelspeil, 2010). These juvenile detectives, as they would be referred to today, assisted Berkley schools with rehabilitation focused juvenile justice efforts and organizing youth sports leagues in collaboration with schools.

The first modern day SRO program began in the 1950's in Flint, Michigan to assist with community policing due to the increased levels of gun violence (Counts, Randall, Ryan, & Katsiyannis, 2018). In 1971, the Charlotte Police Department initiated the Officer Friendly program incorporating officers into schools with the goal of increasing the image of the police department with their juvenile population (Coon & Travis, The role of law enforcement in public school safety: a national survey, 2005). Congress passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act in 1984, mandating schools receiving federal funding provide multidisciplinary teams including law enforcement agencies to combat crimes against youthful victims (Canady, James, & Nease, 2012).

The number of SROs increased throughout the 1990's as schools were seen as being crime ridden for both the students and staff. This perception culminated at the end of the decade with the school shootings in West Paducah, Kentucky in 1997, the Jonesboro, Arkansas incident in 1998 and Columbine in Colorado in 1999 (Myrstol, 2011).

In 1999, the federal government Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in an effort to advance community policing, started the COPS in Schools grant program to hire SROs in schools. The SROs were to engage in community policing in and around primary and secondary schools. The COPS in Schools programs had two primary objectives: to improve student and school safety, and to help police agencies build collaborative partnerships with local schools (Myrstol, 2011). The COPS in Schools grant provided \$750 million to 3,000 law enforcement agencies between 1999 and 2005.

From 1997 to 2003, the number of school based law enforcement officers which can include school security guards, and patrol officers who are not all SROs, rose 52 percent from 9,400 to 14,337. As of 2012 there were more than 10,000 SROs at almost 40% of schools nationwide (Rosiak, 2014).

Age and experience level differences in SROs

The qualifications to become a SRO are generally that they are a sworn officer of the state where they are employed for an average of three years. Typical SRO candidates are interviewed initially by the law enforcement agency. In some jurisdictions the SRO candidate may already be a juvenile detective for that agency and has typically gone through an advanced juvenile officer training course which reviews the juvenile justice system, restorative justice and crisis intervention. NASRO has a basic SRO course which is a forty hour block of instruction

which emphasizes three main areas of instruction: the function of law enforcement at schools, mentoring students, and guest speaking (NASRO, 2019)

The SRO position can also be appointed depending on the needs of the law enforcement agency and the local school districts. An interview with the school district administration and the prospective SRO is also completed to provide an initial assessment of the feasibility for both the school administration and the SRO. SROs will then go to state wide SRO training and once at the schools will have ongoing training with other regional SROs to determine trends and issues that are currently an issue.

In the past, there has been a perception in some law enforcement circles that the SRO position at a school was for either new officers at the department or for officers close to retirement. In both cases the thought was that the new officer assigned to the school would not be effective as they did not know anything yet, and the veteran officer was sent there to get them away from their agency and were not going to do anything. In one study, some SROs said they were just “gophers” or that the only job they had were to stand in the lobby and walk the halls or be a bathroom monitor (Barnes, 2016). In one study, police officers in Meridian, MS. were spending so much time transporting students in handcuffs to the local juvenile detention facility that they began describing themselves as a “taxi service” (Owens, 2015). The concern by the community over this was that the majority of the students were arrested and transported for violating school rules and minor offenses. These arrests were also suspensions for the students and then the student would be released from the detention facility and placed on probation. Any future school discipline involving that student then could violate their probation which returned them to the detention facility for a longer time frame.

In another study of 211 SROs in Kentucky, it detailed three analysis: the characteristics of SROs whom are either newbies, under 2.5 years' experience, and veterans, more than 2.5 years' experience. Second the study examined the differences between the newbies and the veterans regarding the perceptions of school administrators, and lastly whether there is a difference in the police actions taken by the newbies and the veterans (May & Higgins, 2011). The study showed that there was no statistical difference in the activities of either of these groups. The veterans were not "put out to pasture" and were effective at the schools and the newbies were shown to be level headed and no more or less aggressive in their policing than the veterans (May & Higgins, 2011).

Perceptions of fear at schools

In the National Assessment of SRO Programs from 2005, it summarized the perceptions of fear about campus safety among school administrators, faculty, and students, and secondly trust in the police among these groups in the 19 large and small, new and established SRO programs that were evaluated and visited (Finn & McDevitt, 2005). The report documented that there is a lower perception of fear by faculty and students at schools with SROs, and that the SRO program increased trust in the police. Students who report that they feel safe in their schools are more engaged in their classes, have higher academic achievement, and have lower rates of absenteeism, truancy, and behavioral issues. Another study found that educators who report feeling safe at schools can focus more on academics, remain longer in their positions, and are better equipped to teach and support students (Rosiak, 2014).

A two year study by Carleton University in Toronto of five schools with dedicated full time SROs showed students were less stressed at school, missed school less, and had a lower fear of being bullied or physically harmed (Rubenstein, 2018). The research surveyed 1,300 students in

two socio-economically challenged, two middle class and one affluent schools in Peel Region high schools. The 100 SROs that were interviewed were responsible for non-criminal issues such as trespassing, liquor infractions, fighting, and suicide attempts, criminal issues such as drugs and robberies, monitoring social media and participating in extra-curricular sports. This report showed the SRO program there reduced crime and bullying along with providing additional social and economic benefits which they estimated at 11 times the annual SRO program costs (Rubenstein, 2018).

Financial requirements to fund an SRO program

SRO programs are usually funded by both the school district and the law enforcement agency. The percentage of the funding is different in jurisdictions and is agreed upon by both stakeholders depending on the financial positions of both parties. The cost for the SRO program covers the SRO salary as they are paid by the law enforcement agency and the school district is billed. There is typically another hourly rate by the law enforcement agency that is assigned for after school activities such as sporting events, dances and other activities which require law enforcement assistance. In both of these cases, the full time SRO and extra activities payments gets billed out by the law enforcement agency and then is paid back from the school district.

In the United States, law enforcement and school budgets continue to be stretched as tax dollars are more scrutinized than ever. SRO programs have been cut to part time positions or eliminated because of budget restrictions, and several programs have one SRO providing services to more than one school (May, Hart, & Ruddell, 2011). SRO program funding was begun by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. It provided for the Department of Justice to provide grants for schools to fund an SRO program through the Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) (May et al., 2011). By 2004, a National

Association of School Resource Officer surveyed respondents reported that funding for their SRO programs had stayed the same or decreased in 70% of the law enforcement agencies that had responded (Trump, 2005).

Since the 1990's with the country focused on school shootings as a reason to fund SRO programs, to date there have been a few studies which have studied the relationship between having an SRO on campus and the number of homicides committed at schools. According to James and Dragoo (2018), there were on average 23 children ages 5-18 that were victims of a homicide each year from 1992 to 2015 in or around schools in the United States. The research showed that only one incident where an SRO killed an active school shooter, but it is unknown how many school shootings were prevented by having an SRO on a campus (James & Dragoo, 2018).

In recent years, school districts and local police departments have had to reassess their own funding priorities because of tightening budgets. Schools have a difficult time justifying the expansion of preservation of "non-academic" programs like the SRO position (Stinson & Watkins, 2014).

Receiving funding for an SRO program and maintaining that funding is essential for law enforcement administrators. In 2006, after the murder of a school principal by a middle school student in Tennessee, the Governor, Phil Bredesen, said that he would be looking into incorporating an SRO position in every public school in that state (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016).

In 2013 after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, President Obama pledged funding for hundreds of school resource officers around the country (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016). Under the Comprehensive School Safety program, President Obama provided \$150 million to

school districts and law enforcement agencies to hire SROs, school psychologists, social workers and counselors.

Challenges for SROs

SROs respond to a multitude of issues from mental health emergencies, domestic violence, drug and alcohol experimentation, bullying and sexual harassment. School safety planning and active shooting drills are also now a standard part of SRO training to ensure the local law enforcement agency works with the adjoining jurisdictions for both external police and fire responses that will be assisting.

There have also been serious incidents such as the Stoneman Douglas High mass shooting where the SRO, Broward County Deputy Scot Peterson, is seen outside the school during the shooting instead of actively addressing the active shooter who killed 17 people inside the school. Peterson was arrested and charged with 11 counts including culpable negligence, perjury and felony child neglect (Almasy & McLaughlin, 2019).

A six year study from January 2015 until December 2011, of searches where SROs were arrested for crimes showed that there were 52 incidents (Stinson & Watkins, 2014). The majority of the offenses were sex-related incidents at 61.5%, followed by profit-motivated incidents at 10%, violence related at 9 percent, followed by alcohol and drug related at 7% and 3 % respectively. The 52 incidents were committed by males who had been working in law enforcement for 10 years and the average age being 39 years old

Allegations of misconduct by school resource officers get national attention as the officers are dealing with the most vulnerable members of the society. These incidents cause the erosion of trust between the community and law enforcement.

The SRO and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The public school system in America is constantly under scrutiny and includes concerns about having an SRO in the school. Some critics have been critical of police in schools and say that it begins a school to prison pipeline. The definition of the school to prison pipeline is a phenomenon whereby young people are arrested at school for behavior that would not normally be considered dangerous (Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018).

The concern develops from the media's view of the "heavy handed" SRO who are stationed in schools lead more frequently to the arrest of students for minor infractions increasing the students chance to enter the school-to-prison pipeline (Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018). The school-to-prison pipeline begins when a student is arrested for an offense that is not normally considered dangerous. Not only can the student receive school suspensions or expulsions for the acts they have committed, but then are also referred to juvenile courts for the same act beginning their introduction to the justice system.

Unruly adolescent behavior that could be considered "horseplay" by school administered can be viewed by the SRO as "disorderly conduct" and the juvenile could be charged as such (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016). In 2014, there were approximately 850,000 nonfatal victimizations at school, which included 363,700 theft victimizations and 486,400 violent victimizations (simple assault and serious violent victimizations) (Sullivan & Hausman, 2017).

Zhang and Spence (2018) analyzed 238 middle school and high schools in West Virginia and found that SROs in these schools had a direct correlation with an increase in drug related arrests and suspension. The study reviewed the number of violent crime, property crime, drug crime, disorder incidents with out of school suspension, violent incidents, and out of school

suspensions with drug incidents. With the SROs present for the three year time frame which was reviewed, the number of reported drug crimes and out of school suspensions increased, and there was a decrease in the violent crimes and incidents of disorder. There were no observable impacts on property crimes (Zhang & Spense, 2018).

Schools adopted zero tolerance policies after encouragement by federal legislation which provided more funding to schools if they took a zero tolerance approach to weapons and drug offenses. However, some schools extended this approach to other less serious behaviors (Wolf, 2018). This approach has led to school discipline being criminalized and students not only having school consequences, but criminal charges leading critics of police in schools to call this the school-to- prison pipeline.

The criminalization of student behavior has been argued began when SROs were incorporated into schools and school discipline that was normally handled by school administration was now forwarded to the SRO to complete. This has increased the number of students who were brought into the justice system for an act that occurred at school that previously was a school matter. There is also the correlation that as SROs are in schools they witness more crimes and take appropriate police action to address the issue.

A study by Ruddy et.al, used data from the School Survey on Crime and Safety from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The schools were surveyed over a multi-year period, (2003-2004, 2005-2006, and 2007-2008) and included some had an SRO and some that did not have and SRO. It used reported crimes to determine effectiveness. This study found that there is no evidence suggesting that the SRO or other sworn law enforcement officers contribute to school safety. The actual reported crimes reviewed were rape, sexual battery, robbery, attack, threat, theft, firearms, knife, drugs, alcohol and vandalism. This study also found that contrary to

speculations that the presence of SROs may unjustly rob students of their right to a public education through increased use of suspension and expulsion or may contribute to civil rights violations by disproportionately impacting minority or special education youth (Na & Gottfredson, 2013). Students in this study were no more likely to be suspended, transferred or removed from a school as a result of an offense than are students in school that do not. There is also a correlation that as the SROs make friendships with students, they will be told of criminal offenses and identify offenders which will also increase arrests in the schools.

Zero tolerance policies

Zero tolerance policies which were initially enacted to heighten safety at schools by discouraging students bringing a firearm or knife to school, now have been increased to incorporate drug possession and threatening other students. In some areas of the country, these zero tolerance policies now also include disobeying school rules, insubordination, and disruption, which are behaviors that are not safety concerns (Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018). One study posits that zero tolerance policies have increased the number of SROs in schools. This increase has had a direct effect on the number of arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system. In addition, it has a dramatic effect on suspensions, expulsions, and dropout rates (Petteruti, 2011). Petteruti's (2011) recommendations were to remove all law enforcement from schools, refrain from using law enforcement responses to student behavior, institute a system to review the validity of arrests within the circumstances of the offense, invest in education and prevention and intervention strategies that work, which include creating graduated responses to student behavior, reduce disproportional impacts on students of color and students with disabilities, provide proper training, and evaluation along with collecting better data.

Zero tolerance policies in schools lead to African Americans and other minorities students are disproportionately affected, which leads to higher cases of suspension (Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018). In larger cities with significant concentrations of minorities, there has been an increase in school security with the incorporation of metal detectors, security cameras, and school backpack searches.

Since the zero tolerance policy has been enacted in schools, suspensions and expulsions have increased as well as there being criminal charges attached to the student for incidents that used to be handled solely by school administrators (Merkwae, 2015). This has labeled rule breaking behavior, or trouble making students being referred to a “criminals”. Students with disabilities and of color are disproportionately being affected by these zero tolerance policies.

According to Teske and Huff (2011), both of whom are judges whom preside in Clayton County, GA., and Jefferson County, AL., respectively, zero tolerance policies contribute to the existing racial and ethnic disparities in public education. These inequalities more often than not produce lower graduation rates among minority youth with contributes to higher rates of criminality among these youth. As such, in his jurisdiction, Teske enacted a Cooperative Agreement which are responses to misdemeanor delinquent acts that begin with a warning, then referral for mediation at the school level, before any referral to the criminal justice system. Huff has initiated the Birmingham City Schools Collaborative which is similar to the Cooperative Agreement. These protocol have specific instructions for the collection of data in these incidents for future evaluation.

School issues becoming police matters

SROs should not be used to investigate and provide school discipline. In some jurisdictions, SROs have been increasingly called on to handle many disciplinary issues, such as being late for school, missing classes and classroom disruption. As NASRO supports the ‘triad’ concept of school-based policing which includes the three roles as educators, informal counselor, and law enforcement officer (Canady, James, & Nease, 2012), does not include enforcing school code violations. School administrators and teachers who are guided by district school rules and procedures must be responsible for disciplinary acts while an SRO should address legal violations and threats to the security of the school, students and staff (Schweit & Mancik, 2017).

Constitutional rights

Constitutional rights issues such as search and seizure are important to be protected by both the schools and law enforcement agencies. SROs receive additional training as juvenile officers which reinforce the 4th Amendment search and seizure rights, the 5th and 14th Amendments dealing with due process, Miranda rights, and free speech which are limited in the school environment.

One landmark case dealing with juvenile rights on school grounds was the United States Supreme Court case of *New Jersey v T.L.O.* (1985). A student, - T.L.O., was caught smoking cigarettes, was brought to the administration and her property searched. A small amount of marijuana was found and the student was charged with possession of cannabis which she was found guilty of. T.L.O. said that the search of her property was illegal as the school officials had no reasonable grounds to conduct the search, and attempted to suppress the cannabis evidence. T.L.O. was found guilty and appealed which eventually ended up at the United States Supreme

Court. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the school administration and said that school officials required only the reasonable suspicion standard to search a student for an illegal or dangerous activity (*New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 1985). As this case illustrates, the SROs must know search and seizure as it applies to being in a school environment, and must allow the school disciplinary process to proceed before becoming involved in searching a student.

In another Supreme Court case, *Safford Unified School District v Redding*, an eighth grade student at Safford Middle School, Savana Redding, was strip searched by school officials on the basis of a tip from another student that Savana had school prohibited ibuprofen on her person and was giving pills to other students. Savana's possessions were searched in the administrator's office where no pills were found. Savana was then taken to the nurse's office where Savana had to take off her outer clothing. Savana was then instructed by the nurse to pull her bra out and shake it, and to pull out the elastic on her underpants, which briefly exposed her breasts and pelvic area to the nurse. No pills were found and Savana's mother filed suit that the strip search violated Savana's Fourth Amendment rights. The Supreme Court heard the merits of this incident and said that the search of Savana's underwear violated the Fourth Amendment standard of reasonableness that stops short of probable cause (*Safford Unified School District #1 v Redding*, 2009). SROs are aware that strip searches should never be conducted on school grounds and are only allowed in a very small instances.

The reasonable suspicion definition allowed to school administrators does not extend to regular police officers on the street who must meet the higher probable cause standard in order to search a person, but it does allow an SRO acting at the request of a school official to assist with a search on school grounds (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016). School administrators are not required to read the students Miranda rights prior to questioning about an incident at school as they are not

allowed to place students into custody. However, if a student is being questioned about a crime in a school by an SRO, then the student must be provided with his/her Miranda rights.

In another Supreme Court case review, Bugden (2017) gives an example of a thirteen year old middle school student in New Mexico was removed from gym class for excessively burping. According to the school the student made other students “laugh and hampered class proceedings”. The SRO arrested the student “for interfering with the educational process” after the student was suspended, and was transported to a juvenile detention facility (Bugden, 2017). The parents for the student sued the school and the officer for unreasonable seizure which eventually was heard by the Supreme Court. After deliberating, the Supreme Court held that the officer’s actions were constitutional (A.M. v Acosta, 2016).

Anderson provided a report which investigated the effectiveness of the North Carolina grant to provide SROs in elementary and middle schools. This report from 471 middle schools were analyzed to show the effectiveness of the state funded SRO program. The report that there was an increase in grade level proficiency when SROs were introduced into the schools which was associated with reductions in reported criminal acts (Anderson, 2018).

Students with disabilities

There were almost 300,000 students nationwide who were referred to the juvenile justice system or are subjected to school related arrests in the 2015-2016 academic school year, and with almost 83,000 of these being students with disabilities. It is imperative that SROs are properly trained to assess each student’s infraction and address specific concerns for students with disabilities to ensure the school-to-prison pipe line is curtailed (Counts, Randall, Ryan, & Katsiyannis, 2018). As SROs are required to engage daily with students at their schools, it is a

necessity that the training for SROs provides for special education law (Shaver & Decker, 2017). This critical training will assist SROs understand how special needs children and their behaviors differ from those who don't have special needs (NASRO, 2019). Concerns about students who have special needs, are poor and are minorities are overrepresented in the school to prison pipeline (Fitzgerald, Hunt, & Kerr, 2019).

There have been several instances where students with disabilities who are acting out are unnecessarily having police contact in school settings. For example, a school resource officer in Virginia intervened with an 11 year old African American student with autism who kicked over a trash can in school and then pulled away from the SRO when the student was confronted. The student was charged with disorderly conduct and felony assault of a police officer (Merkwae, 2015). It is a very real concern that the SROs decision regarding a students' actions, which may be influenced by racial or disability related biases, can determine whether that student has school consequences and/or the introduction into the juvenile justice system (Merkwae, 2015). Concerns are also raised when patrol officers are responding to schools that do not have a dedicated trained SRO and would not have a full understanding of special needs students, that a dedicated full time SRO would be able to provide (James & Dragoo, 2018).

Diversion Programs

The purpose of diversion programs is to redirect youthful offenders from the justice system through programming, supervision, and supports (youth.GOV, 2019). Juvenile and drug offenses are being diverted to a more administrative hearing process with a civil rather than criminal outcome. Diversion programs in the United States have been gaining popularity to help combat the school to prison pipeline. Some popular diversion programs are known by different names, peer-to-peer court, teen court and youth court. These voluntary programs are for

nonviolent juvenile offenders who commit a misdemeanor or status offense and are sent to these courts instead of juvenile court. Further, decriminalization especially when it comes to marijuana possession and use is another way of keeping juveniles out of the juvenile justice system. Crimes which would have resulted in arrest and court are instead provided with a civil penalty for the same infraction keeping the stigma of offender off the individual. Status offenses such as truancy and running away have also been done away with which is labeling fewer juveniles as offenders. Deinstitutionalization of juvenile status offenders and keeping them out of jail has increased which keeps the offender out of the formal justice system. In short, diversion programs have seen low recidivism rates for juveniles who complete the program, and save the participating jurisdictions' money as a pro-social alternative to the traditional justice system (Tashea, 2013).

In conclusion we have discussed the definition and the history of the SRO program, the perceptions of fear at schools which has led to an increase in SRO programs, the financial requirements to fund an SRO program, the challenges for SROs which include the school-to-prison pipeline, zero tolerance policies at schools, school issues becoming police matters, along with ensuring juveniles' constitutional rights are adhered to and the requirements for properly assisting students with disabilities, to discussing juvenile diversion programs.

Section III: Theoretical Framework

The following section includes a review of labeling theory, followed by its application to SROs. The labeling theory can explain in depth what SROs should keep in mind when assisting school administrators with a school matter that could potentially become a criminal matter.

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory or social reaction theory was introduced in the 1960's and is primarily concerned with how individuals' personal identities are highly influenced by the way that society or authorities tend to categorize them as offenders. This viewpoint puts negative labels on lower class minorities as offenders more than it does on middle or upper class persons (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). Labeling Theory maintains that youth who are labeled delinquent are more likely to be excluded from conventional activities, adopt a deviant identity and spend time with delinquent peers (Wiley, 2013).

Howard Becker in 1963 is the architect of modern day labeling theory. Labeling theory states that repeat criminal offenders can be reduced in society if they are not stigmatized by authorities and society. Keeping juveniles or first time offenders from being labeled as offenders was the cornerstone of the "hands off" policies of the 1960's. This was attempted to be achieved by diversion, decriminalization and deinstitutionalization (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015).

In the 1930's Frank Tannenbaum noted the dramatization of evil that occurred when youth were arrested and charged with their first offense (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). Tannenbaum argued that the dramatization of evil which separates the child out of his group for specialized treatment plays a greater role in making the criminal than perhaps any other experience (Criminal Justice, 2019).

Edwin Lemert in 1951, then later said that individuals, typically youths commit primary deviance, which is not serious, and not frequent, but then happen to be caught by police and are subsequently labeled (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). Lemert argued that deviations are not significant until they are organized subjectively and transformed into active roles and become the social criteria for assigning status (Criminal Justice, 2019).

In 1963, Howard Becker defined in very clear language that labeling theory positions on the nature of deviant acts, how some behaviors get to be labeled as deviant and what happens when persons are labeled as deviant (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). Becker said that deviance is simply behavior that is labeled deviant by person in positions of power and that the behavior does not matter until the label is applied (Becker, 1963).

Paternoster and Iovanni in 1989 and Braithwaite in 1989 revitalized the labeling theory into more general theories of crime (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). Braithwaite identifies two types of shaming, disintegrative shaming and reintegrative shaming. Disintegrative shaming states not only the crime, but the criminal is also labeled as bad and is excluded. Reintegrative shaming labels only the act and not the person. This labeling then makes the individual believe he is an offender and then this forces them to associate with other offenders. Lemert referred to this as secondary deviance where the offending is not more violent, but more frequent by the offender (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2015). Labeling theorists are interested in the reactions to crime and not to the causes of crime. There are different levels of this labeling; the individual, the institutional, and the state or national rule making and how labeled persons respond to those labels (Paternoster & Bachman, 2013).

The strengths of labeling theory explains the reasons for differences in deviance between cultures, shows that law is often enforced in a discriminatory way, shows how attempts at control

can often backfire and highlights weaknesses of official statistics. The weakness of this theory are that it promotes lenient and ineffective sentencing. It is often deterministic to all who are labeled and then continue their deviant behaviors. It ignores individuals who actively pursue deviance. It disregards how the deviant behavior came to originate. Finally, its ignores the possibility for rehabilitation as the labeled see the problem of crime as not lying within society and as such they believe that society should change(Wiley et al., 2013).

Application of Labeling Theory for the SRO

Labeling Theory suggests that police contact may actually increase juvenile delinquency because the students who are arrested at school along with being suspended or expelled, have shown to adopt a deviant identity and spend more time with other at risk juveniles (Wiley, 2013). When police seem to view the students as the enemy or potential criminals, it can be disastrous for minority communities who are incarcerated at higher rates than their more affluent student counterparts (Owens, 2015).

A delinquency label changes youths' opportunity structures in ways that limit their ability to pursue conventional routes to socioeconomic success and leads others to treat the labeled youth in ways that promote the adoption of deviant self-meanings, which in turn, motivate the affirmation of those self-meanings through subsequent deviance (Kroska, Lee, & Carr, 2017). The labeling and disciplining of students also creates a negative view of the school, the school staff, the SRO and law enforcement, and eventually the learning in the minds of the students (Schlosser, 2014). Students who were labeled as delinquent and had police contact would report greater subsequent involvement in delinquent behaviors, regardless of the initial level of delinquent contact (Toro, et al., 2019).

Labeling theory suggests that official contact leads to increased delinquency because it enhances involvement with, support from, and commitment to deviant peers (Wiley et al., 2013). SROs have a unique opportunity when dealing with juveniles at schools in that the outcome of most interactions can be positive for both the student and the school. SROs should determine if the school incident that is being investigated by the school administration requires police involvement as part of a criminal complaint, or if it should remain as a school issue and be resolved at that level. Further, SROs should ensure that diversion programs for eligible juveniles are the first steps to allow the juvenile the opportunity to learn from their mistake without having to go through the formal juvenile justice system.

Section IV: Recommendations and conclusion to implement or improve current SRO programs

There are several recommendations to implement and improve current SRO programs which have been detailed from the research done.

School Resource Officer Selection

SRO selection should include an assessment by both the law enforcement administration and the officer applying for the position on how the officer will respond to working in a school, and fulfilling nontraditional roles such as teaching in this capacity. Character traits that both school officials and law enforcement administrators should look for are the ability for the officer to be patient, approachable, team oriented, and understand that their arrests will predominately be all juveniles (Thomas et al., 2013). Further, SROs should have excellent communication skills to be able to confidently address all questions related to their position.

At the start, SRO candidates should have a willingness and ability to work with students and school staff (Thomas et al., 2013) and to recognize they will be working in an open, supportive learning environment (Coon & Travis, 2012). They also should have a desire to learn crisis intervention techniques, possess great communication skills, have a thorough understanding of juvenile justice, in addition to an enhanced knowledge of social, emotional, and intellectual development for juveniles (Rosiak, 2014). Substance abuse intervention, diversion techniques, adolescent and developmental psychology which combine classroom based training, along with on line training is also essential for potential SRO candidates (Thomas et al., 2013).

SROs should understand the application of labeling theory in the school setting. As SROs who will be interacting with juveniles on a daily basis, they should be discreet with their

interactions, and be dependable to these students. De-escalation techniques and being able to provide a human touch to situations are important skills as an SRO (Rosiak, 2014).

Successful SRO programs

Three key components for a successful SRO program are extensive training, clearly defined roles within the school structure, and systems for evaluating officers (Merkwae, 2015). SROs who are not receiving specialized training in adolescent development, counseling, or teaching, do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities or arrest decisions, and have inconsistent methods for assessing the effectiveness of the SRO program will have a difficult time.

Successful SRO programs can assist the school staff with providing an extra resource to the at risk student in the form of mentoring or addressing domestic issues at the student's home. As an informal counselor instead of a strict disciplinarian, successful SROs are able to assist in achieving the desired results to keep the students in the educational environment. Having clearly defined roles for the SRO in the school will allow for better results on all incidents (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016).

Successful SRO programs incorporate community involvement in developing positive relationships with students, and collaboration with school staff and mental health professionals to proactively address school safety issues and divert at-risk students from the juvenile justice system (Rosiak, 2014). A cross sector school safety team incorporating an SRO, the school administration, mental health agencies, and other community based partners can help align services required by students having difficulties at the schools (Rosiak, 2014).

Agreements with law enforcement agencies and school administrators which provide mediation or diversion programs to juveniles are also part of a successful SRO program. This would incorporate a comprehensive Memoranda of Understanding with the school district.

The value of a comprehensive Memoranda of Understanding

There are natural tensions for the SRO because they are responsible to different entities, their agency and their school. Disagreements between the SRO and the school about the role of the SRO is common and can lead to difficulties between the law enforcement agency and the school administrations (Coon & Travis, 2012). Finn and McDevitt (2005) concluded that the lack of an agreement between the school and law enforcement agency regarding the function and role of the SRO in the schools was a serious issue for all stakeholders (Finn & McDevitt, 2005).

The majority of SRO programs have enacted a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) that outlines when the SRO is to be used and for what purposes. The MOU helps both the officer and the school staff understand when and how the SRO will be used in order to minimize the school to prison pipeline (Weiler & Cray, 2011). The MOU defines the school-law enforcement partnership and delineate the program mission and goals (Thomas, Towvim, Rosia, & Anderson, 2013).

A MOU defines the school-law enforcement partnership and outlines the programs mission and goals. MOU's should be created with all stakeholders in a collaborative effort. School officials, the law enforcement agency, and community members should provide their respective needs and requirements. The key components to a successful MOU are to define the mission, clearly establish the goals, and objectives of the SRO, the roles and responsibility of the SRO, the commitment by the partners i.e. funding, and office space, the chain of command for

the SRO with school administration, the selection and minimum training for the SRO, the availability to exchange information between the school and the SRO, integrating the SRO into the classroom, and providing both transparency and accountability on arrests, and use of force incidents with the school and community (Rosiak, 2014).

School districts should have written procedures for staff to enforce and students to follow to attempt prevention and reduce crime, disorder, and violence (Ruddy, Neiman, Hryczaniuk, Thomas, & Parmer, 2010). These procedures should incorporate SRO notification and response for criminal acts which are separate of the school acts and limit arrests for public order offenses such as disorderly conduct, and disrupting the educational process.

As part of a successful SRO program which can be incorporated into the MOU, school districts and law enforcement agencies should provide regular scheduled meetings for the parents of the juveniles in their schools. This will allow another avenue for transparency between the law enforcement agency and the community they serve. Providing information on the incidents which required SRO intervention and what was done to reduce the recidivism for the juvenile should be discussed.

School Resource Officer Evaluation

Continuous evaluation of the SRO programs is important. These evaluations should be completed by both the law enforcement agency and the school administration or third party evaluations by researchers or consultants. These evaluations are imperative so that issues of SROs not following procedures is kept to a minimum in addition to a comprehensive evaluation of the SRO program to determine the impact the program is having at the school.

These evaluations by both the law enforcement agency and the school administration should be completed on a routine basis. These evaluations should highlight both the positive and negative incidents that have occurred with the SRO during that time frame with the goal of providing better service to the students. Evaluations and support from supervising officers of the SROs in managing challenges will increase their performance (Thomas et al., 2013). Even with oversight, a recent case in Orlando, Florida highlights, problems still occur. In the case SRO Dennis Turner was fired for arresting two 6 year old students for misdemeanor battery at Lucious and Emma Dixon Academy (Mansell, 2019). Carroll posited that the SRO program which had regular annual evaluations of their SROs and was studied over a 12 year period in Broward County, FL. was a very efficient crime prevention approach and should be routinely monitored to continually provide these results (Carroll, Ben-Zadok, & McCue, 2010).

Required standardized SRO training

Training for SROs should include an understanding of the development of the juvenile mind and how to foster relationships with students, as the training is done with teachers (Weiler & Cray, 2011). SROs should also meet with other SROs from their surrounding jurisdictions to go over trends they are seeing in schools, strategies for positive intervention with students, and combine resources for critical incident drills and canine sweeps.

In today's school environment, mental health and mental illness training for SROs is essential. SROs who can recognize emotional disturbance signs and intervene properly will diminish the student being referred to juvenile court and provide mental health services through local resources (Rosiak, 2014).

In 2016, the Department of Education and Department of Justice sent letters to school districts and states to emphasize the importance of a well-designed training program for SROs in an effort to curb the school to prison pipeline (LaFosse & Eckes, 2017). It is also incumbent on the school social workers, psychologists, and counselors to periodically provide training to SROs about school-based tiered prevention models (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013).

New Jersey was one of the first states to make training mandatory for SROs which began in 2006. In their current 40 hour SRO program, they cover the roles of the SRO; threat and risk assessment, instructional time, legal issues to include search and seizure, outreach programs, interview and interrogation, classroom management, teaching methodologies, bullying prevention and mentoring (Lewis, 2017). Training for SROs should also include cultural sensitivity and linguistic differences, adolescent development, mental health, bullying prevention, drug awareness and substance abuse, school discipline and code of conduct, and students with disabilities (Schweit & Mancik, 2017).

Conclusion

Based off what has been highlighted above, the following summary statements can be made to implement or enhance current SRO programs.

- Having defined roles for the SRO and emphasizing the main goal of keeping students and school staff safe is paramount. Further, having a clear distinction between school discipline and criminal acts is required so both the school administration and the law enforcement agency know their respective boundaries.
- There needs to be a comprehensive MOU, which specifies who has authority in individual situations, and ways to resolve conflicts between the SRO and school staff.

- Selection of SROs should be based on having outstanding communication skills, a willingness to work at a school where students are interacted with on a daily basis.
- There must be initial and ongoing formal and informal multifaceted training for SROs to cover topics such as juvenile intervention tactics, and responding to incidents for students with disabilities.
- SRO programs should include regular meetings with both school administration and law enforcement administration to discuss how the SRO program is progressing.
- SRO programs should include regular scheduled meetings with the parents to discuss the activities the SRO has been involved in at the school to provide transparency.

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