

**SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN KENTUCKY
WHO ARE THEY, AND WHAT DO THEY DO?
2023 - 2024**

By:

Kentucky Center for School Safety

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March 2024

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

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 with 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 fundamental 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.

In 2019 the Kentucky General Assembly passed the School Safety and Resiliency Act (SSRA). The SSRA affected the expansion of school-based law enforcement and the development of expanded training requirements. This act mandated that every local school district in Kentucky assign one or more certified SROs to each school campus as funds and personnel became available. SROs, as mandated by the SSRA, are required to work under a contractual relationship between the local law enforcement agency that employs the law enforcement officer and the local school district that utilizes their services. The SSRA also provides a broadened scope of training that SROs must complete in three years. SROs are now required to complete 120 hours of training specific to the role of SRO. Before 2019, training for SROs was highly recommended as an in-service training opportunity by the Department of Criminal Justice Training (DOCJT) but not required.

The Kentucky Center for School Safety updates the master list of SROs in Kentucky annually. On a biannual basis, online questionnaires are administered to 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 during the spring of 2024.

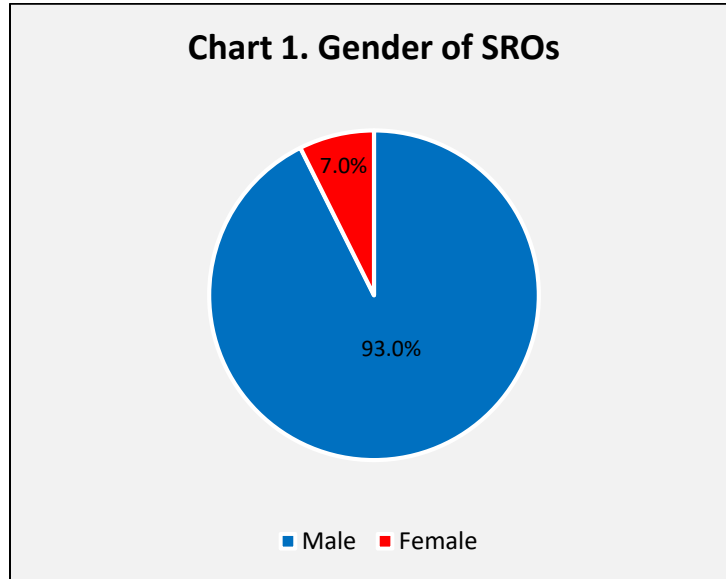
Data Collection

In January 2024, researchers from the Kentucky Center for School Safety (KCSS) conducted a study examining the attributes of School Resource Officers throughout Kentucky. Using an existing database revised in the fall of 2023, an electronic questionnaire was utilized to make it easier for the SROs to complete the survey. In January 2024 an email was sent that explained the purpose of the study and included a link to a SurveyMonkey website where the questionnaire was housed. A second auto-generated email from SurveyMonkey was sent two weeks later that automatically linked the survey and reminded the SROs to complete the survey if they had not already. At the time the study was conducted there were 783 SROs that received the electronic link. Responses were received from 437 SROs for a 55.7% response rate. This was a slightly higher response rate than the 2022 - 2023 survey report.

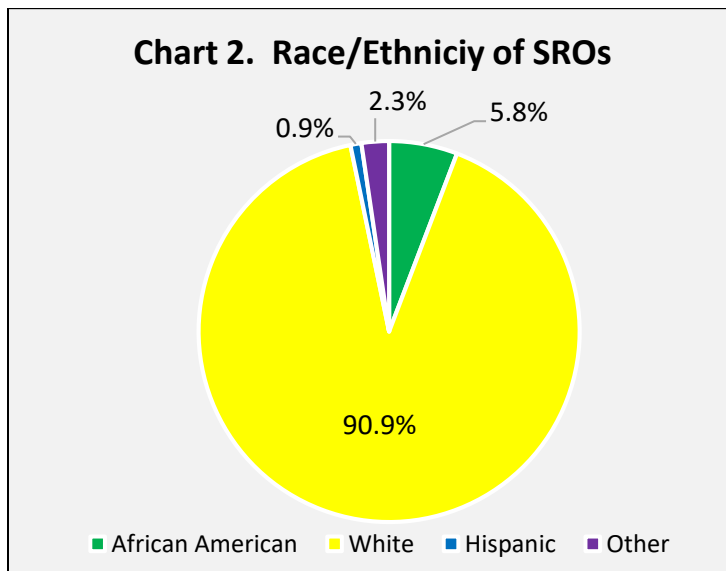
The data for this study are comprised of responses received from 437 SRO questionnaires. Practically all respondents provided data for questions on the last page of the questionnaire, indicating that the entire sample probably read the whole questionnaire. Nevertheless, some respondents failed to complete the data for some questions. 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.

Results

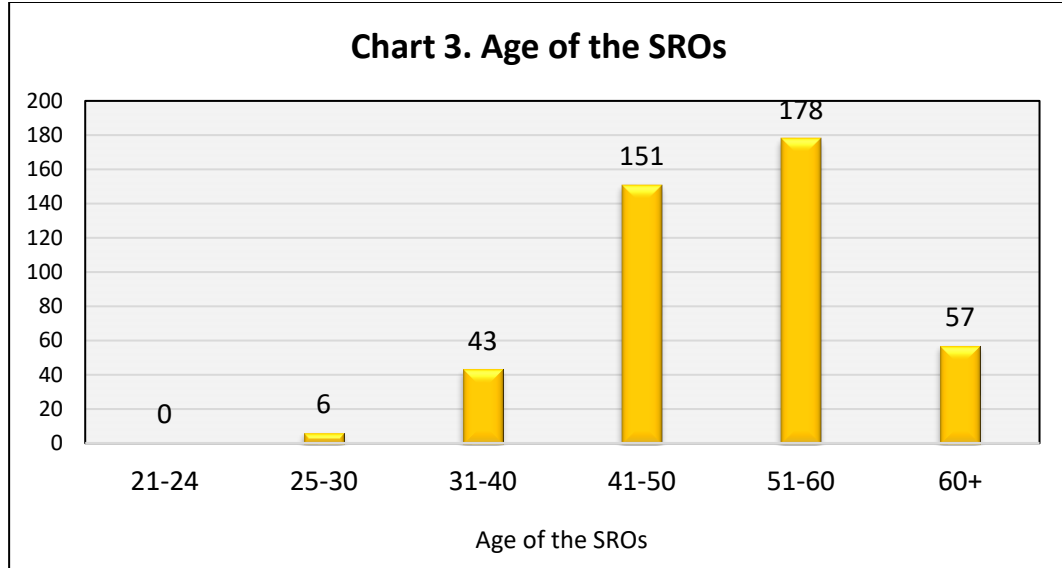
The gender and racial characteristics of the Kentucky SROs who provided data for this study are similar to those who responded in the previous SRO reports.



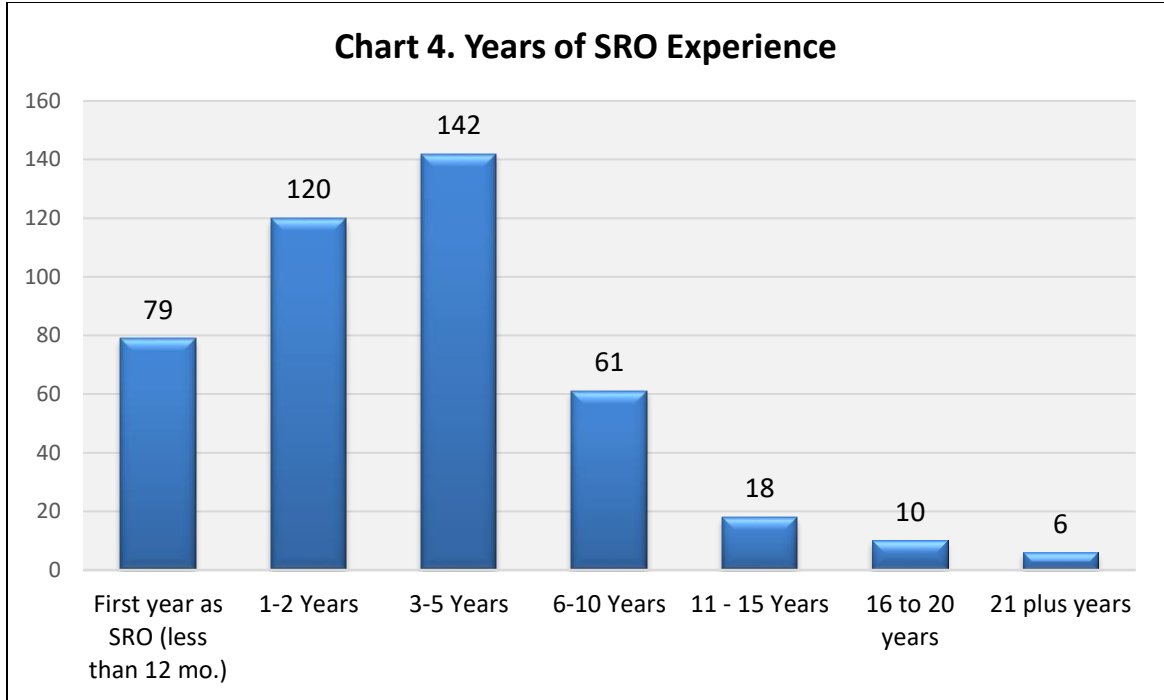
The vast majority (93.0%) of the SROs were male, while (7.0%) were female.



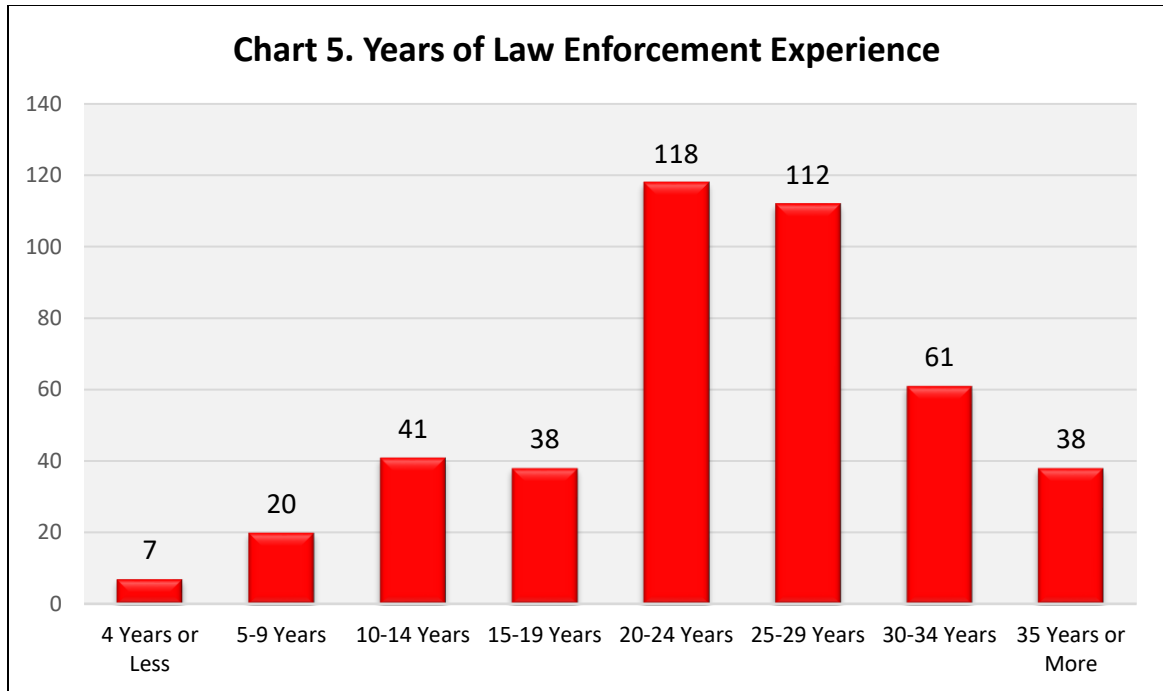
The vast majority of SROs (90.9%) were White, while the remaining SROs were African American (5.8%), and Hispanic or other races (3.2%)



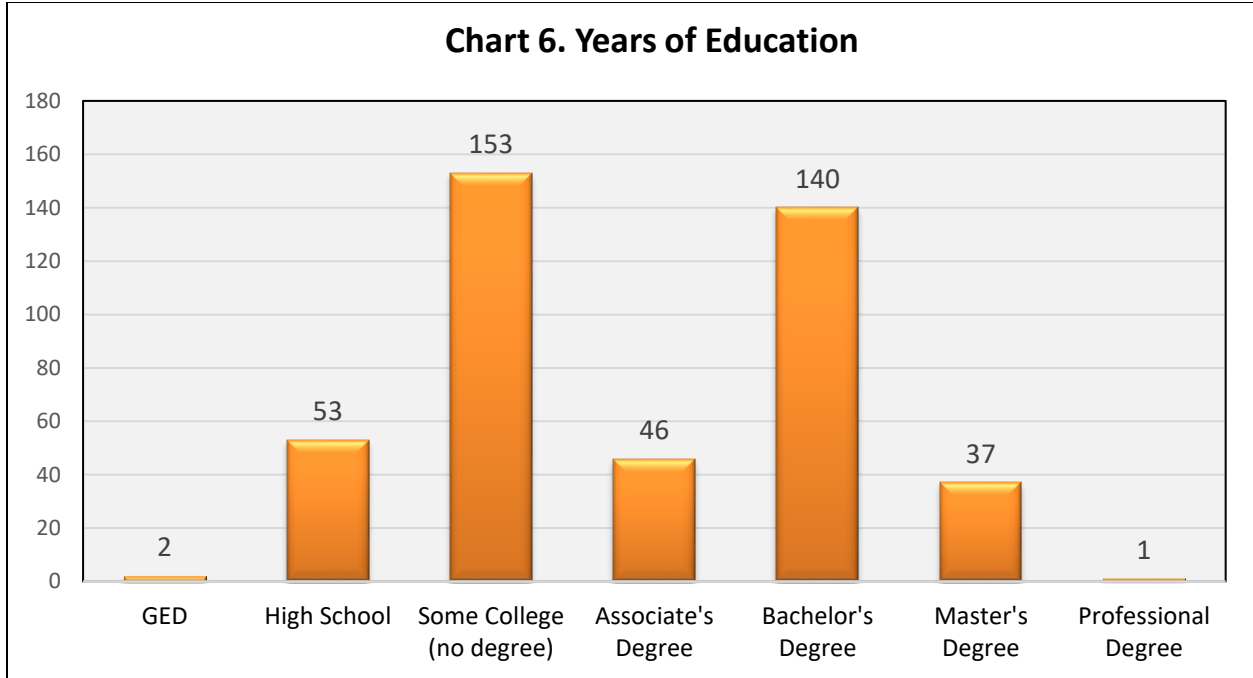
Of the 435 SROs who responded to the question about their age, a small percentage (1.4%) reported being between 25 and 30 years of age, and 9.9% reported being between 31 and 40 years of age. More than one in three SROs were 41 - 50 years of age (34.7%). Two in five SROs (40.9%) reported being between the ages of 51 and 60. More than one in eight SROs were over 60 years of age (13.1%). These responses were consistent with the 2022 - 2023 report.



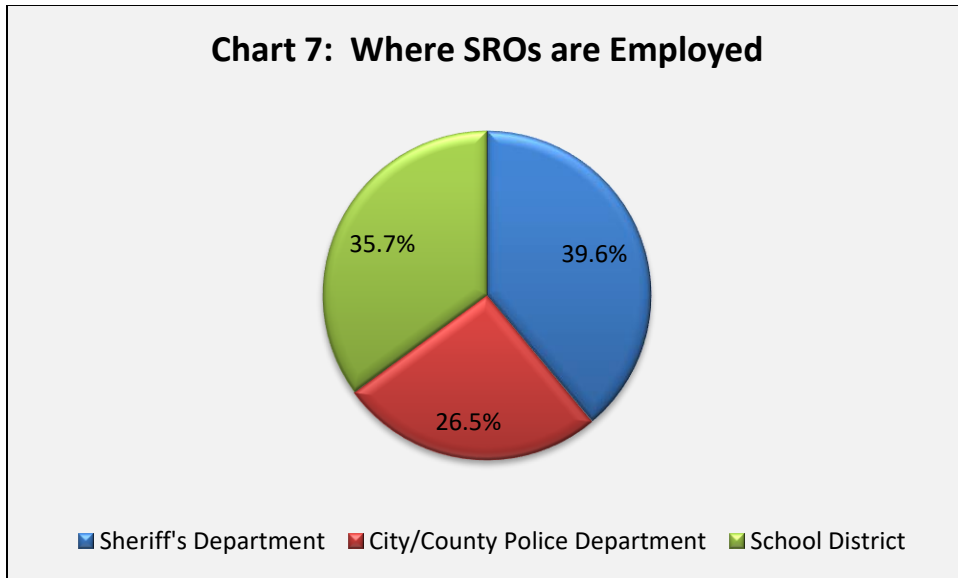
Of the 436 responses to the question asking how much SRO experience the officers had, almost one in five officers (18.1%) had worked as an SRO for less than a year. One in four officers (27.5%) had worked as an SRO for 1-2 years. One in three officers (32.6%) had worked as an SRO for 3-5 years. Almost one in seven SROs had been working for 6-10 years (14.0%). Of the remaining SROs who responded, 11-15 years (4.1%), 16-20 years (2.3%), and 21-plus years (1.4%).



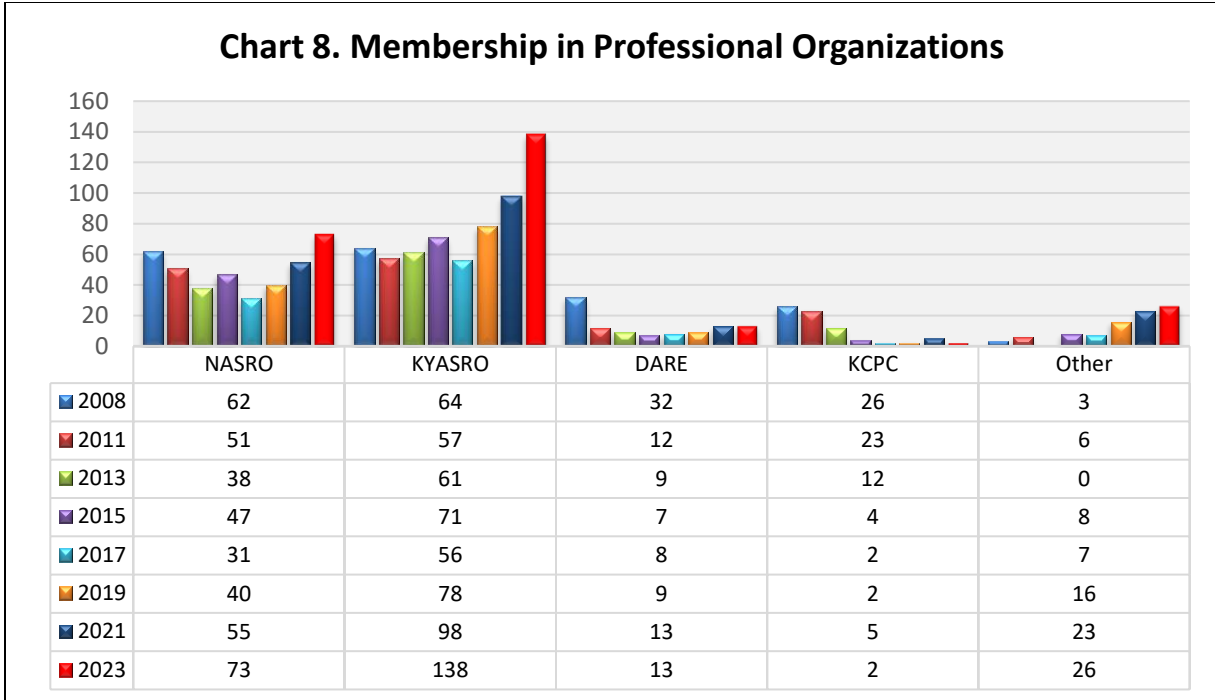
We then asked the respondents how many years they had been employed in law enforcement. Of the 435 officers who responded to that question, only seven had four years or less of law enforcement experience. A small percentage (4.6%) had been employed as law enforcement officers for 5-9 years, and (9.4%) had been employed for 10-14 years. One in ten officers (8.7%) had 15-19 years of law enforcement experience. One in four officers had been employed 20-24 years (27.1%) and 25-29 years (25.7%). One in seven officers (14.0%) had been employed as a law enforcement officer for 30-34 years and 8.7% for 35 years or more.



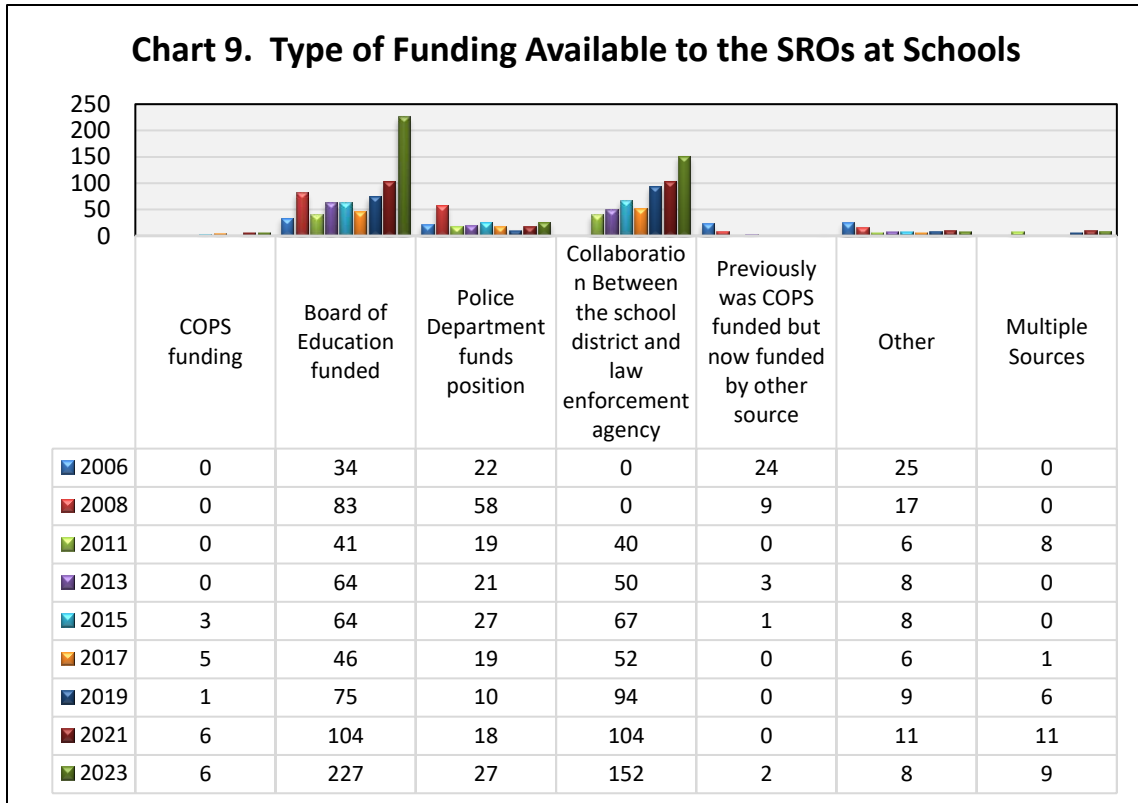
We then asked the SROs how many years of education they had completed. Of the 432 SROs who answered this question, one in eight respondents (12.3%) had finished high school. One in three SROs (35.4%) have some college education and earned a bachelor’s degree (32.4%). Almost one in ten SROs (8.6%) reported having a master’s degree and one in ten reports having an associate degree (10.6%).



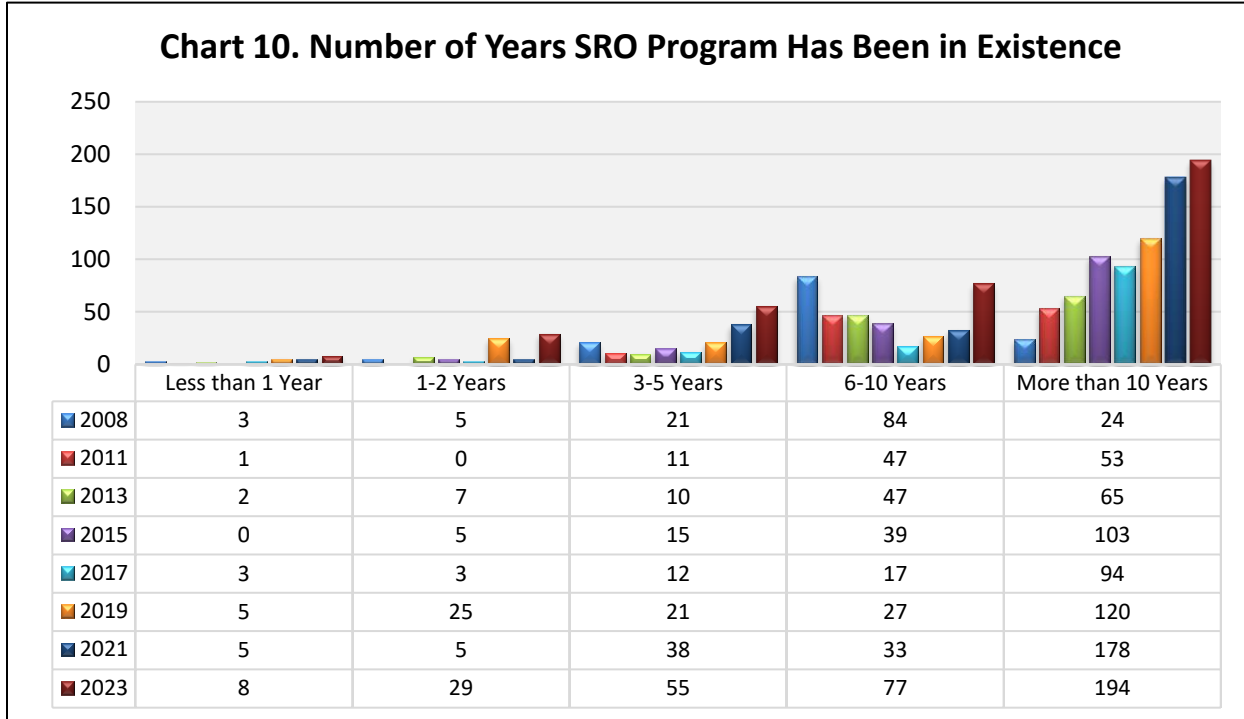
School resource officers were asked what agency employed them. Chart 7 indicates who the responding officers considered their central employing agencies. Almost two in five (39.6%) of the 437 responding officers reported being hired by a sheriff's department. More than one in four SROs report being hired by a city/county police department (26.5%). More than one in three SROs (35.7%) reported being hired as a school district employee. In another question asked in this survey, SROs were asked if they went through the Special Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO) hiring process for school district departments or the School-Based Law Enforcement Officer (SBLEA) process. Fifty-six officers employed by school districts (31.8%) reported going through the SLEO hiring process, and one hundred twenty officers employed by school districts (68.2%) reported going through the SBLEA hiring process.



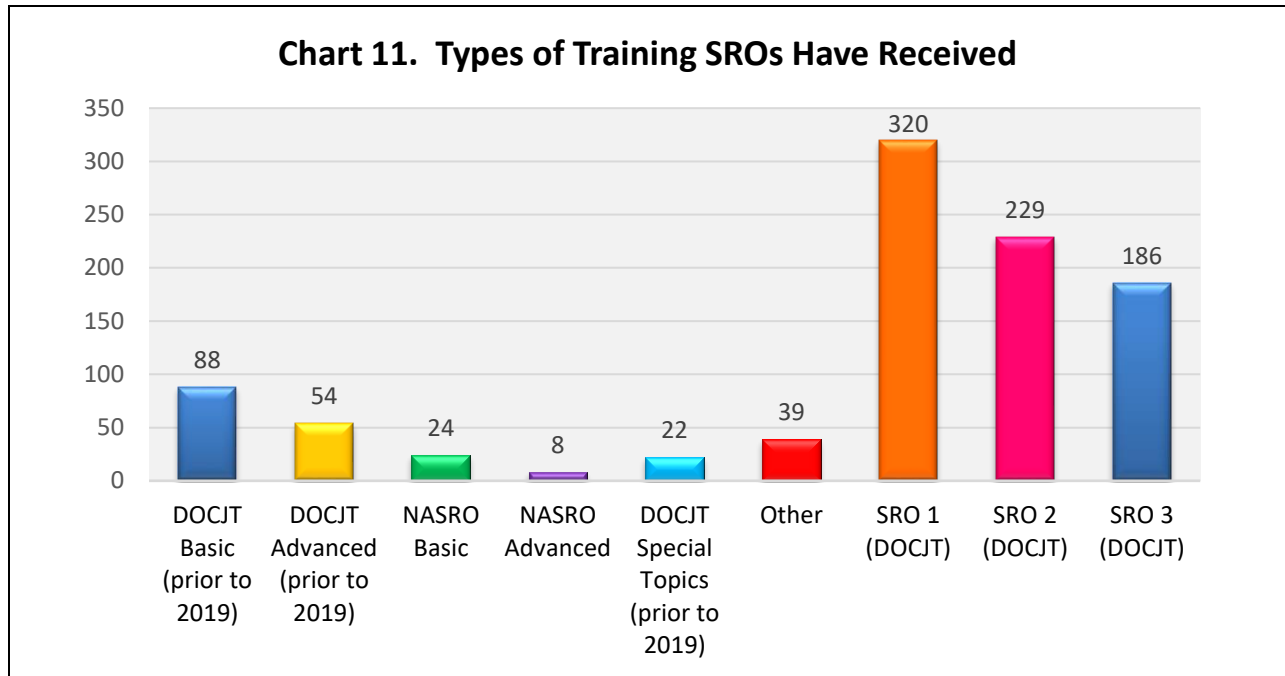
School Resource Officers were then asked which professional associations they were involved with. Responses to this question can be found in Chart 8. Half of all SROs (57.7%) responding to this survey reported being professional association members. Of those SROs who belong to a professional association, over half (54.8%) reported being a member of the Kentucky Association of School Resource Officers (KYASRO). More than one in four respondents (29.0%) are National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) members. A small percentage (5.2%) reported being members of Kentucky DARE, and only two SROs reported being members of the Kentucky Crime Prevention Coalition (KCPC). Twenty-six SROs report being members of other professional associations.



The SROs were then asked how their position was funded. The 431 responses to that question are presented in Chart 9. As evidenced by the chart above, in 2011 and 2013, no schools were funded by Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funding, a dramatic reduction from 2004, when almost half of the SROs were funded by COPS funding. In 2015 and 2017, there was a slight increase in SROs reported to be funded by COPS. One SRO was funded by COPS in 2019, and six SROs were reported to be funded by COPS in 2021 and 2023. Most of the SROS were funded either through the Board of Education (52.7%) or collaboration between the Board of Education and the Police Department (35.3%). Of the remaining categories, 6.3% were funded solely by police departments, and 1.9% were funded by other sources not listed.

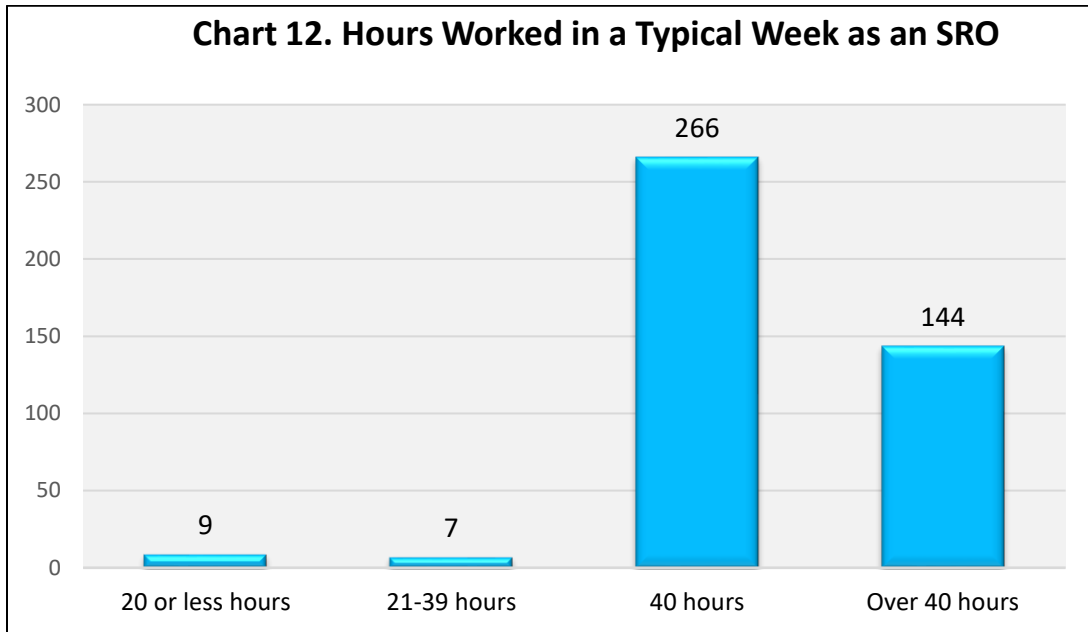


The SROs were then asked how long an SRO program had been in existence in the district to which they were assigned. Of the 363 responding officers to this question, more than half (53.4%) indicated in Chart 10 that their SRO program had existed for more than 10 years. One in five SROs (21.2%) reported their program was 6 to 10 years old, and one in seven SROs (15.2%) responded their programs were 3 to 5 years old. Only one in ten SROs (10.2%) reported their program was 2 years old or less. Eight SROs reported their program was less than a year old. Overall, the SROs providing data for this study generally work in districts with well-established SRO programs.

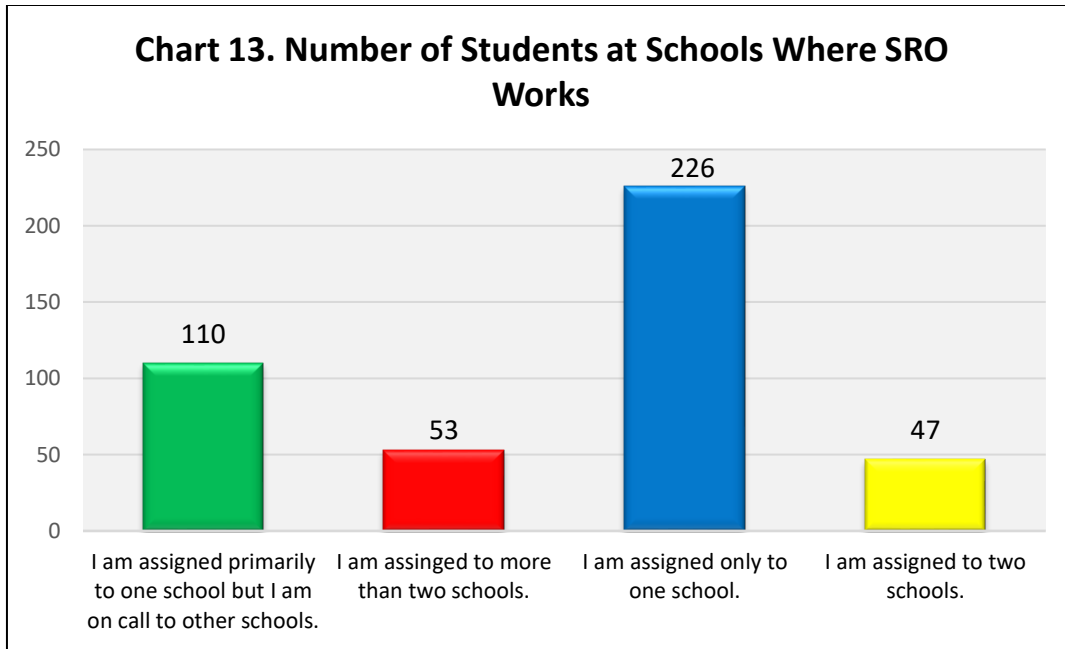


The SROs were then asked what type of SRO training they had received. With the passage of Senate Bill 1 in 2019, the training requirement for School Resource Officers changed considerably. SROs are now required to take 120 hours of training from the Department of Criminal Justice Training over a three-year timeframe. Prior to 2019, the training from DOCJT was highly encouraged but not mandatory. The 391 responses to that question are presented in Chart 11. Among the SROs who responded, 22.5% had attended the SRO Basic Training offered by the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice training (DOCJT) prior to 2019. One in seven SROs (13.8%) attended the DOCJT Advanced training prior to 2019 and a small percentage (5.6%) of SROs attended the DOCJT Special Topics training prior to 2019. The majority of responding SROs (81.8%) attended the new mandatory SRO 1 course and half of the responding SROs (58.6%) attended the new SRO 2 course. Two in five respondents (47.6%) attended the new SRO 3 course. A small percentage of respondents (6.1%) responded having attended the basic class offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). One in

ten of respondents (10.0%) received “other” type of training and eight respondents received the NASRO advanced training.

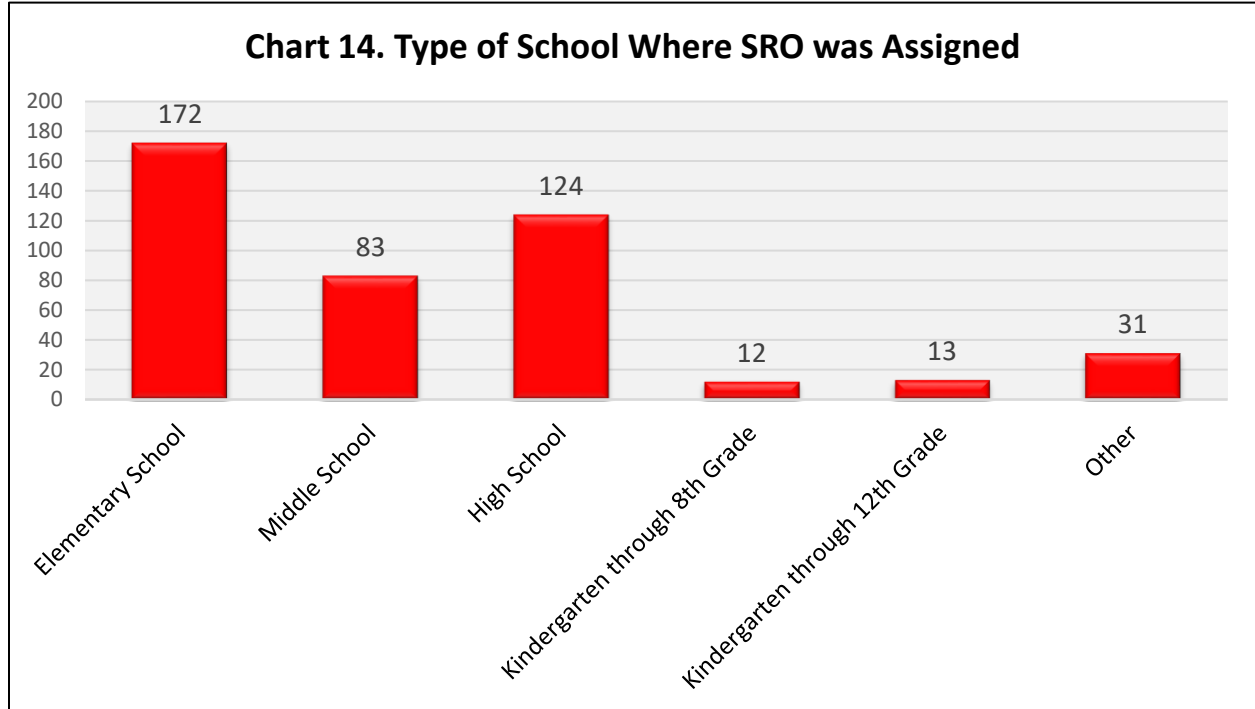


During the typical school year, SROs were asked how many hours per week they worked in the SRO role. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 12. Of the 427 SROs who responded, 62.3% worked full-time as SROs (40 hours per week) during the school year. One in three (33.7%) worked more than 40 hours weekly. A small percentage had worked 20 hours or less (2.1%) or 21-39 hours (1.6%). Thus, the majority of SROs were full-time SROs during the school year, a trend that matches the findings from the eight previous reports.

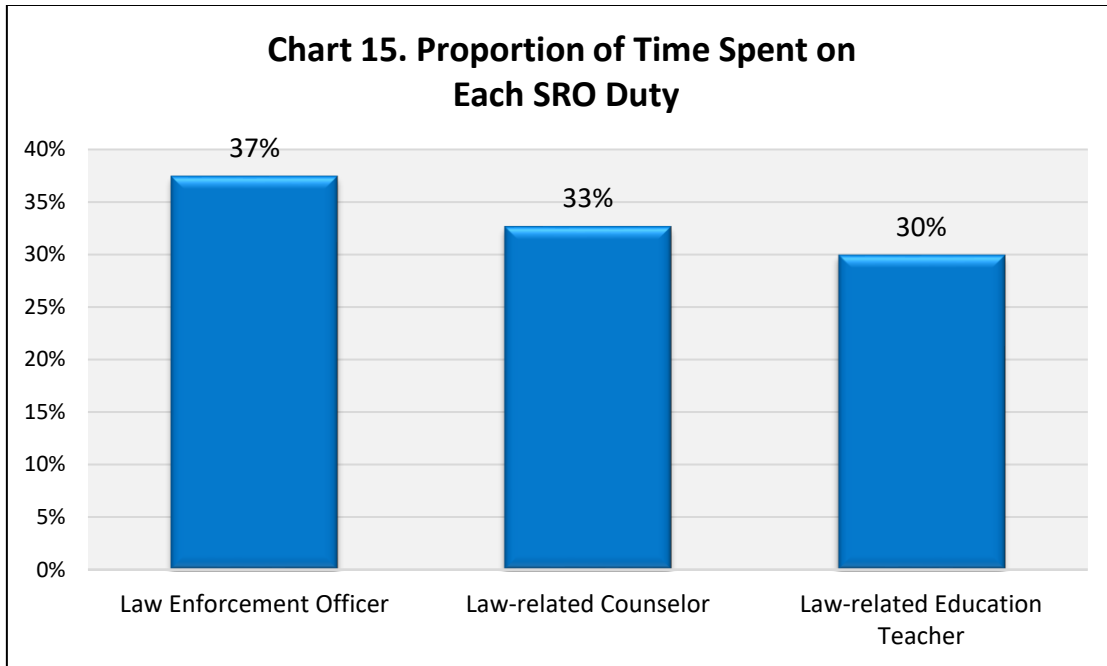


Respondents were then asked the number of schools for which they provided coverage.

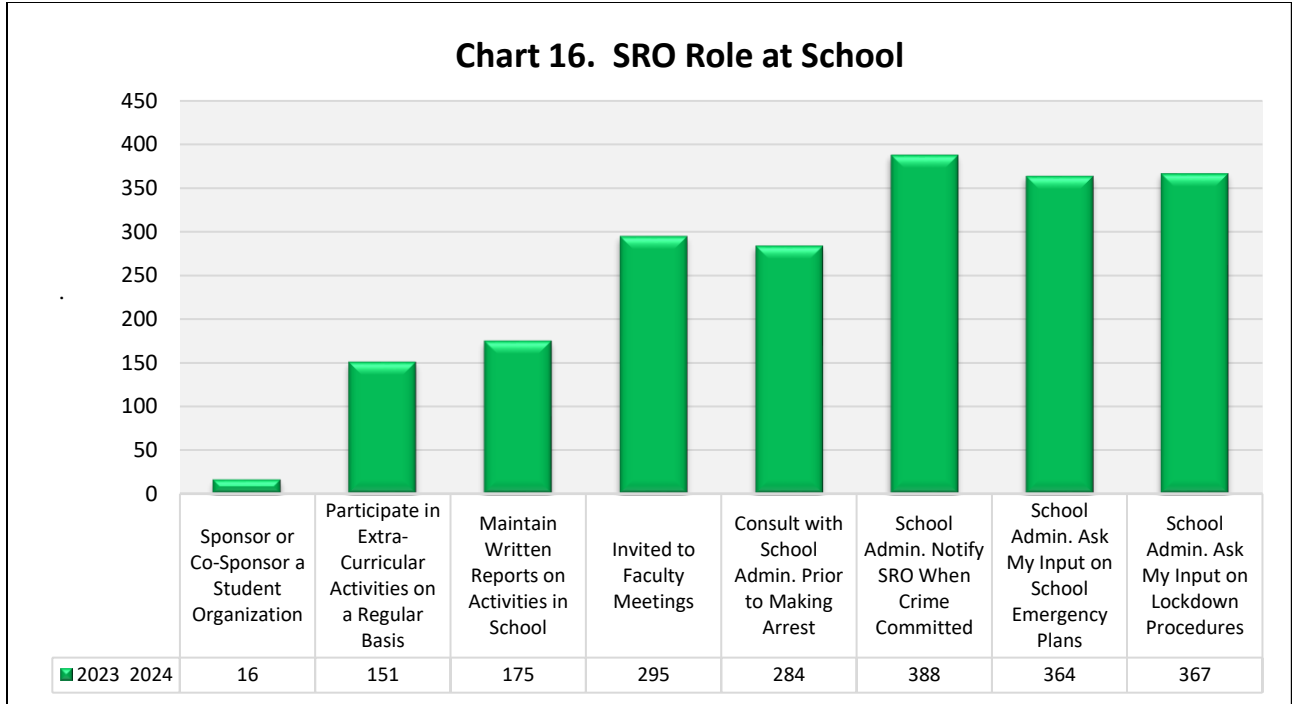
The responses to that question are presented in Chart 13. Of the 436 SROs who responded, half of responding SROs (51.9%) were assigned to one school. This was a considerable increase from the 2017 report when only 9.2% of responding SROs reported being assigned to one school only. One in four (25.2%) of responding SROs were primarily assigned to one school but were on call for other schools. One in ten SROs (10.8%) split their time between two schools. One in eight SROs (12.2%) were assigned to more than two schools. Thus, although the optimal situation is one SRO per school, many officers are responsible for more than two schools or respond to other schools in their district, but that trend appears to be decreasing over time.



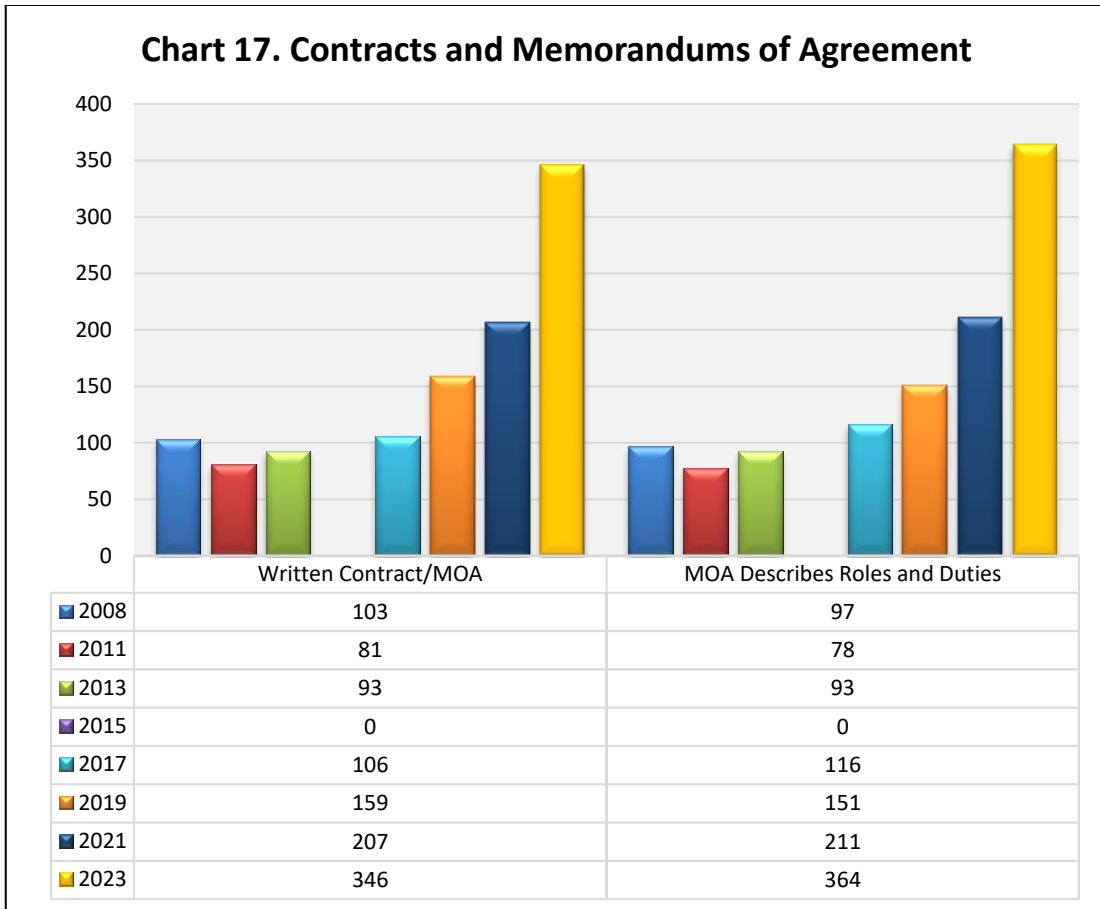
We then asked the SROs the grade levels of the school(s) to which they were assigned. The responses are presented in Chart 14. More than one in four respondents were assigned exclusively to high schools (28.5%) while approximately one in five (19.0%) were solely assigned to middle schools. Two in five officers (39.5%) are assigned exclusively to elementary schools. This a considerable increase from the 2021 survey when only 25.5% were exclusively assigned to elementary schools, and the 2017 survey when only 5.4% of responding SROs reported being solely assigned to an elementary school. Of the remaining SROs who responded, 5.7% were assigned to schools of more than one level, and 7.1% responded with “other.” SROs in Kentucky still work primarily in high schools and middle schools. Still, the number of SROs assigned to elementary schools has exceeded the number of SROs assigned solely to high schools or middle schools.



We then asked the SROs how much time was spent on each SRO duty that NASRO suggests comprising the SRO triad (law-related counselor, law-related educator, and law enforcement officer). The responses to those questions are presented in Chart 15. The SROs in this sample spent a more equal amount of time on all three roles. In the 2021 report, the responding SROs spent more than half of their time (56.0%) in the law enforcement role. In the present survey, the responding SROs spent the most time (37.0%) performing law enforcement duties, with slightly less time spent on law-related counseling (33.0%) and an even smaller amount spent as law-related educators (30.0%). Thus, at least among this sample of SROs, the “triad” is an accurate depiction of the way in which SROs spend their time.

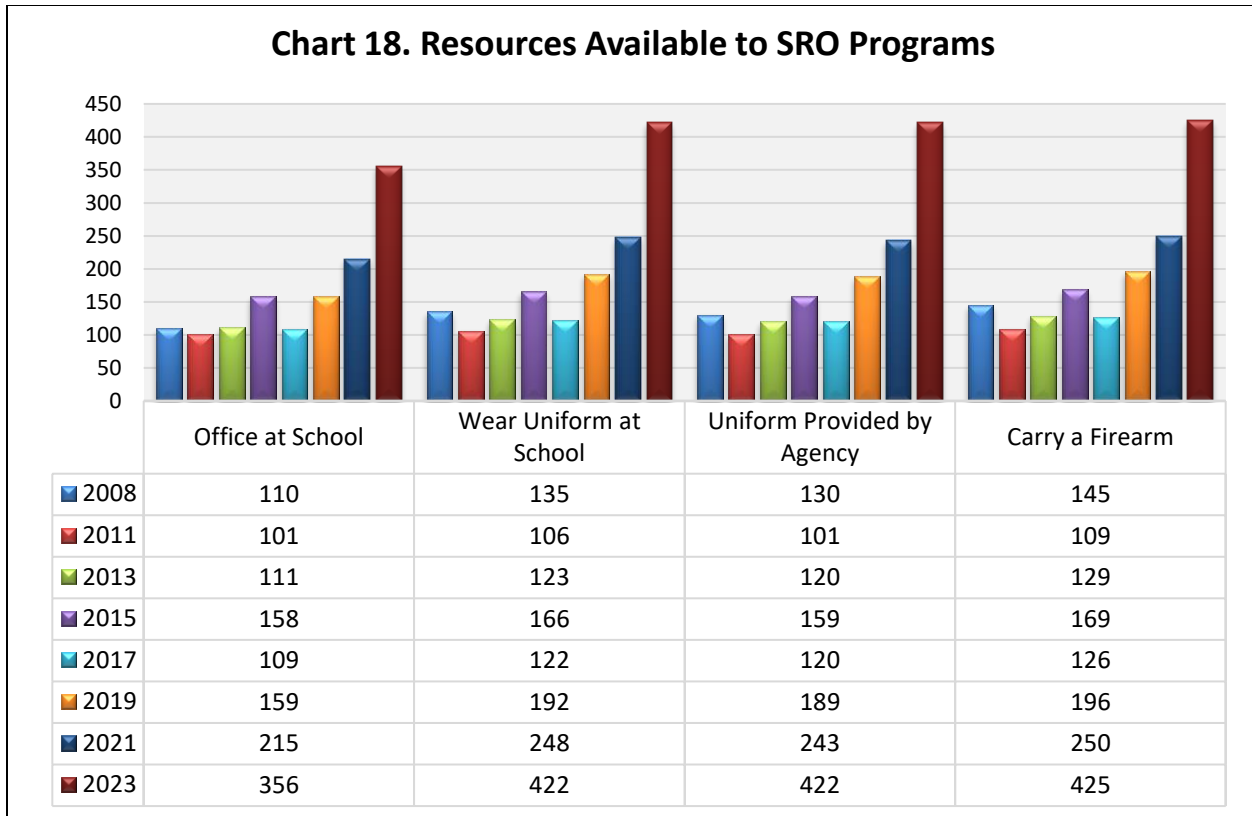


We then asked the SROs about their specific duties as an SRO. The responses to those questions are presented in Chart 16. The vast majority of SROs (93.0%) notify school administration when a crime is committed at school. Most responding SROs are asked their input on lockdown procedures (87.8%) and the development of school emergency plans (87.0%). The majority of the responding SROs (71.6%) are invited to staff meetings, and two in five (42.2%) maintain written reports on activities at school. The majority of responding SROs (69.3%) consult with school administrators prior to making an arrest and one in three of the SROs (36.3%) participate in extracurricular activities. Sixteen SROs reported being a sponsor of a student organization.



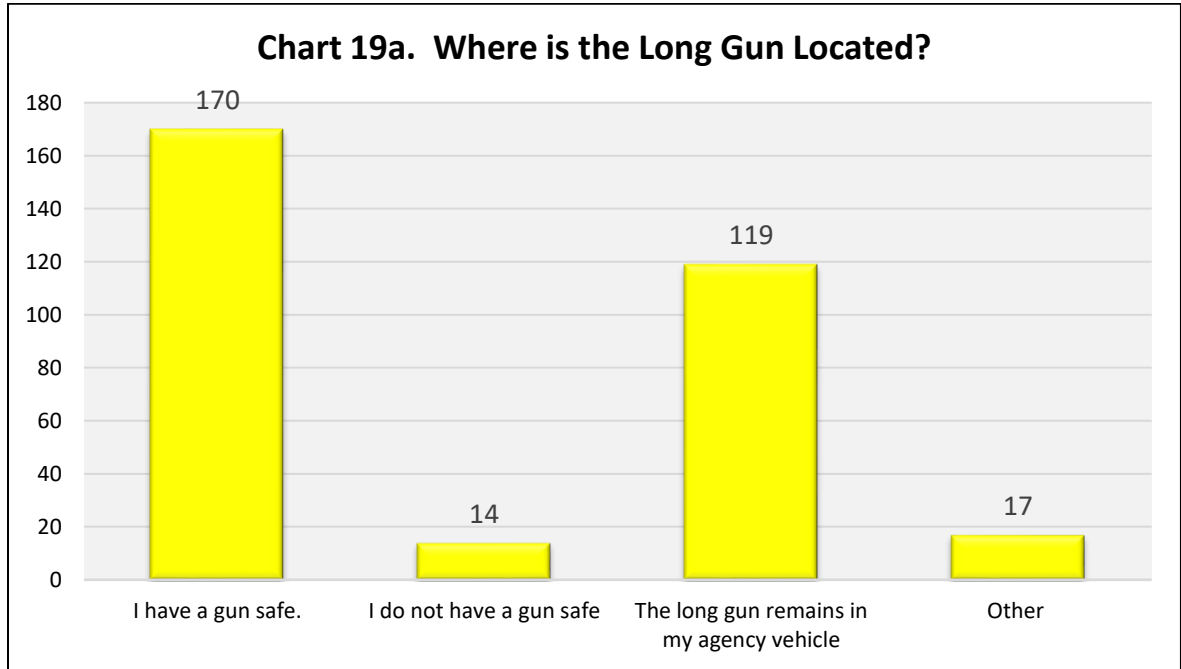
SROs were then asked questions about their contracts and memorandums of agreement.

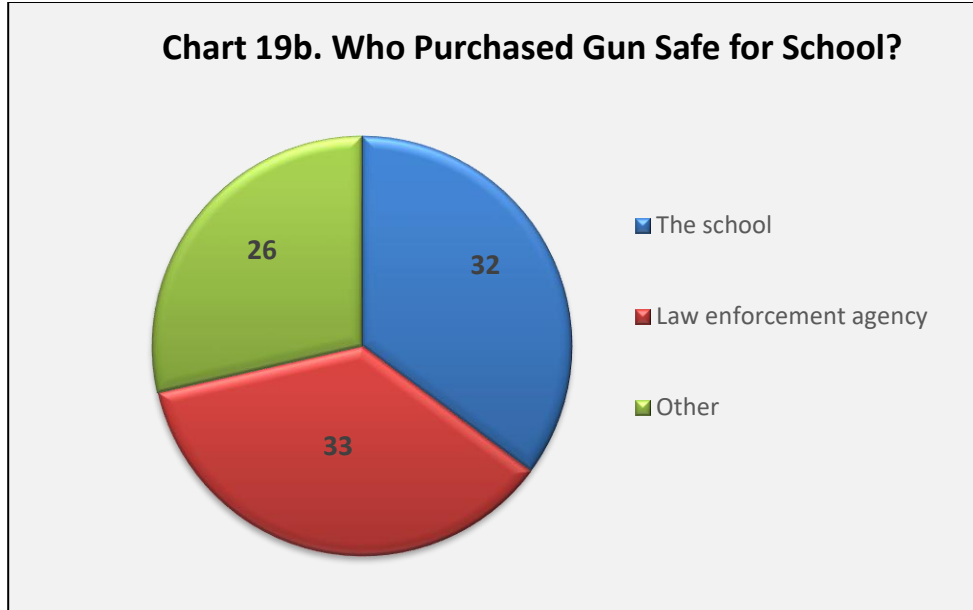
The responses are presented in Chart 17. The majority of the SROs who responded (85.2%) stated that there was a written contract/Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the school(s) where they worked as an SRO and the police department with whom they were employed. Finally, the majority of SROs (95.0%) who responded to this question reported that the contract/MOA adequately described the role and duties of the SRO and the relationship between the school administration and the law enforcement agency to which they belonged.



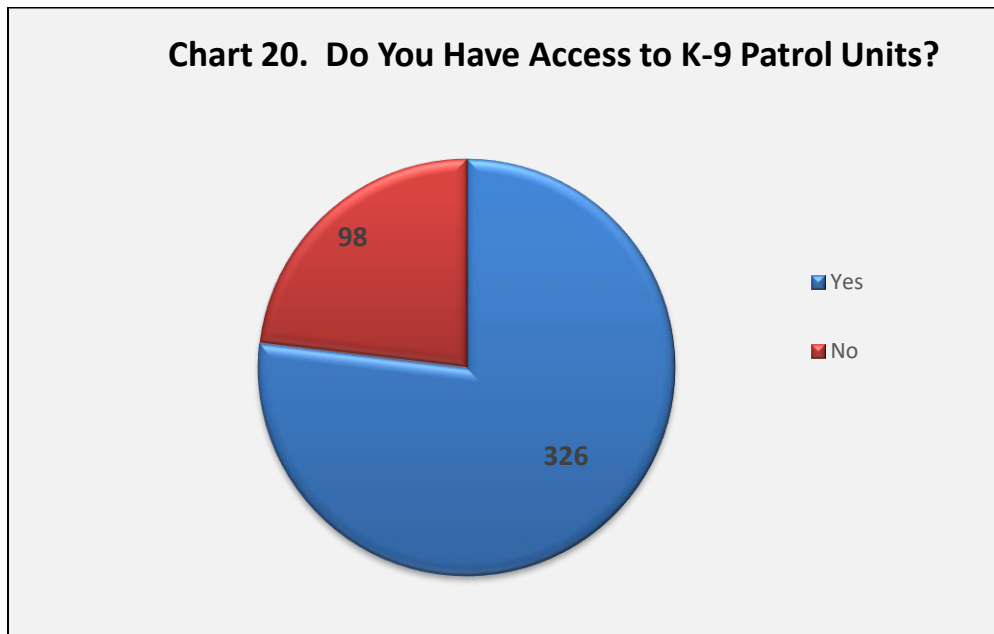
SROs were then asked questions about the resources provided by the school and their law enforcement agency. The responses are presented in Chart 18 and Chart 19. Of the SROs who responded to the survey, the vast majority (84.2%) stated they had their own offices at school. Almost all of the SROs (99.1%) reported that they wore a uniform in their role as an SRO and that uniform was provided by the agency for which they were employed (99.3%). All but one of the officers who responded to the firearm question (425) carried a firearm on school property, while almost three in four officers (66.7%) had access to a long gun on school property.

Of those officers who indicated having a long gun at school, more than half (59.9%) had a gun safe in their school to store their long gun. Two in five of responding SROs (41.9%, n = 119) keep their long gun in their agency vehicle.





The majority of SROs responding to this question (71.4%), report that the school or law enforcement agency purchased a gun safe for them. Additionally, Most SROs (76.9%) report having access to canine patrol units for searches on the school property.



Conclusion

The results suggest that the School Resource Officer program continues to thrive in Kentucky. Kentucky SROs are generally experienced law enforcement officers who enjoy their positions and work well with the school administrators, and their programs are well established and have existed for ten years or more. SROs generally work at least 40 hours per week in their positions as SROs and are usually assigned to more than one school (typically high school or middle school). However, there has been a significant increase in SROs in elementary schools. SROs responded that they spend a proportional amount of time in each role of the TRIAD (law enforcement, informal counselor, and law-related teacher), and SROs engage in a wide variety of activities at school that would not traditionally be considered law enforcement activities. Given the findings from this report, it appears that the SROs who work in schools in Kentucky work collaboratively with school administration and are an asset to the schools where they perform their duties. The growth and development of school resource officer programs in Kentucky demonstrates the dedication of the Kentucky General Assembly to ensure that students of the Commonwealth have a safe and secure learning environment.