

**SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN KENTUCKY
WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT DO THEY DO?**

By:

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The first School Resource Officer (SRO) program in Kentucky was initiated in Jefferson County in 1977. Since that time, the program has grown steadily due primarily to the availability of grants through the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office in the U.S. Department of Justice.

School Resource Officers were first referenced in Kentucky statutes with the passage of the Safe Schools Act in 1998. Kentucky Revised Statute 158.441 defines an SRO as *a sworn law enforcement officer who has specialized training to work with youth at a school site. The officer shall be employed through a contract between a local law enforcement agency and a school district.* The statutory language was extremely important to the development of the SRO program for three reasons: 1) it required SROs to have specialized training; 2) it recognized the importance of having a written contract between the two agencies to clarify the duties of the officer; and 3) it formally recognized SROs as a specialized field of law enforcement.

Every even year (e.g., 2002, 2004, 2006), the KCSS updates its database of SROs and administers questionnaires to the SROs asking questions regarding their characteristics, activities, and perceptions of school safety and the SRO's role in school safety in Kentucky. This report is an outcome of that effort.

Data Collection

In the fall of 2006, researchers from the Kentucky Center for School Safety (KCSS) conducted the third phase of a panel study examining the attributes of School Resource Officers throughout the state of Kentucky. Using an existing database created in 2002, a warning letter was mailed to all SROs in the database informing them that they would be receiving a self-report

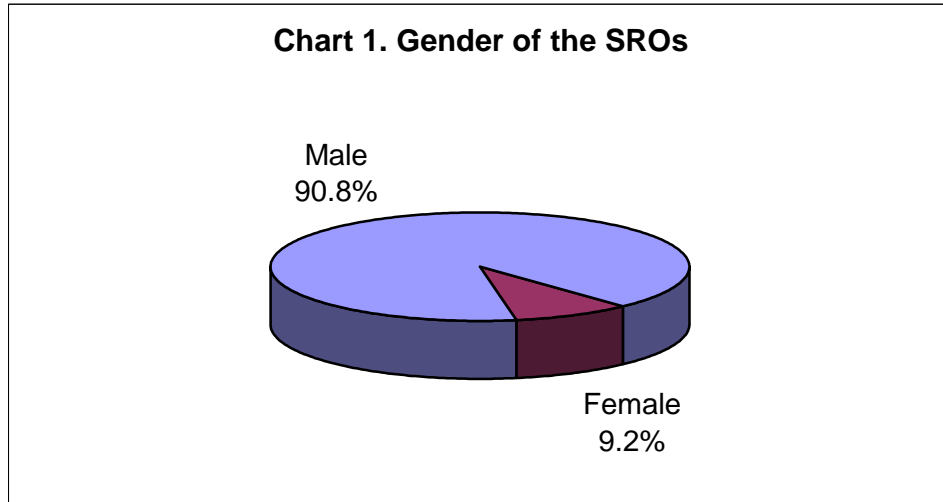
questionnaire in approximately two weeks and requesting their participation in the study. A questionnaire and cover letter explaining the importance of the project was then mailed two weeks later. After two weeks, a second letter and questionnaire were mailed to those who did not respond to the original questionnaire. A final questionnaire and letter were mailed to nonrespondents three weeks later. Of the 227 SROs who received a questionnaire, 128 responses were received, for a response rate of 56.4 percent. Thus, approximately three in five SROs in the state of Kentucky provided data for this report.

In 2004, the authors used a seven-page instrument to collect exploratory data from 216 SROs. More extensive research and discussion, combined with comments that presented unanswered questions in the 2004 survey, caused the authors to revise the questionnaire for the current effort. The final SRO survey for this report was seven pages long and required approximately 20 minutes to complete.

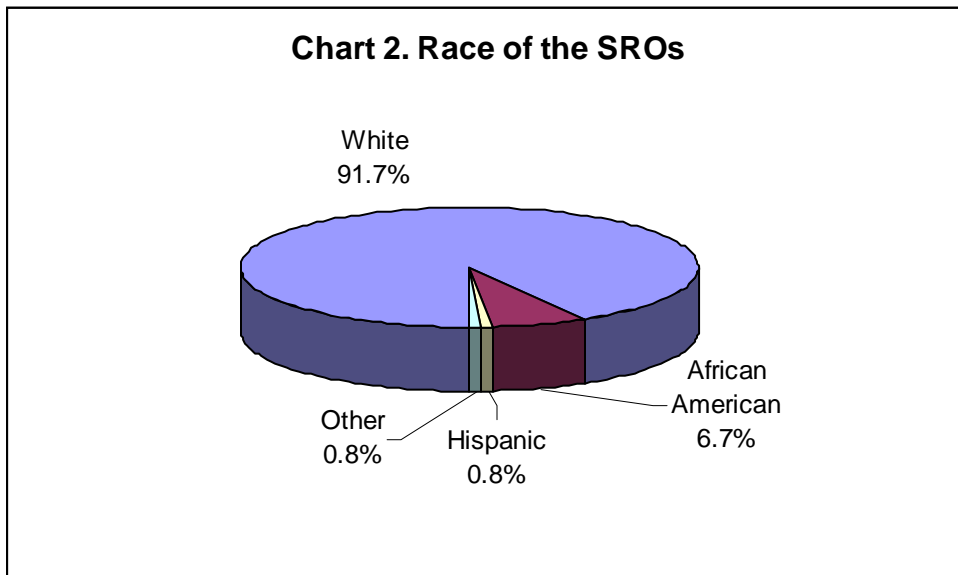
The data for this study consist of results received from 120 SRO questionnaires. With the exception of two SROs who completed only a small number of questions and were subsequently excluded, practically all respondents who responded provided data for questions on the last page of the questionnaire, possibly indicating that the entire sample read the entire questionnaire. Nevertheless, some respondents failed to complete data for some of the questions. As such, the charts provided below (as well as the percentages presented in the text of the report) reflect only valid responses. In other words, the number of responses for some charts is greater than the number of responses for others because some respondents chose not to answer some questions. In most cases, the charts present the raw number of responses while the text presents summary of the charts, using percentages instead of raw numbers. The tables from which the charts were derived are available upon request.

Results

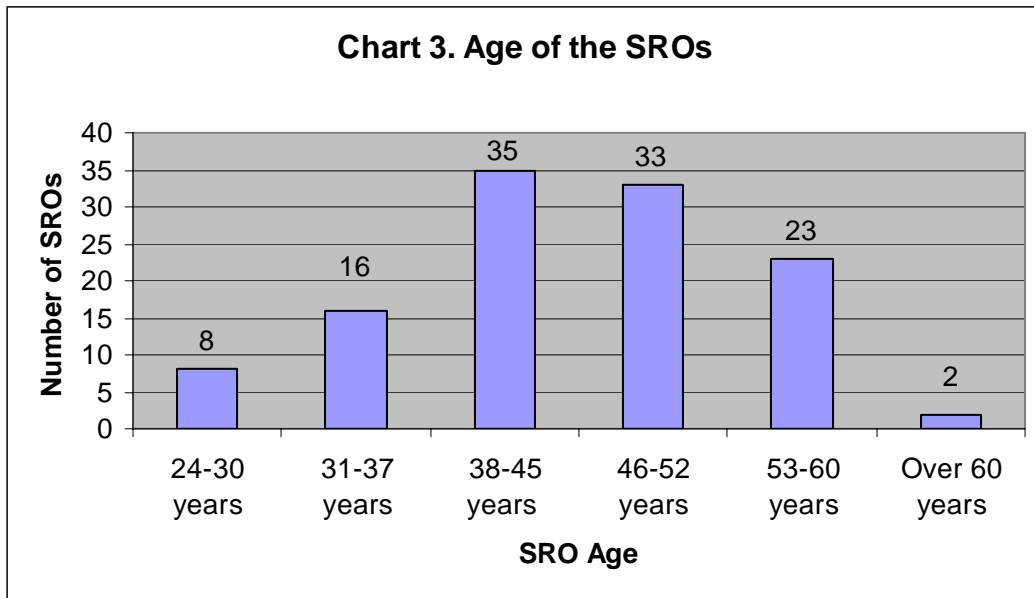
The gender and racial characteristics of the Kentucky SROs who provided data for this study are very similar to those who responded in the 2002 and 2004 SRO reports.



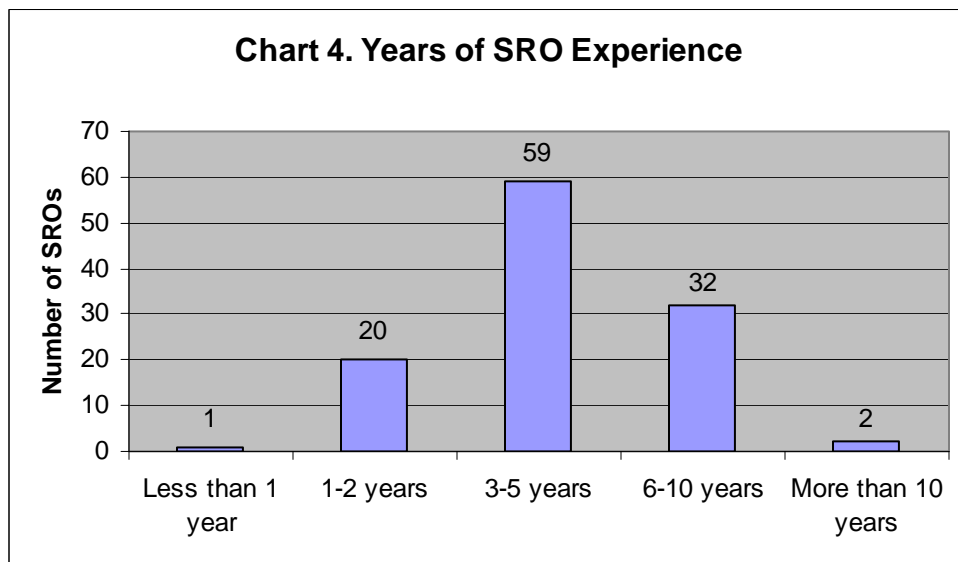
The vast majority (90.8%) of the SROs were male, while less than one in ten SROs (9.2%) was female.



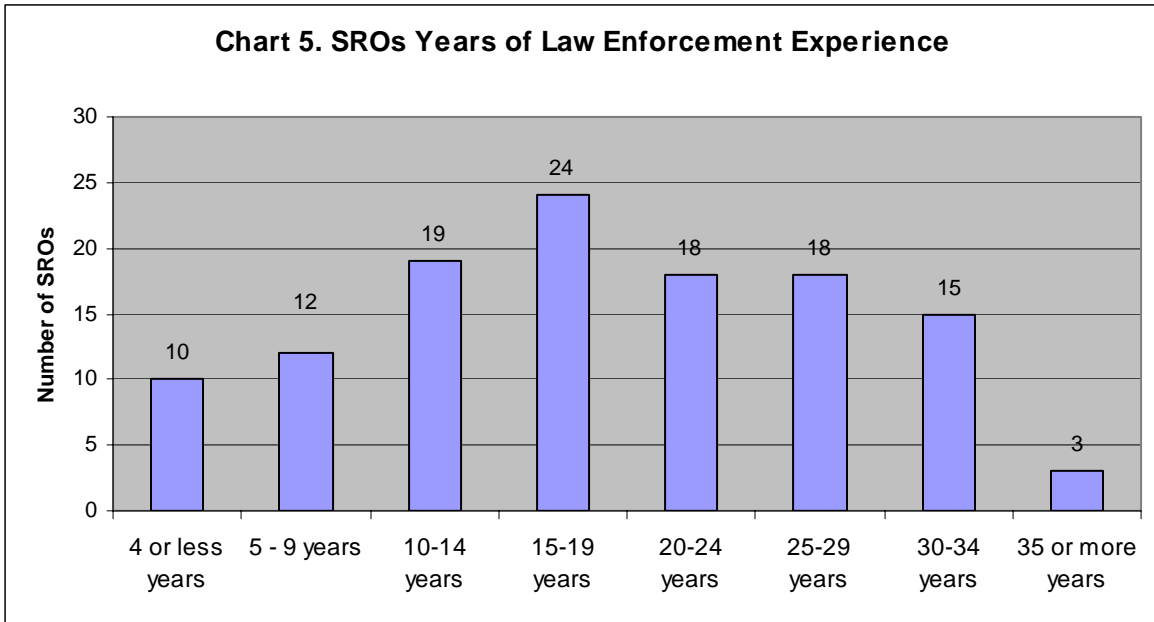
A large majority of SROs (91.7%) were White, while a small percentage of SROs (6.7%) were Black. Only two SROs (1.6%) were of an ethnicity other than Black or White.



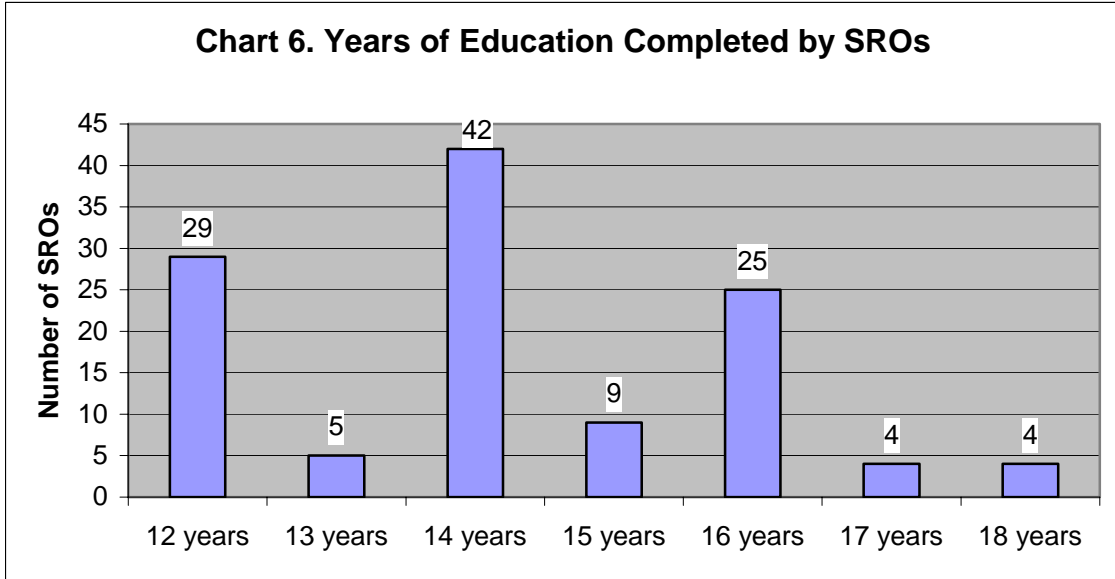
Of the 117 SROs who responded to the question that asked their age, a small percentage (6.8%) were 24 to 30 years of age and approximately one in eight (13.7%) were between 31 and 37 years of age. About three in ten were 38 to 45 years of age (29.9%) and 46 to 52 years of age (28.2%), while approximately one in five SROs (19.7%) were between the ages of 53 to 60 years of age. One officer was over 60 years of age.



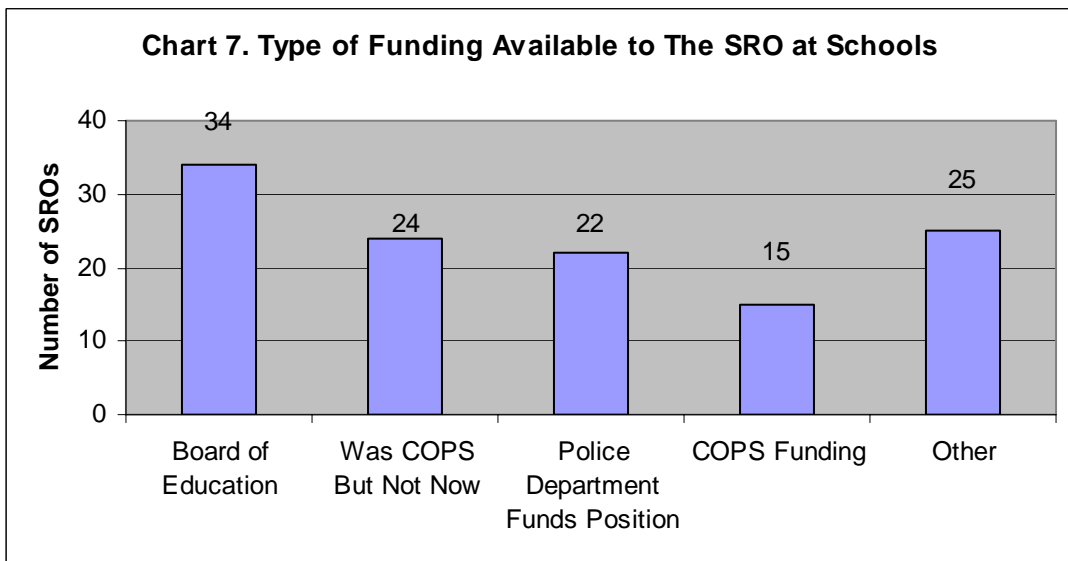
Of the 114 respondents to the question asking how much SRO experience the officers had, half (51.8%) had between three and five years of experience as an SRO, while more than one in four (28.1%) had six to ten years experience. More than one in six (17.5%) had one to two years experience while a small percentage (1.8%) had more than 10 years experience as an SRO. One SRO reported that he/she had less than one year experience.



We then asked the respondents how many years they had been employed in law enforcement. Of the 119 officers who responded to that question, one in five (20.2%) had 15 to 19 years of law enforcement experience. More than one in seven (16.0%) had 10 to 14 years experience while equal numbers had 20 to 24 years experience (15.1%) and 25 to 29 years experience (15.1%). One in ten (10.1%) had 5 to 9 years experience while one in eight (12.6%) had 30 to 34 years law enforcement experience. Less than one in ten (8.4%) had less than four years experience while a smaller percentage (2.5%) had 35 or more year experience. Thus, despite their relative “newness” to the SRO role, the vast majority of officers had a number of years of experience in traditional law enforcement roles prior to their assignment as an SRO.

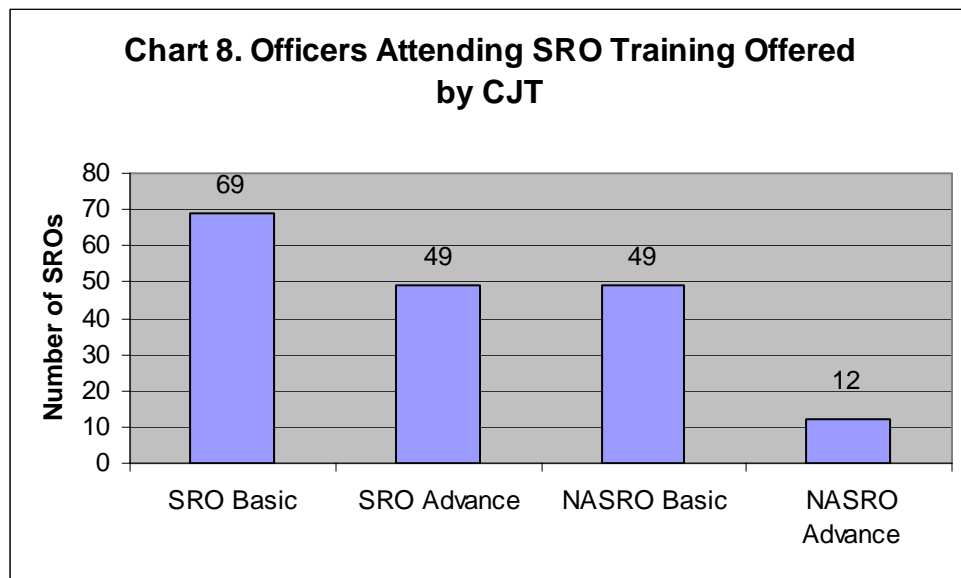


We then asked the SROs to tell us how many years of education they had completed. Of the 118 SROs who answered this question, more than one in three respondents (35.6%) had completed two years of college and slightly less than one in four (24.6%) had completed high school. Over one in five (21.2%) had completed college while a small percentage (6.8%) had some postgraduate education as well.

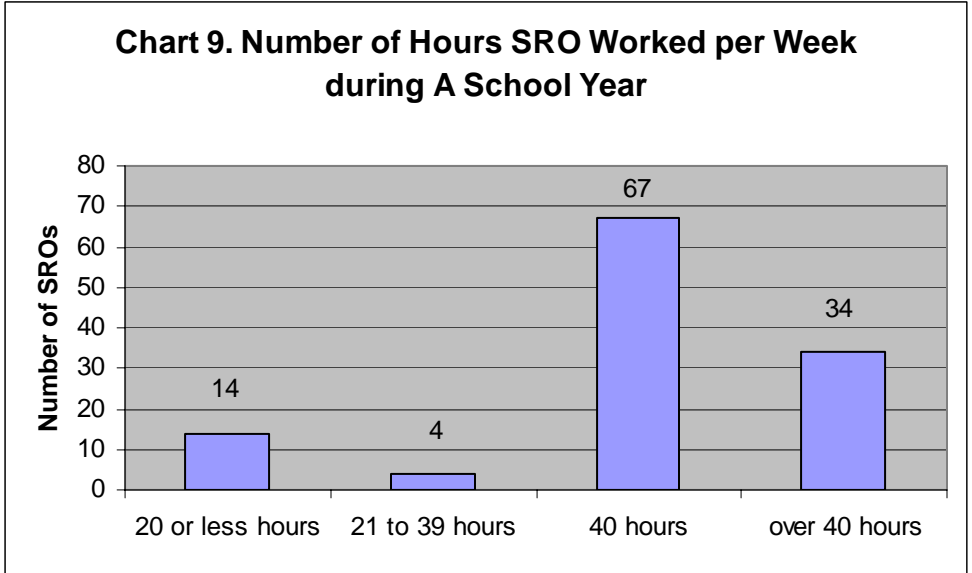


The SROs were then asked how their position was funded. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 7. Approximately three in ten (28.3%) were funded by their

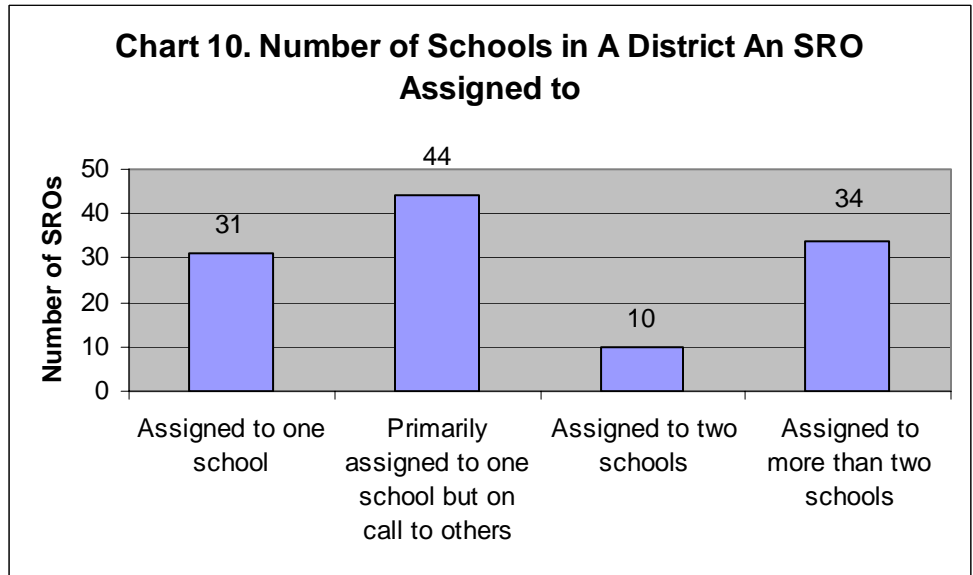
board of education while one in five (20.0%) were funded by Community Oriented Policing (COPS) before but the funding has now expired. More than one in six (18.3%) were funded by the police agency for which they worked while one in eight (12.5%) SRO positions were funded by Community Oriented Policing (COPS) grants.



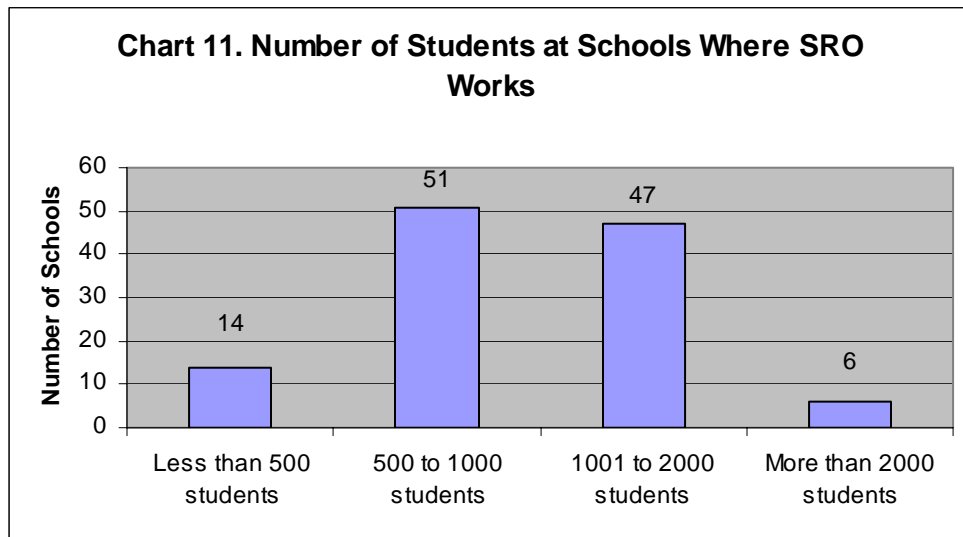
The SROs were then asked what type of SRO training they had received. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 8. Of 120 SROs who responded this question, some officers had attended more than one training. Almost three in five SROs (57.5%) had attended the SRO Basic training offered by the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training (DOCJT). Two in five (40.8%) had attended the basic training program offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) while the same number of officers (40.8%) had attended the SRO Advanced training offered by DOCJT. One in ten officers (10.0%) had attended the NASRO advanced training program.



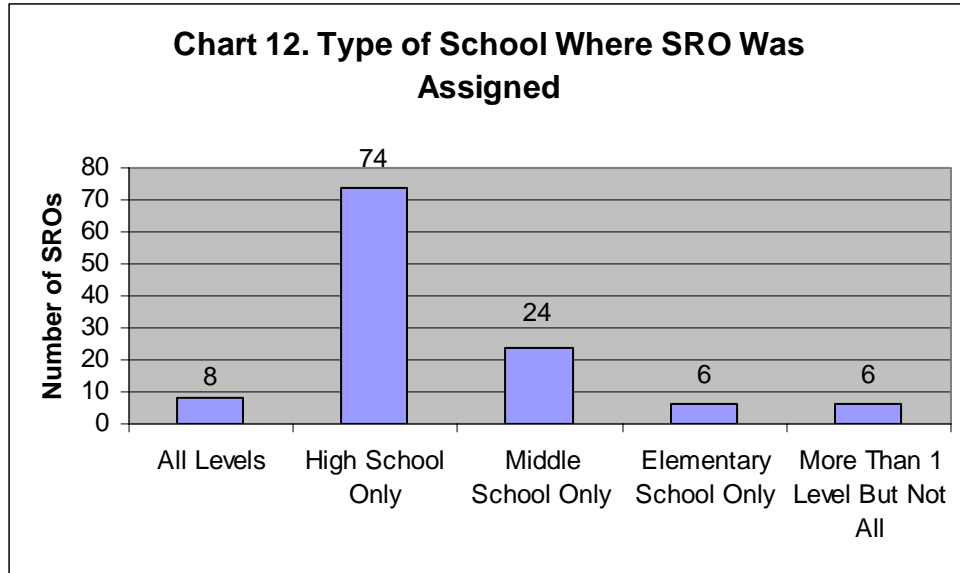
SROs were then asked how many hours per week they worked in the SRO role during the typical school year. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 9. Of the 119 SROs who responded, more than half of respondents (56.3%) worked full-time as SROs (40 hours per week) during the school year. Approximately three in ten (28.6%) worked more than 40 hours per week while over one in seven (15.2%) worked less than 40 hours per week as an SRO. Thus, the majority of SROs were full-time SROs during the school year.



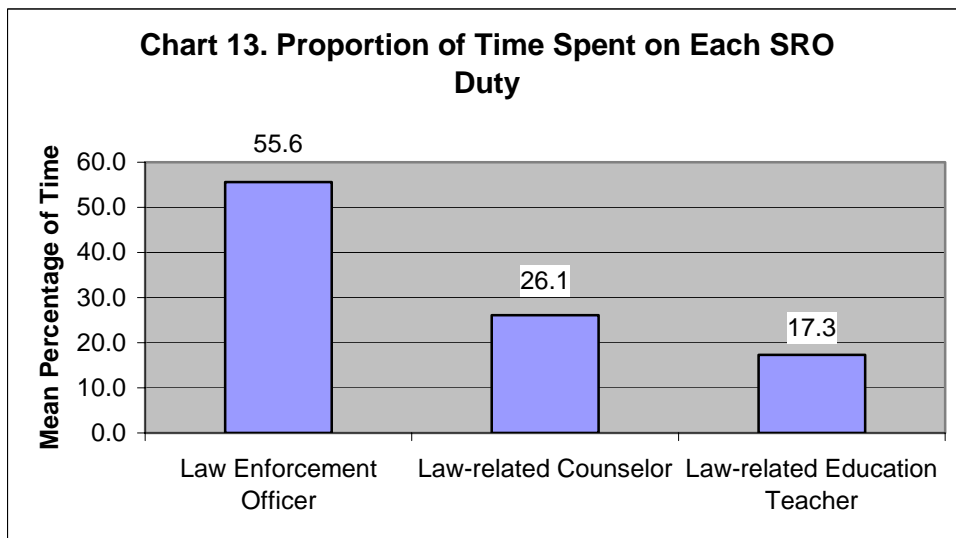
Respondents were then asked the number of schools in the district that they were assigned to cover. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 10. Of the 119 SROs who responded, more than one in four (26.1%) were assigned to one school while less than four in ten (37.0%) were primarily assigned to one school but were on call for other schools. Less than one in ten (8.4%) were assigned to two schools while approximately three in ten (28.6%) were assigned to more than two schools. Thus, despite the fact that the optimal situation is one SRO per school, most officers are responsible for more than one school in their district.



We then asked the SROs how many students were enrolled in the schools where they spent the majority of their time as SROs. The responses are presented in Chart 11. Of the 118 SROs who responded to that question, more than two in five (43.2%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 500 to 1000 students. Two in five (39.8%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 1001 to 2000 students while one in nine (11.9%) spent the majority of their time at schools with less than 500 students. Only a small percentage of SROs (5.1%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 2000 or more students.

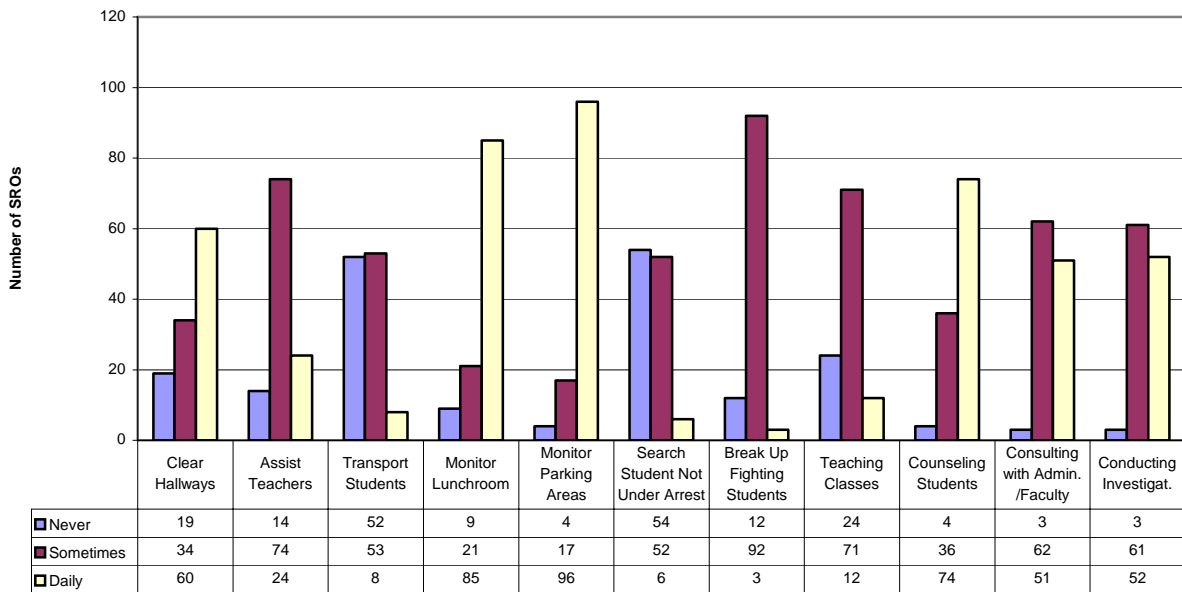


We then asked the SROs the type (grade levels) of school to which they were assigned. The responses are presented in Chart 12. Over three in five (62.7%) were assigned exclusively to high schools, while one in five (20.3%) were assigned exclusively to middle schools. Only six officers (5.1%) were assigned exclusively to elementary schools. The remaining SROs (11.9%) were assigned to schools of more than one level. Thus, SROs in Kentucky work primarily in the middle and high schools.



We then asked the SROs how much of their time was spent on each of the SRO duties that NASRO suggests comprise the SRO triad (law-related counselor, law-related educator, and law enforcement officer). The mean responses to those questions are presented in Chart 13. The SROs in this sample spent the majority of their time (55.6) as law enforcement officers with almost exactly half that time spent on law related counseling (26.1) and a lesser amount spent as law-related educators (17.3).

Chart 14. Activities Performed at School

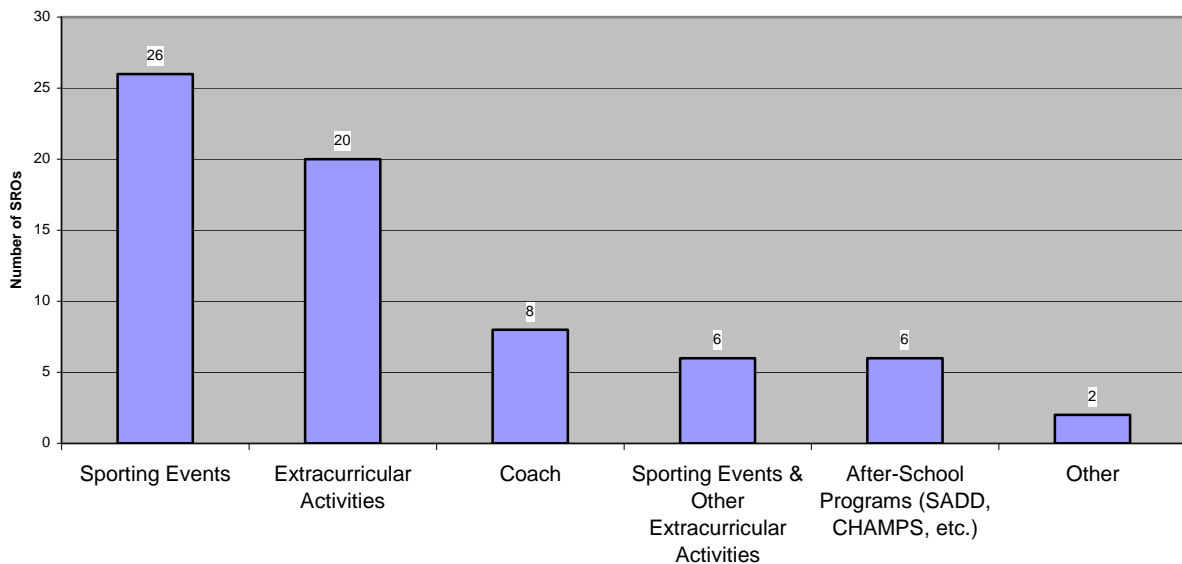


We then asked the SROs about the different types of activities they performed at their assigned schools and the frequency of those activities. The most frequently occurring activity that SROs performed daily was monitoring parking areas; more than four in five SROs (82.1%) did this activity daily. The second most common daily activity was monitoring lunchrooms (73.9% of the SROs performed this activity daily), then counseling students (64.9%) and clearing hallways (53.1%). The activities that many SROs never performed included searching students not under arrest (48.2% of SROs never did that activity), transporting students (46.0% never

transported students), and teaching classes (22.4%). Most of the officers performed most of the other activities at least occasionally.

We then asked SROs if there were duties that they performed that were not part of the duties of the SRO. In results not presented here, four officers felt it was not part of their duty as an SRO to assist in traffic control, while one also thought that it was not part of their duty to transport to the detention center. Other activities mentioned by one SRO included dealing with child abuse, conflict resolution, and home visits. SROs were also asked if they sponsored or co-sponsored any student organizations. In charts not provided here, one in five respondents (20.8%) indicated that were either sponsors or co-sponsors of student organizations.

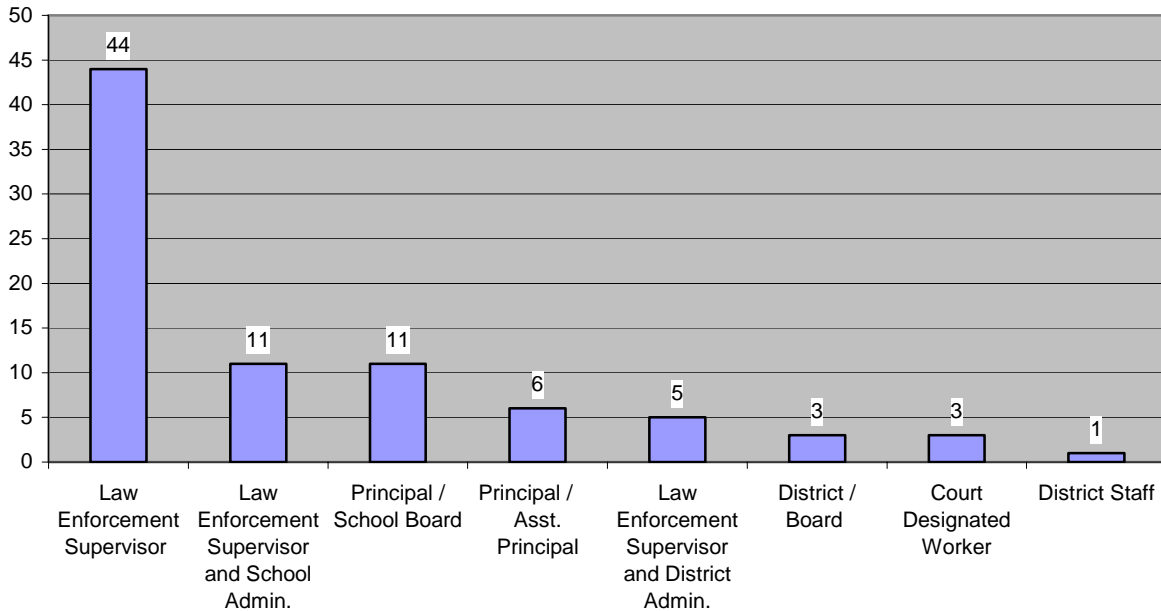
Chart 15. SROs participating in Extracurricular Activities on A Regular Basis



We then asked the SROs if there were extracurricular activities that they participated in on a regular basis and to describe what type of activity it was. We found 68 SROs that provided us with activities that they participate in on a regular basis. Their responses are presented in Chart 15. Most of the SROs who responded stated that they participated in only sporting events

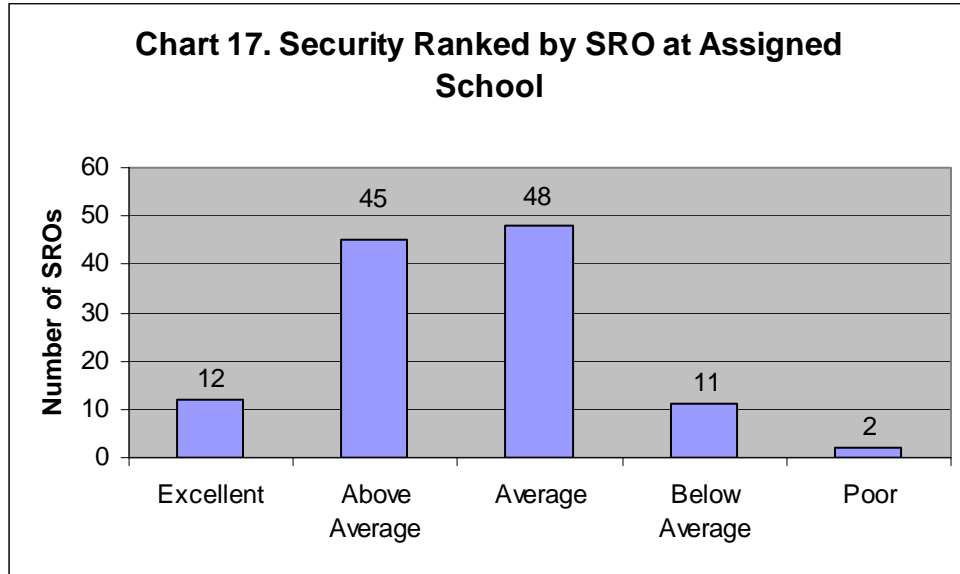
(38.2%) or sporting events in addition to some other activity (8.8%). Slightly less than three in ten SROs (29.4%) participated in extracurricular activities while one in nine (11.8%) stated that they participated in extracurricular activities as coaches. Less than one in ten (8.8%) stated that they participated in after-school program such as SADD, CHAMPS, etc.).

Chart 16. Person Who Gets A Copy of Report or Record of SROs Activities at School



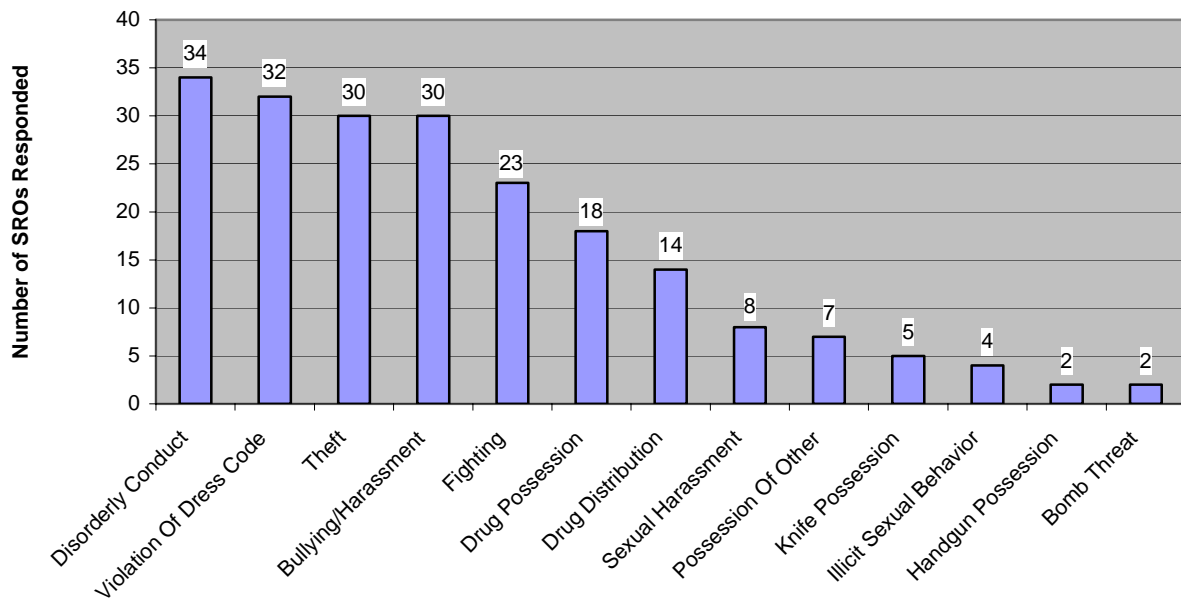
We also asked the SROs who received a copy of the report or record of SROs activities at the schools. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 16. Of the 84 SROs that responded, over half (52.4%) of the SROs said that the law enforcement supervisor in their department would get a copy. Only 13.1% of the SROs said both the law enforcement supervisor and the school administrator would get a copy of report while an equal number (13.1%) of the SROs stated that the Principal and school board would get a copy of report. Less than one in ten (7.1%) SROs said that the Principal or Assistant Principal would get a copy of report while slightly less (6.0%) stated that the law enforcement supervisor and district administrator would

get a copy of report. A small percentage of SROs stated that the district or school board (3.6%) and Court Designated Worker (CDW) (3.6%) would get a copy of SROs activities while one SRO (1.2%) said the district staff would know of their activities.



We then asked the SROs to rank the security at the assigned schools. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 17. Of the 118 SROs that responded, one in ten (10.2%) said the security is excellent at the assigned school although nine in ten officers (89.0%) replied that security was at least average in their assigned school. Less than one in nine SROs (11.0%) felt that security in the school where they were assigned was below average or poor.

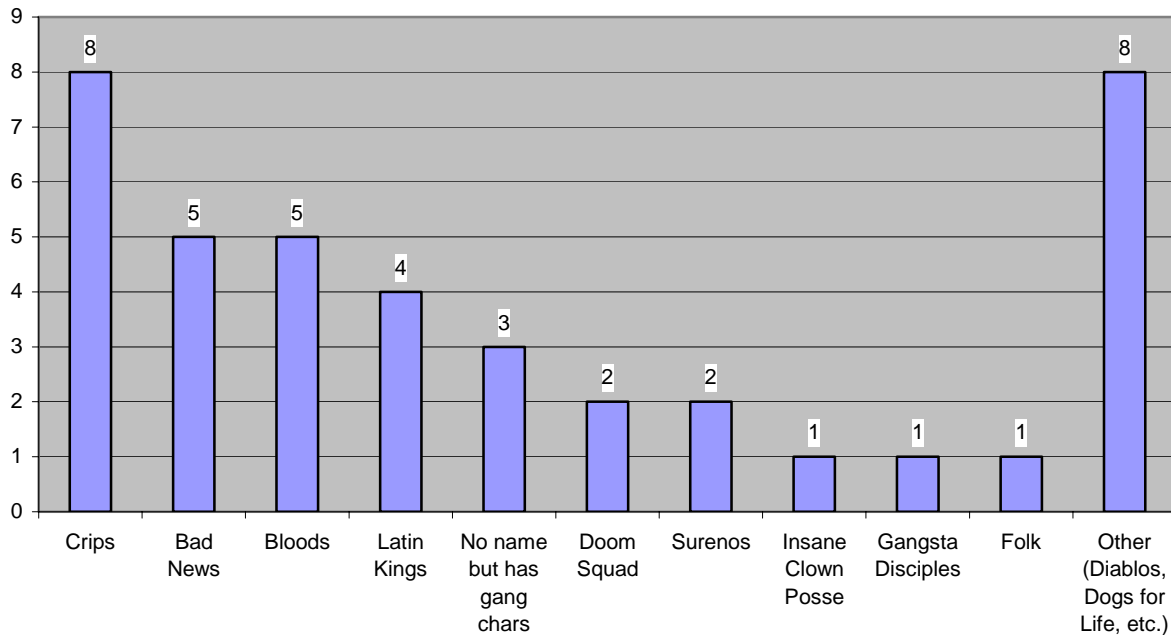
Chart 18. SROs Perception of Most Serious Problems During Past School Year



We then asked the SROs their perception of how serious a number of problems were at their school during the past school year. Their responses to those questions are presented in Chart 18. Of the 120 officers who responded to these questions, slightly less than three in ten (28.3%) thought that disorderly conduct was a serious problem at their school while more than one in four (26.7%) thought that violation of dress code was a serious problem at their school. Additionally, one in four respondents (25.0%) thought that theft and bullying/harassment were serious problems at their school. Approximately one in five officers (19.2%) thought that fighting was a problem at their school. Slightly more than one in seven (15.0%) thought that drug possession was a problem while one in nine (11.7%) thought that drug distribution was a problem at their school. A small percentage of respondents (6.7%) thought that sexual harassment was a problem while a smaller number of officers (5.8%) thought that possession of weapons other than guns or knives was a problem at their school. Small percentages of SROs

thought that knife possession (4.2%), illicit sexual behavior (3.3%), handgun possession (1.7%), and bomb threats (1.7%) were a problem in their school.

Chart 19. Identifiable Gang Names at SRO's Assigned School

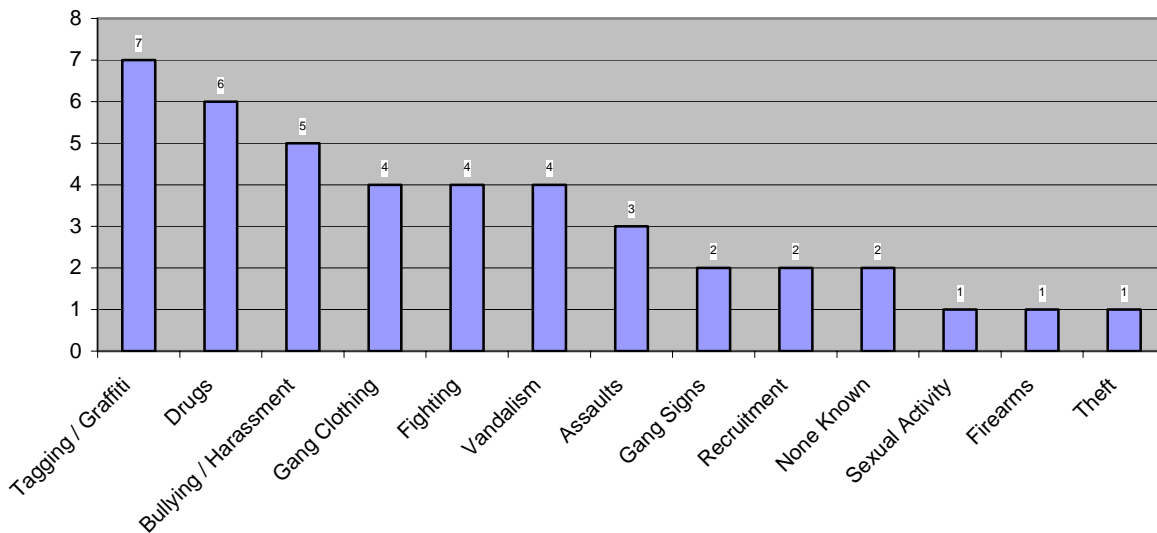


We then asked the SROs if identifiable gang activities were present at the school to which they are assigned. In results not presented here, one in four (25.0%) of the 120 SROs that responded felt that there were identifiable gang activities at their school. Thus, the vast majority of respondents did not feel that there were identifiable gang activities at their school.

We then asked those officers who responded that there were gang activities at their school to identify the names of the gangs at the school to which they were assigned. Of the 28 SROs that responded, the most prevalent identifiable gang was the Crips (mentioned by 28.6% of the SROs who responded), and Bad News and Bloods (both mentioned by 17.9% of the SROs who responded). One in ten (10.7%) SROs who responded said there were students with gang

characteristics but no distinguished name, while one in seven (14.3%) stated that the gangs at their school were called “Latin Kings”. Less than one in ten (7.1%) stated that the Doom Squad were present in their school while the same number stated that the Surenos were present in their school.

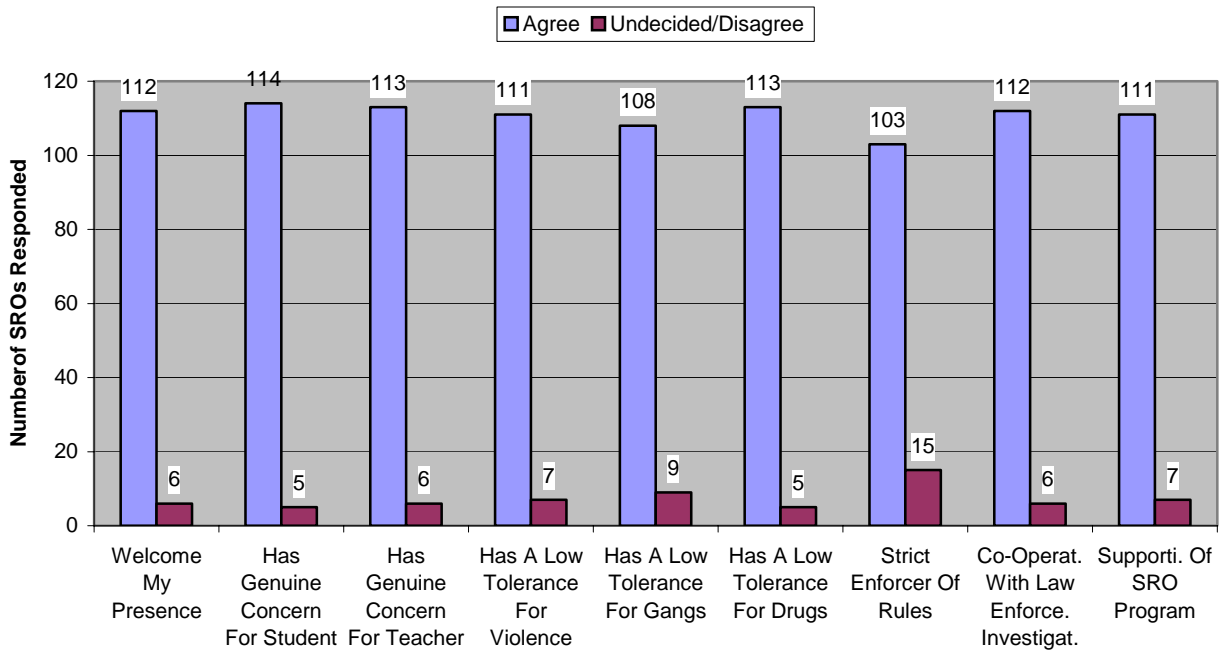
Chart 20. Type of Activities in Which Gangs at SROs Assigned School Engaged in



Those officers were then asked to describe the type of activities in which gangs engaged at their assigned schools. Their responses are presented in Chart 20. Of the 28 SROs who described types of activities that they observed in the assigned schools, one in four (25.0%) observed tagging and graffiti as the activities in which gangs were involved at their school. One in five (21.4%) stated that the gangs were involved in drug activity at the school while one in six (17.9%) thought that the Bullying/Harassment were involved in gang activity at their school. One in seven felt that gangs were involved in wearing gang clothing, fighting, and vandalism (14.3%, respectively). One in ten (10.7%) stated that gangs were involved in assaults while smaller percentages thought that gangs were involved in gang signs, recruitment, sexual activities, theft and firearms. Thus, it appears that graffiti and drugs are the most prevalent

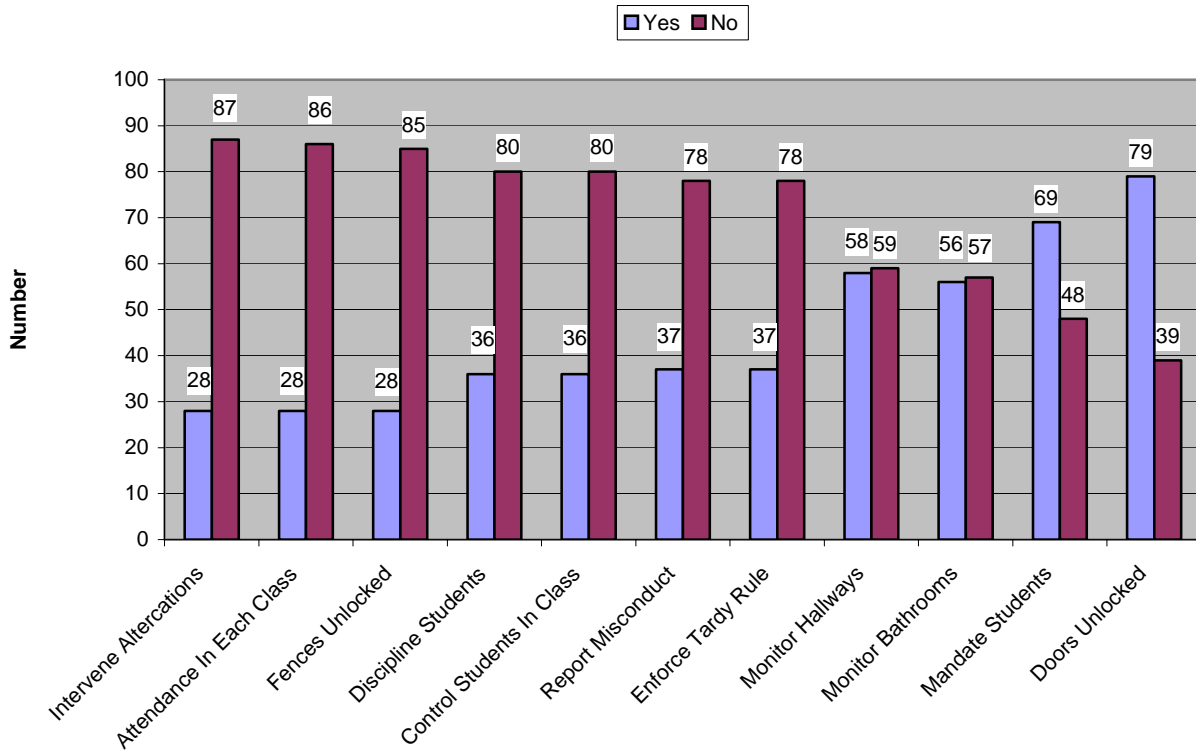
activities.

Chart 21. SRP Opinion of Principal at Their School



SROs were then asked a series of nine questions designed to allow SROs to give their opinion of the Principal at their assigned schools. The responses to that series of questions are presented in Chart 21. Among the 120 SROs who responded to these questions, it was evident that the vast majority of them thought highly of the principal at the school where they were assigned. Over nine in ten agreed that the principal at their assigned school: welcomed their presence at the school (94.9%); has a genuine concern for students (95.8%); has a genuine concern for the teachers (95.0%); has a low tolerance for violence (94.1%); has a low tolerance for gangs (92.3%); has a low tolerance for drugs (95.8%); was cooperative with law enforcement investigations (94.9%); was supportive of the SRO program (94.1%). Over four in five SROs agreed that the Principal was a strict enforcer of rules (87.3%). Overwhelmingly, then, the SROs who responded to this questionnaire thought that the principal at their school was making an effort to reduce crime and violence in the schools and support them in their role as an SRO.

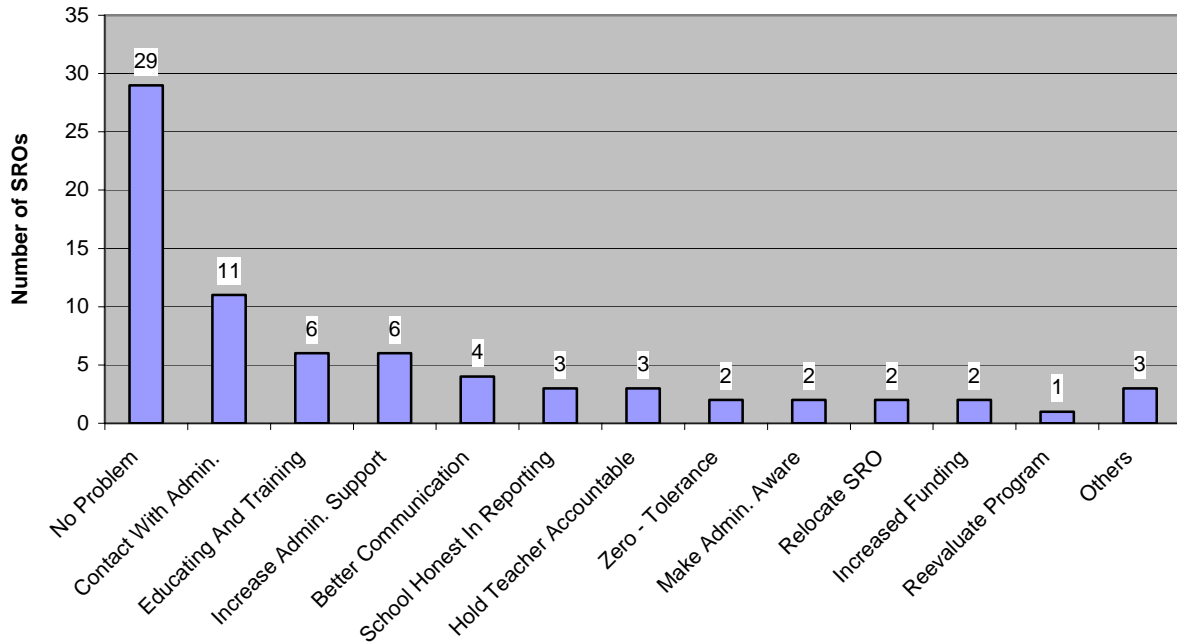
Chart 22. Activities in Which Teachers Interfere with the Security of the School



We then asked the SROs to describe how teachers interfered with the security of the school. We described 11 types of activities and asked the SROs whether they thought teachers interfered with safety in the school setting by engaging in those activities. Responses to those questions are presented in Chart 22. Of the SROs responding, SROs were most likely to say that teachers interfered with school safety by: (1) leaving the doors unlocked (66.9%); (2) not mandating that students have passes authorizing them to be in the halls (59.0%); (3) not monitoring students in the hallway between periods (49.6%); and (4) not monitoring the bathrooms (49.6%). Smaller percentages of SROs said the teachers interfered with security by: not enforcing the tardy rule (32.2%), not reporting misconduct in the school (32.2%), not controlling students in class (31.0%), not disciplining the students (31.0%), leaving fences unlocked (24.8%), not keeping attendance in class (24.6%), and not intervening in altercations

between students (24.3%). Thus, while the vast majority of SROs had overwhelmingly positive things to say about the principals at the school where they worked, they were less charitable in their views toward teachers when it comes to school safety.

Chart 23. SROs Opinions on How to Deal with Lack of Cooperation from School Administrators

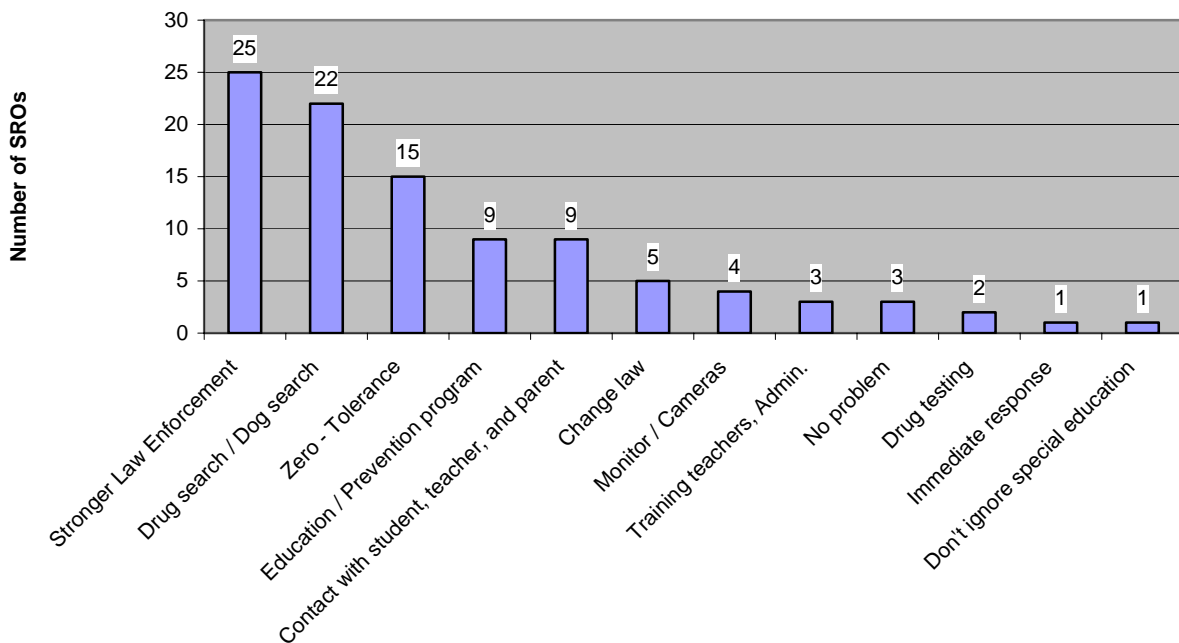


We then asked the SROs a series of open-ended questions regarding how to deal with the following problems: lack of cooperation from school administrators; drug possession and use; fighting; bullying/harassment; and theft. Their responses are presented in Charts 24-27.

There were 74 SROs who provided their opinion on how to deal with this lack of cooperation. Their open-ended responses were categorized into the responses presented in Chart 24. Approximately two in five (39.2%) SROs felt that they had very good cooperation from the administrator at their school or the communication was better, and thus no improvement was needed. One in seven (14.9%) felt that school administrators should contact, meet or talk with their law enforcement administrator, while less than one in ten (8.1%) thought the administrator

would be educated and trained about the SRO program. Less than one in ten (8.1%) said that more administrator support was needed. Additional responses included: schools need to be more honest in reporting problems, the administrators should hold teachers accountable for following school policies, zero-tolerance for lack of cooperation, make administrators aware, ask for help, increase funding, reevaluate program, develop a strong memorandum of agreement, and require the presence of SROs in each school.

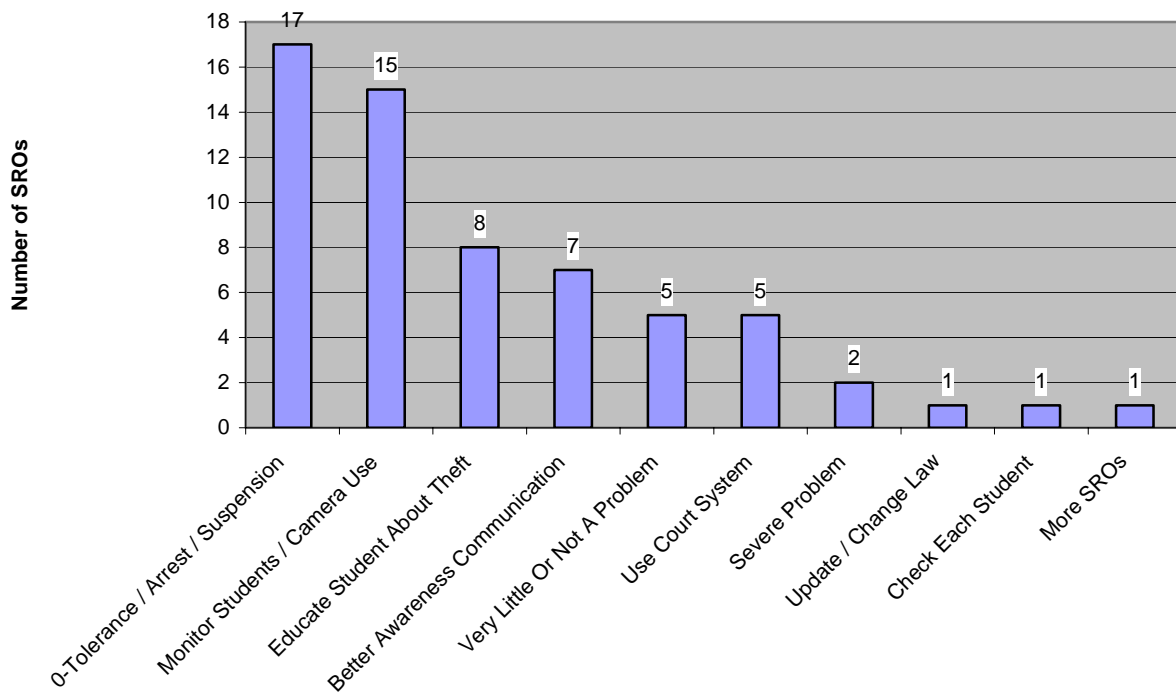
Chart 24. SROs Opinion on How to Deal With Drug Possession and Use



Of the 64 SROs who responded to the question asking them their opinion on how to deal with drug possession and use, more than three in five (62.6%) thought there should be more intensive law enforcement efforts to reduce the drug problem (e.g., stronger law enforcement, drug search/ dog search , and zero tolerance arrest policies). One in five (21.2%) thought that staff and parents needed to be contacted and educated about the problems to prevent drug abuse. Over one in five (26.3%) SROs believed drug dog searches and monitor/camera systems should

be used in the schools. A small percentage of SROs suggested that changes to the law were needed (5.1%). One SRO suggested immediate response was needed when notified of suspicions of drug use/possession while one SRO thought that teachers and administrators should not ignore problem behaviors by students that have special education status. Only three SROs who responded did not think drug possession and use was a problem; furthermore, only two SROs thought drug testing was the answer to this problem.

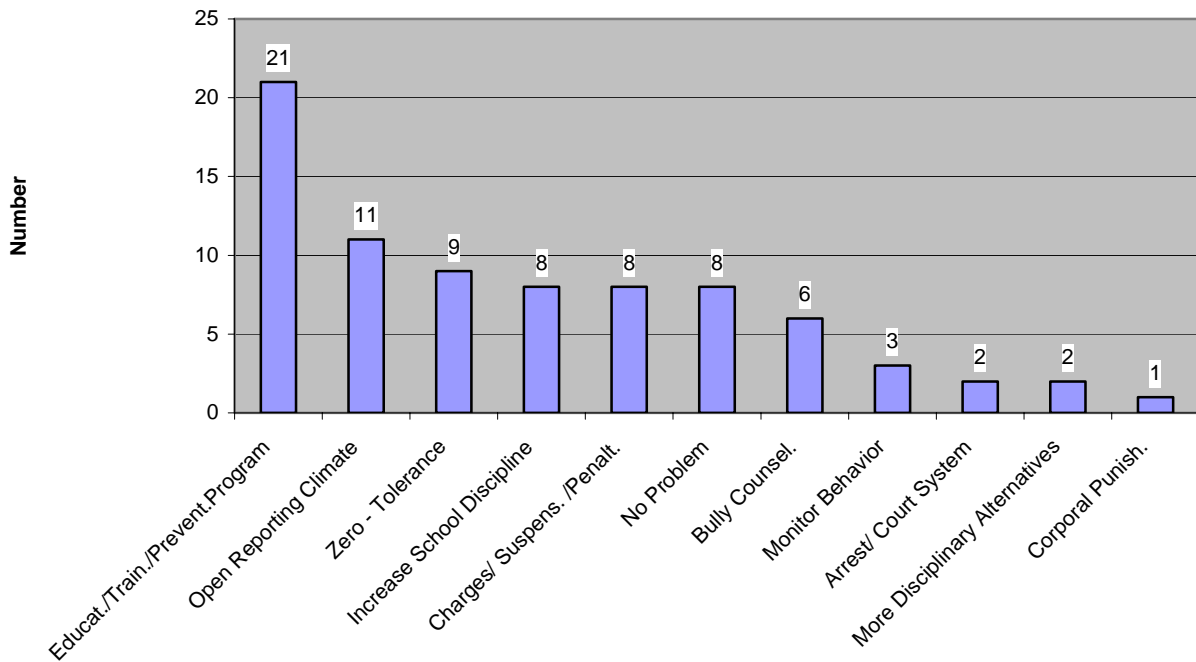
Chart 25. SROs Opinion on How to Deal with Theft in Schools



We then asked the SROs to give us their opinion on how to deal with theft in the assigned schools. We found 62 SROs that responded to this question with opinions. Over one in four (27.4%) SROs who responded to this question stressed that the zero tolerance, arrest policy or suspension could be applied while a smaller percentage (24.2%) thought that students should be more closely monitored or cameras should be used. One in eight (12.9%) SROs suggested that students need to be educated about theft while one in nine (11.3%) felt that better awareness and

communication was need. Less than one in ten (8.1%) SROs felt that theft in the schools was only a little problem or not a problem at all while the same number of SROs (8.1%) suggested using the court system to punish those committing theft at school. Two SROs regarded theft in the school as a severe problem (3.2%). A small percentage of SROs suggested that the law needed to be updated or changed, students should be checked before they left each classroom, and more SROs should be added at their schools (1.6% for each).

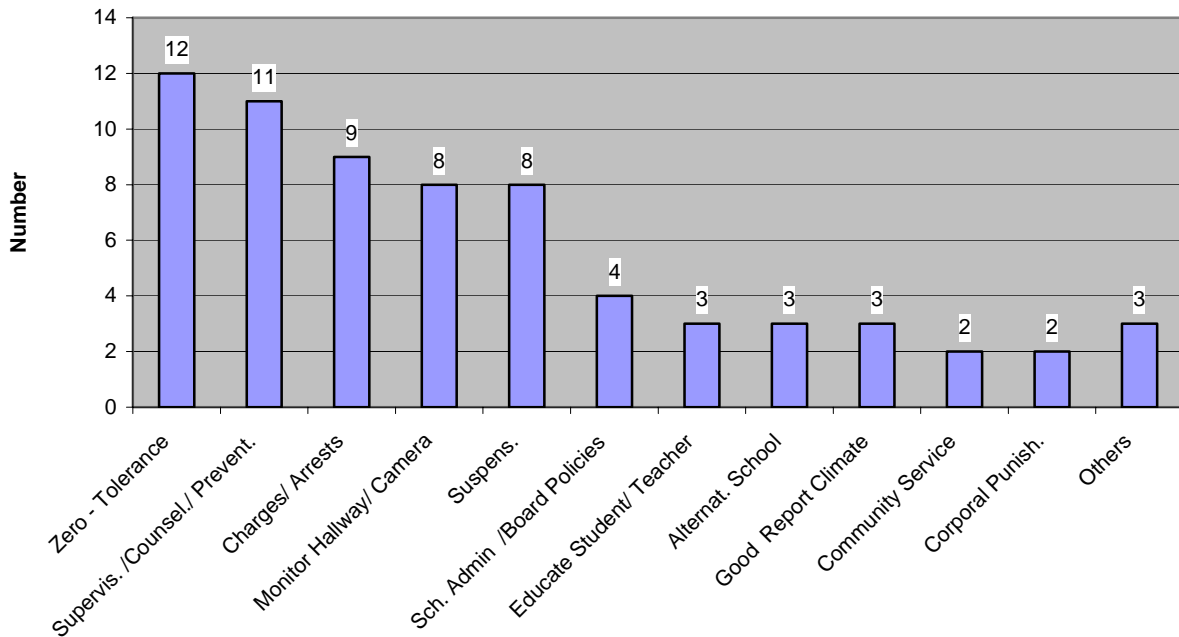
Chart 26. SRO Responses Regarding How to Control Bullying



Of the 79 SROs who responded to the question asking them their opinion on how to control bullying, over one in four (26.6%) thought there should be more education and training programs to prevent the bullying problem. More than one in eight (13.9%) felt that an open reporting climate would be help to reduce the bullying problem while small percentages of SROs suggested that there should be bullying counseling (7.6%) and behaviors should be more closely monitored (3.8%). One in ten (10.1%) stated that there was no problem about bullying at their

school. One in nine (11.4%) thought that the school should use a zero tolerance toward bullying while one in ten suggested school discipline should be increased (10.1%) and applied in a more punitive manner (e.g., charges should be filed, suspensions). There were small percentages of SROs that thought that there should be arrests and the court system should become involved (2.5%), more disciplinary alternatives should be available (2.5%), and corporal punishment (1.3%) should be applied when bullying occurred on the campus.

Chart 27. SRO Opinions on How to Control Fighting



We then asked the SROs to give us their opinion on how to control fighting in the assigned schools. We found 68 SROs that responded to this question with opinions. More than one in six (17.6%) of the SROs who responded to this question stressed that zero tolerance could be applied to fighting situations while one in eight suggested charges/arrest (13.2%) or suspensions (11.8%) should be used to control fighting. One in six (16.2%) thought that

prevention should be applied (e.g., supervision and counseling students) while one in nine (11.8%) suggested that hallways should be more closely monitored or camera use would be helpful. Small percentages of SROs suggested that school board policies need to be enforced (5.9%), students and teachers should be educated about violations (4.4%), offenders should be sent to alternative school (4.4%), school personnel should set up a good relationship with students and encourage an open reporting climate (4.4%), and community service programs (2.9%) and corporal punishment (2.9%) should be used.

Conclusion

The results presented here suggest that, despite the reduced Community Oriented Policing grant funding that is currently available, the School Resource officer program continues to thrive in the state of Kentucky. Kentucky SROS are generally experienced law enforcement officers who enjoy their positions, work well with the school administrators at their school, and feel the schools in which they work are relatively safe environments. SROs generally work at least 40 hours per week in their positions as SROs and are generally assigned to more than one school (typically middle and high schools). Even though they respond that the majority of their time is spent in law enforcement duties, SROs engage in a wide variety of activities at school that would not traditionally be considered law enforcement activities (e.g., monitoring hallways, parking lots, clearing hallways, counseling students). SROs perceive disorderly conduct, theft, verbal harassment, and bullying as the most serious safety problems at their schools and have a wide range of ideas on how to solve these problems. Given the findings from this report, it appears that the SROs who work in schools in Kentucky generally enjoy their work and are an asset to the schools in which they perform their duties.