SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AND STUDENT ARRESTS ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES:
AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR PRESENCE AND ACTIVITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

The utilization of school resource officers (SROs) is a nationwide topic of interest. The intent for the initial implementation of SRO presence on school campuses was to protect the students from potential outside harm and promote better interactions between students and police, improving overall school safety. Existing literature has shown increased disciplinary actions for students, with disproportionality among minority students. The current study examined the presence of SROs and their reactive and proactive activities about reports of student arrests on campus. Results showed that SROs are more prevalent in schools with larger student enrollment and higher grade levels. Additionally, the types of SRO activities (i.e., proactive and reactive activities) did not predict student arrests. The findings are discussed for practical implications and future research studies.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

American school districts began to adopt zero-tolerance policies following the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) in 1994 and implemented a mandatory student expulsion expectation contingent upon carrying any firearm weapon to a school campus (Teske, 2011). The purpose of the act was to maintain school safety by removing potentially dangerous students from school campuses, upholding a consistent expectation of student behavior with substantial implications, relieving school staff from implementing decisions, and replacing the subjectivity of student discipline (American Psychologist, 2008; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; King & Bracy, 2019). In the 1996-1997 school year, just two years after the emergence of GFSA, zero-tolerance policies were expanded. Ninety-four percent of schools implemented zero-tolerance policies for firearm possession, ninety-one percent for any weaponry, eighty-eight percent for drug possession, and eighty-seven percent for alcohol possession (Dupper, 2010). In addition to these areas, zero-tolerance policies have also been applied to non-violent offenses and noncompliant behaviors to forcefully remove students who engage in any type of problem behavior or are disorderly while within school bounds. Black students are consistently and disproportionally affected by zero-tolerance policies, which have been linked to mass incarcerations overall (Nelson & Lind, 2015; Teske, 2011). Instead of classroom environments that provide students with equal chances to succeed, zero-tolerance practices are punitive disciplinary measures that offer no support to anyone who may engage in problem behavior at a young age.

In conjunction with zero-tolerance policies implemented in schools, districts across the country have hired school resource officers (SROs) in attempt to prioritize the safety of attending students. A drastic increase of SROs occurred following the mass shooting at Columbine High
School in 1999 to address school violence in addition to other issues, although SROs had been present in schools since the 1950s (Ryan et al., 2018; Weiler & Cray, 2011). The initial intent for having school-employed police officers was to bridge the gap between students and community police officers, offering more positive interactions between the two entities on school grounds and providing administration with assistance with increased levels of community violence (Counts et al., 2018). Currently, SROs are considered law enforcement officers hired to serve schools and are members of the police force first and members of the school campus community second (Clark, 2011; Counts et al., 2018; Weiler & Cray, 2011).

Recent data from the U.S. Department of Education reported that there has been a significant increase in hired police in school districts over the past decade, during which there has been an increase in office referrals for problem behaviors and arrests made on school campuses (Mallett, 2016; United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2017). Additionally, research showed an increase in out-of-school suspensions and continuation of minority student discrimination in the suspensions as well (Losen et al., 2015). Meanwhile, effective proactive strategies have received less attention to decrease and present school violence. Instead, target hardening strategies, such as SROs monitoring campuses and zero-tolerance policies, are utilized to encourage the removal of students who engage in problem behaviors. These common behavioral interventions and punitive measures remove students from their educational environments for minor violations, which provide limited opportunity for academic advancements and are known to shape criminal behavior (Giroux, 2003; Swain & Noblit, 2011). No recent data is available for the exact number or percentage of SROs utilized in the US, but in the 2017-2018 school year the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) estimated more than 17,000 SROs served schools across the country and eighty-four
percent of public high schools reported to have one or more security officers present at least one day per week (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Despite the tremendous increase and presence of SROs in public schools across the country, little research shows the effects of SROs on the students or the types of activities SROs participate in while on duty (Cornell, 2015). This study aimed to better understand the presence and activities of SROs in US elementary and secondary schools. The purpose of the present study was to examine the presence and activities of SROs in a large national data and to explore the relations between their presence/activities and student arrest.

**Background and Context**

The mass shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012 have promoted and normalized the use of various security measures for the intended purpose of protecting students and staff. Over the last several decades, research indicates that school districts have consistently increased the use of security techniques (Robers et al., 2015). Such strategies include using metal detectors, security surveillance cameras, identification badges, locked access points, fences, monitoring entrance and exit points, drug sweeps, and law enforcement personnel on campus. Although the intention of policing school grounds is to improve school safety, debate continues on whether these security measures create positive outcomes for campuses and students.

Following the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, which left twenty children and six adult school staff dead, emotional, heated debates ensued suggesting quick solutions to gun violence on school grounds. With the nature of the tragedy, discussion and debate were developed to focus on how fast a solution could be reached and not on statistical research involving violence in American schools. Comprehensive data are essential to identify
concrete occurrences and help cultivate recommendations for change (Weisburst, 2019). Every year, nearly 2,900 children and teens are killed by gun violence, and less than two percent of those homicides occur on school grounds. Additionally, the percentage of school-related youth homicides has consistently stayed below two percent since the 1992-1993 academic school year (Center for Disease Control, 2019). In the 2016-2017 school year, there were approximately 98,000 public K-12 schools in the United States, and 318 school shootings were reported (United States Government Accountability Office, 2020). These statistics indicate that school shootings and mass shootings are rare, but the horrific nature of the instances spark a significant portion of topics on adolescent violence in the mass media (Newman & Fox, 2009). Attention has also been focused on school shootings in urban areas, but shootings have occurred across the country in big cities and small towns. While urban schools did record more school shootings between 2009-2019, suburban and rural schools had the most targeted shootings in schools (the deadliest type of school shooting) (United States Government Accountability Office, 2020).

The intense emotions related to school violence have prompted districts to develop solution-focused procedures to protect their campuses. The implementation of security measures heightened following the mass shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, which left fourteen students and one teacher deceased (King & Bracy, 2019). While the purpose of more security was to protect students in school districts nationwide, the measures have been identified as policing their own students while at school. Several studies have found that greater security measures actually increase violence and impact school learning environments, resulting in poor student outcomes (Nance, 2014; Tyler & Rankin, 2012) whereas some qualitative research studies have identified students and teachers as feeling safer as a result of their full-time SRO on campus (Curran et al., 2021). More specifically, the use of SROs has been shown to increase
students’ sense of danger (Curran et al., 2021) and shows a direct increase in suspensions and arrests made on campus (Homer & Fisher, 2020; Weisburst, 2019). Schlosser (2014) also found in a sample of students that having an SRO on campus was associated with higher rates of crimes and recommended that additional options for school security should be considered.

The use and over-reliance on security measures used on school campuses have been referenced as also criminalizing students and a contributing factor to the complex “school-to-prison pipeline” problem, a term established by Devine (1996). The metaphor highlights the interconnection between discipline and policies within American schools and that of the criminal justice system. The school-to-prison pipeline is defined by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as the “funneling of students out of school and into the streets and the juvenile correction system, depriving children and youth of meaningful opportunities for education, future employment, and participation in our democracy” (Redfield & Nance, 2016, p. 74). A wealth of data supports the direct relationship between schools and the juvenile correction system. Researchers have found that the disciplinary procedures used by districts, such as the utilization of security cameras and technologies to record and capture observable evidence, are related to more frequent removal of students from their classrooms (temporarily or permanently), and more placement of students into the juvenile justice system (Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011; Kupchik, 2010). The regular use of these intense measures creates an environment where students are more likely to drop out of high school and ultimately end up in contact with the criminal justice system or prison (Gregory et al., 2010; Peguero & Bracy, 2015; Rios, 2011). The students who are most at risk of incarceration are those of racial minority, those identified with learning disabilities, or students with emotional disabilities (Mallett, 2016; United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2017).
It is particularly alarming that disciplinary policies have been shown to impact a significant proportion of minority students with referrals of engagement in problem behaviors as compared to their White peers. Specifically, schools with SROs have been found to arrest and suspend Black students at higher rates (Homer & Fisher, 2020; Weisburst, 2019). As a result of the high prevalence of SROs on urban school campuses, experts have raised the concern that the school environment has become more representative of a juvenile correctional facility and provides negative experiences for students (Nolan, 2011; Toldson, 2012).

Several scholars noted that using zero-tolerance policies and SROs to mediate issues with students undoubtedly promotes a setting in which youth are under surveillance and scrutiny for negligible behavioral issues (Theriot, 2009; Weiler & Cray, 2011). Even with this known research and the impact of their use, schools continue to employ police staff. Lacking in empirical research is the identification of how SROs on school grounds may impact students. It is imperative to understand the use and impact of SROs on the students. Although the intent behind the use of SROs is clear, the extent to which they participate in different school duties, the impact of their presence, and the outcomes they have on students needs further examination.

**The Current Study**

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the use and presence of SROs. The study examined the extent to which SROs participate in various duties (e.g., student mentoring, disciplining). Fisher and Devlin (2020) discuss common roles of SROs on school campuses to include: (a) security enforcement and patrol, (b) maintaining school discipline and safety, (c) coordination with local police and emergency team, (d) identifying problems in the school and proactively seeking solutions to those problems, (e) training teachers and staff in school safety or crime prevention, (f) mentoring students, and teaching law-related education courses or training
students (e.g., drug-related education, criminal law or crime prevention course). The current study investigated how these different activities are related to student arrest. The data from the current study could help better understand the current rate of SROs and the type of activities in elementary and secondary schools, which could be considered in the development of future school district policy decisions, hiring procedures, and training opportunities.

**Research Questions**

1. To what extent does the presence of SROs predict the number of student arrests that occur on school campuses in differing school sizes and differing school levels?

2. What are the current duties of SROs on school campuses? How do SRO duties differ across school levels (e.g., primary, middle, high school) and school size (e.g., student enrollment size)?

3. To what extent do the duties of SROs predict the number of student arrests that occur on school campuses across school levels and school sizes?

Based on the existing literature, it was hypothesized that SROs will be reported to engage in more student disciplinary activities than student mentoring activities at higher-level schools and at schools with larger student enrollment sizes. It was hypothesized that schools with SROs who are more engaged in student mentoring will have better outcomes (i.e., fewer reported arrests) whereas schools with SROs who are more engaged in student discipline will have more negative outcomes (i.e., higher reported arrests).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Following the mass shootings at Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School, districts around the country began increasing their use of target hardening strategies, or security and safety procedures, on campuses. This included the hiring of armed SROs to maintain safety and reduce violent actions from outside communities coming onto school grounds (Travis & Coon, 2005; King & Bracy, 2019). Police presence on school campuses has increased to approximately 84 percent of high schools across the country during the 2017-2018 academic year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Despite the popular use of hired SROs, limited research is available regarding their efficacy in the reduction of school violence occurrences, or the duties of SROs (e.g., behavior management, student mentorship) during school hours (King & Bracy, 2019).

The mass shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 changed future school safety decisions for the school years onward. Because of the national attention the incident drew through mass media outlets, moral outrage and panic were common responses to school shootings. Although school shootings are extremely rare events (Cornell, 2015; Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014), news coverage showed both suburban and urban schools to be filled with violent events, which were viewed by the public as means for needing security (Addington, 2009). The following decades brought continued securitization across public schools in America, regardless of geography, demography, or crime level.

History of School Resource Officers

The historical background of SROs began during the 1950s, but police presence in schools was relatively rare (King & Bracy, 2018). The intent to employ officers at schools was
a community policing effort to reduce increased levels of gun violence. As time progressed, so did SRO prevalence and purpose. Their responsibilities expanded to assisting and mediating issues that may arise with students, including any and all behavioral infractions (Ryan et al., 2018). The increase of target hardening measures in public schools across the United States occurred first in the mid-1980s in response to a high frequency of crime in urban areas such as New York City and Chicago. Schools in high crime locations used law enforcement, metal detectors, and drug searches to ensure the crime occurring in the surrounding communities was not coming onto school grounds (Addington, 2009; Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011). Police presence at schools during that decade were considered to be harsh and quick to punish, which mirrored the implementation of police in urban neighborhoods. However, their presence within schools was still considerably less than it is today. During the 1996-1997 academic year, just two years prior to the Columbine shootings, seventy-eight percent of public schools did not have an SRO assigned to the campus while only six percent had a full-time officer present (Kaufman et al., 2000).

The use of SROs continued to broaden following historically high rates of crime in the United States, which influenced the legislative initiative for policies such as the GFSA in 1994 and an amendment to the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act in 1998. Following the mass shooting at Columbine High School, expanded implementation of security procedures were utilized beyond urban schools. School boards began strict implementation of zero-tolerance policies and encouraged a partnership between law enforcement with federal funding of nearly $300 million dollars from 1995 to 2006 provided through the United States Department of Justice’s COPS in Schools grant program (French-Marcelin et al, 2017; Girouard, 2001; James & McCallion, 2013). The funding for policing measures has solely been
a reactionary response to the highly publicized coverage of school shootings and student causalities rather than based on efficacious strategies and researched evidence (King & Bracy, 2019). Following the shooting at Sandy Hook in 2013, President Obama signed an act to provide further federal funding to schools to increase the presence of SROs and school security equipment (French-Marcelin et al., 2017). The intent of these movements was to provide further protection for students with the reduction and removal of dangerous or potentially dangerous situations. At the same time, a significant concern had emerged that students were being penalized for minor behavioral issues and were removed from school entirely as per the zero-tolerance policies in place (King & Bracy, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that the most frequently cited behavioral problems associated with student removal were tardiness and absenteeism in data collected from the 2018-2019 school year.

Limited statistical data is available regarding the number or percentage of school-hired SROs, but in the 2017-2018 school year the NASRO estimated between 14,000 and 27,000 SROs were present at approximately 57 percent of the country’s public schools (Losen & Whitaker, 2018; NASRO, 2020). Of those, 84 percent of high schools reported having one or more security officers present at least one day per week (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018; NCES, 2018). The largest and fastest increase in hired SROs has occurred in urban high school settings with a student enrollment of more than 1,000 (James & McCallion, 2013). The NASRO recommends that every school, regardless of size or level, should have at least one “carefully selected, specially trained” SRO. Previously, the association recommended one SRO per 1,000 enrolled students but suggested that additional factors including campus size, acreage, number of buildings, school climate, school location, and the number of other safety members on
campus be considered before determining the number of SROs needed (NASRO, 2012). No other organizations have publicized the recommended ratio of SROs to students.

**SRO Responsibilities and Activities.** Literature and political legislation provide different titles and definitions for law enforcement officers assigned to work in schools (e.g., school-based law enforcement, school security officer, school district police, school peace officer), but the term that is most commonly used is school resource officer (SRO). This term is specific to law enforcement that is hired through a local police agency and assigned to a school district. Some SROs are assigned to one school campus full-time while others rotate between several school campuses in a district. SROs are located in schools of all grade levels, geographic locations, and in communities with different degrees of urbanicity (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018).

There are no standards and rules for SROs to follow while working at a school, but most commonly they are considered to work under, and in collaboration with, the school administration staff and are officers trained in law enforcement assigned to protect and service educational environments (Coon & Travis, 2012; Girouard, 2001; NASRO, 2020). SROs are always armed and in uniform while on duty. Their duties typically encompass law enforcement (e.g., patrolling campus, investigating problem behavioral reports), mentoring (e.g., partnering with students in need), and teaching (e.g., staff trainings, preventative programs) (NASRO, 2020). More specifically, Fisher and Devlin (2020) discuss common roles of SROs on school campuses to include: (a) security enforcement and patrol, (b) maintaining school discipline and safety, (c) coordination with local police and emergency team, (d) identifying problems in the school and proactively seeking solutions to those problems, (e) training teachers and staff in school safety or crime prevention, (f) mentoring students, and (g) teaching law-related
education courses or training students (e.g., drug-related education, criminal law or crime prevention course).

Coon and Travis (2012) investigated SROs’ duties while working at schools. In a sample of 1,387 public school principals and 1,140 police chiefs, they found that eighty-one percent of school principals reported SROs participated in crime/disorder mediation (vs. ninety-one percent from police chiefs), forty-five percent reported SROs making arrests at school (vs. seventy percent from police chiefs), and sixty-six percent reported participation in the mentorship of individual students (vs. seventy-three percent from police chiefs). In a national assessment of school resource officer programs, Finn and McDevitt (2005) found that of the nineteen SRO programs and 108 schools assessed, the SROs spend on average sixty to sixty-five percent of their time on law enforcement, twenty-five to thirty percent of their time on mentoring students, and five to ten percent of their time on teaching and training. Police chief perceptions of SRO activity participation differ from that of school principals, making it difficult to evaluate what activities SROs are to engage in while at school.

**Legislation and Policy**

Schools and school districts are often blamed for the inability to prevent school shootings. With American societal demand for change, schools respond to the demand by increasing security measures to prevent future violence (Gardner et al., 2007). In an effort to proactively inhibit violent occurrences, public schools adopted multiple security strategies with SRO presence being the most prevalent and fastest growing security measure (Fisher et al., 2018; NASRO, 2020; Tanner-Smith et al., 2018).

To encourage effective outcomes for the implementation of SROs as a security tactic, the NASRO developed a mission statement to provide SROs with the highest quality training to
protect and ensure the safest educational environment possible (Thomas et al., 2013). The NASRO also reported SROs to be one of the fastest increasing branches of policing in the country. However, contrary to their mission statement, no federal guidelines require the systematic procedures to follow for training (Counts et al., 2018). States rarely outline legislation or policies regarding training procedures at a state or local level (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). It is strongly recommended by educational agencies and community policing organizations that strict training procedures and best practice policies be developed to ensure efficacy and job integrity of SROs (Counts et al., 2018; NASRO, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). *A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools* (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013) is a multidisciplinary collaborative conglomeration of policies and practices to help improve school safety endorsed by the NASRO and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). The framework states that in order to “fully realize the benefits of the presence of local police, SROs must be trained properly” (p. 11). Although a detailed training outline is not included, it recommends that comprehensive training on the nature of school campuses, student needs and characteristics, verbal de-escalation processes, restorative justice practices, and educational custodial interests of school personnel be part of the SRO hiring process so they can better protect campuses while supporting schools’ educational purposes. It is also important that the training provided to SROs is consistent across states and includes specific guidelines as to what activities should be prioritized and engaged in while on duty. The NASP released a statement in August 2020 offering the following recommendations: (1) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be created that clearly defines SRO roles, training, and accountability, (2) SROs should not be involved in school discipline, (3) SROs should be knowledgeable of child development, positive discipline, implicit bias, culturally responsive
education, and (4) SROs should have skills in evidence-based intervention.

Despite these recommendations, the roles of SROs are not clearly defined or outlined. Ryan et al. (2018) argued that because of the lack of clear expectations of hired police, SROs become participants in activities and duties that were not the original intent for hire. In a sample of data reported by school principals and chiefs of police reported, Coon and Travis (2012) categorized SROs' activities while on duty at a school to be law enforcement activities, advising and mentoring staff, advising and mentoring groups (e.g., parents), advising and mentoring students, and being present at school events. Fisher and Devlin (2020) categorized SROs' duties to be security, discipline, coordination, problem-solving, training, mentoring, and teaching. Specifications of activities and duties expected of an SRO will help identify critical skillsets and training needs.

**Goals of School Security**

Public schools across the United States use a variety of target hardening procedures to encourage safety and security on school grounds. Some researchers have categorized security measures based on their outward visibility (e.g., security cameras, locked access points, metal detectors, SROs) while others have grouped measures based on the intended purpose of teaching conflict resolution (e.g., prevention programs, zero-tolerance policies, mentorship) (Addington, 2009; Brown, 2005; Tanner-Smith, Fisher, Addington, & Gardella, 2018). Even further, some have identified overt strategies as security *measures* while other authors identify covert strategies as security or discipline *policies* (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2012). Regardless of categorization, the intention of the observable or unobservable security measures are proactively and reactively used in practice to deter violence from occurring (Taylor et al., 2018).
All security measures utilized by school districts have intended and anticipated benefits for their students and campuses (NASRO, 2020). The most common goal of school security is to reduce the likelihood of physical violence against school staff and students. Some security measures are utilized to reduce the likelihood of violence from outside perpetrators (e.g., tall metal fences, locked exterior doors), while other measures intended to reduce the likelihood of violence committed by perpetrators inside the school (e.g., zero-tolerance policies, metal detectors). The expansion of target hardening strategies was influenced by the shooting at Columbine High School but reinforced by other shootings such as Santana High School in 2001, Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, Santa Fe High School in 2018, and Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018. The sheer horror these shootings brought to parents and the general public sparked confusion and questioning as to why schools could not better protect their students from harm. There will be continual encouragement for the use of hired law enforcement at schools as a security measure for decades to come as society continues to see school shootings occur in schools across the country.

Improving communication in schools through a school-wide multitiered system of support and relationships between school staff and students are effective ways to ensure school safety (Cowan et al., 2013). One of the many roles assigned to SROs is to build relationships with students as means to better connect the adults and children, specifically in regard to behavioral, protective, and safety concerns (NASRO, 2020). While some campuses have had success with SROs establishing meaningful connections with students through mentorship and effective communication, some students have continually felt unsupported and intimidated when law enforcement at their school approach them. Theriot and Orme (2016) investigated student feelings of safety at school in relation to having an SRO hired on their campus. In a
sample of 1,956 middle and high school students, they found groups of students who felt safe (sixty-one percent) and those that did not report feelings of safety (thirty-one percent).

Interaction with SROs, including student mentorship, was unrelated to feelings of safety; however, students who reported more positive attitudes regarding the SRO on their campuses felt safer. There is little research on the specific activities of SROs at schools and the positive and negative effects of those activities on outcomes such as school violence and student arrests.

**Outcomes of School Security**

Previous literature regarding the examination of SROs has shown limited and conflicting results. While stakeholders and staff in schools have experienced psychological benefits from hired police on school campuses, students experienced psychological threats due to police being viewed as a threat to their freedom. Jackson (2002) investigated the impact SROs have on student perceptions about police using a sample of 271 high school students. The author found that students reported having negative contact with police and did not feel as though SROs had a great impact on their school campuses. In their handbook for school psychologists, Cowan et al. (2013) found that students have also reported feelings of being less safe as well as experiences of disruption in learning environments due to police presence. Gottfredson et al. (2020) investigated effects of SROs on school crime and responses to school crime in a sample of 72 schools. They found that an increase in SROs was related to an increase in school discipline incidents and criminalization of students but does not improve school safety.

One issue with the safety measure commonly used is the lack of empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of SROs alone or in combination with other security measures (Addington, 2018). At three of the deadliest school shootings thus far in America (Columbine
High School, Santa Fe High School, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School), SROs were present on the campus and did not assist in preventing or ceasing the active shooter (Cornell, 2020). The SRO present at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School was in fact seen fleeing the area of the shooter. These three shootings alone resulted in 41 deaths. It is argued that any security measure used cannot be indestructible or present in every area of a school at all possible times. Even without knowledge of its effectiveness, school districts made drastic decisions to use SROs across the country in hopes of positive and proactive effects to protect their students (Jonson, 2017). On the contrary, extant research shows the unintentional negative consequences that the use of SROs can create. Theriot (2016) found that students who interacted with SROs more reported a decreased sense of school connectedness. Devlin and Gottfredson (2018) found that schools that had SROs who engaged in law enforcement only had more serious violent, weapon, and drug crimes than schools where SROs engaged in mentoring and law enforcement.

An increase in the utilization of security measures in districts typically follows a mass shooting or violent event at a school (Fisher et al., 2019). This reactive response is induced by societal fear and panic, which influence an amplified interest for more security techniques to protect children at all costs rather than a close examination of research-based evidence. Using a sample of 5,829 high school students, Bachman et al. (2011) examined fear perceptions that students experienced going to and being on school grounds. The authors found nineteen percent of the total sample reported feeling fearful, twenty-eight percent reported being bullied at school, eighty-five percent reported rules are strictly enforced at their school, and sixty-nine percent reported awareness of their campus having an SRO or security guard. Bracy (2011) conducted fifty-two interviews with high school students to identify student perceptions of the
school SRO. Approximately eighty percent of the students interviewed reported that SROs punish students in disproportionately harsh manners (e.g., arrests, suspensions) and reported increased experiences of fear occurred with those students as a result of their school having an SRO.

In addition to fear, security tactics are also incentivized to school districts by the appeal of additional funding opportunities provided. Public schools receive grants, including the United States Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, with the encouragement to purchase security technologies, hire SROs, and provide safety training (Casella, 2018). Funds allocated for public school security measures are approximately $2.7 billion dollars with the cost for an SRO exceeding $90,000 in one state (Fisher & Devlin, 2020; Kupchik, 2016). Additional consequences for the use of SROs in public school districts across the country are an observed increase in student arrests and disciplinary referrals and negative impacts on student perceptions of school climate, which affect student engagement and psychological mental health. Weisburst (2019) analyzed the impact of SROs on student discipline using a 2.5 million student sample. After identifying a rise in disciplinary sanctions for minor behavioral offenses and school code of conduct violations in schools that hired SROs with federal grants, the author found that police in schools increased discipline rates by six percent and decreased high school graduation rates by two and a half percent as compared to previous years without the hired SROs.

**Increase in Student Arrests and Referrals to Law Enforcement**

SROs and the inclusion of law enforcement in schools blur the lines between educational settings and the justice system (Clark, 2011). Because of the nature of their job, SROs are considered a member of the police force hired to serve schools first, and a member of
the school campus community second (Counts et al., 2018; Weiler & Cray, 2011). Due to school shootings occurring at such an extremely low rate, SROs as a school securitization strategy are used to address far less to intervene in severe student misbehavior than to protect students. Several researchers argued that their presence facilitates the outsourcing of school discipline to correctional institutions and juvenile courts, which contributes to the criminalization and future incarceration of students (Fisher & Devlin, 2020; Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Today’s youth are much more likely to get arrested or be suspended at the hands of their own school-hired staff than compared to previous generations (Hirschfield, 2008; King & Bracy, 2019; Theriot, 2009). Fisher and Devlin (2020) used a sample of 850 school principals to examine patterns of school crime in relation to SROs. They found that schools with reactionary SROs on campus had a ninety-one percent increase in recorded non-serious crimes versus schools that did not have an SRO on campus. Na and Gottfredson (2013) used a sample of approximately 3,000 public school principals to examine SROs in schools and the effects on school crime and the processing of offending behaviors. The authors found that as schools increased their usage of SROs, a higher percentage of non-serious violent crimes were reported to law enforcement. Fisher and Hennessy (2015) reported higher rates of suspensions on high school campuses with SROs employed. Theriot (2009) used a sample of 1,012 students to evaluate the impact of SROs on school-based arrest rates. The author found that an SRO on a school campus predicted more arrests for disorderly conduct (or non-serious violence among students). Disorderly conduct has been identified as a subjective label, which includes minute problem behaviors that may not fit within the appropriate bounds of expected school culture. These types of inappropriate behaviors are met with severe consequences (e.g., arrests and suspensions), which creates a shifted perception as to what
constitutes aberrant behaviors (Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011; Theriot, 2009).

**School-to-Prison Pipeline**

Literature involving the examination of SROs on school campuses often focus on the minority student perceptions in urban areas, which have consistently been identified as being over-policed and having excessive surveillance (Nolan, 2011; Weiss, 2007). Referrals and arrests made by schools to juvenile courts have shown to disproportionately affect minority groups of students (Mallett, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The increase in student contact with the juvenile court system is known as the “school-to-prison pipeline” and is fueled by zero-tolerance policies upheld by SROs. Heitzeg (2009) explained that zero-tolerance policies and school resource officer presence in schools are two direct means that increases student suspensions, arrests, and referrals to the juvenile justice system. This has resulted in a phenomenon in which students are pushed out of school settings and funneled into prisons. In a qualitative research study of high school students, Nolan (2011) found that Black students reported negative opinions of authoritative figures at their schools and felt that their behaviors were being criminalized by the SROs rather than the SROs facilitating more positive school climates. Students at schools identified as ‘high-security environments’ viewed SROs as unnecessary and their presence would not deter their peers from violence or school policy violations. Student narratives collected found that students did not believe one person could help prevent every crime that occurs on a campus.

Zero-tolerance policies and SROs’ engagement in punitive consequences for minimal behavioral offenses negatively impacts students’ educational experiences. Heitzeg (2009) reported that for many students, going into a school has become literally and figuratively synonymous with going into a jail cell. Students who receive suspensions or expulsions for a
significant amount of time lack alternative academic instruction or education that is subpar to what their peers receive while in school (Simson, 2014). School disciplinary procedures and arrests from SROs have also been found to increase truancy and rates of dropping out, which increases a student’s likelihood of entering the criminal justice system as an adult (Gonzalez, 2012; Gregory et. al, 2010; Heitzeg, 2014; Peguero & Bracy, 2015; Rios, 2011; Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016). It is suggested that connections and communication between school staff and students lead to more positive outcomes within the school climate (Weisburst, 2019).

However, limited research shows the positive outcomes that SROs create in a school environment and the impact of SRO activities (e.g., student mentorship, law enforcement) on rates of student arrests and physical violence. Devlin and Gottfredson (2018) found that schools with SROs who engaged in law enforcement only recorded more serious violent crimes and crimes involving weapons and drugs than schools with SROs who engaged in law enforcement and student mentoring. Theriot (2016) found that school connectedness decreased with increased student and SRO interactions. Similarly, Fisher et al. (2019) found students to have poorer relationships with their teachers on campuses that had employed SROs than on campuses without. Na and Gottfredson (2013) found that SRO presence on school campuses has an increase in overall reported crimes, although it is unknown whether it is an increase in incidence or detection.

**Student Perceptions of SROs in Schools**

A focus of school securitization is to maintain and create a safe school environment to encourage a conducive learning environment. Feeling safe in a school environment is a fundamental right and is necessary for students to learn effectively (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Sadlier, 2011). Bucher and Manning (2005) discussed the need for learning environments to be
psychologically as well as physically safe for all students to create a safe haven to learn most 
effectively. Better academic performance and higher attendance rates have been found in 
students who report feeling safe at school as compared to students who do not feel safe (Tanner-
and 10,340 schools to identify patterns in security utilization and the association to middle and 
high school students’ academic performance and attendance. They found that students at schools 
that utilized security personnel had higher rates of truancy than schools using no security 
measures (e.g., predicted incidence rate: 0.43 vs. 0.14). Adolescents attending schools with 
security personnel also reported significantly lower grades than those attending schools with no 
security measures (e.g., $d=-0.07$ vs. -0.06). Students who do not experience feelings of safety as 
a result of security measures used while at school cannot perform or learn to their highest 
potential (Cobb, 2014).

Students are often aware of the presence of SROs on campus, but not particularly 
understanding of their purpose. Researchers argue that the more visible the security measures 
utilized are (e.g., SROs, metal detectors, surveillance cameras, barbed wire fences), the more fear 
is heightened creating a culture of criminalization and disruption in learning (Hirschfield 
examined the visual presence of all target-hardening strategies on school campuses and their 
impact on students’ perceptions of safety. The authors found that on campuses where more target 
hardening strategies were used openly (e.g., SROs, security cameras, metal detectors, and 
fences), students felt less safe in school. It was found that these techniques did not make students 
feel safer, but conveyed an opposite message to the students that their campuses were unsafe and 
that the implementation of security technology and other measures were needed. Weiss (2007)
found that students in urban schools reported being harassed by SROs on their campuses due to being viewed as troublemakers and delinquents. Environments in which students are under the impression of being watched by SROs, or other security measures, create a punitive and uncomfortable setting that develop distances between students and school support staff, which have negative impacts on their experiences (Bracy, 2011; Giroux, 2003; Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011; Irwin et al., 2013; Kupchik, 2010; Raible & Irizarry, 2010). These impacts are even more apparent in children who experience developmental difficulties in social interactions and interpersonal relationships.

Students in the United States have reported increased feelings of danger and being watched by the SROs who are hired with the intent of maintaining safety on campus (Booren et al., 2011; Curran et al., 2021). In a sample of 184 students and 32 teachers, Booren et al. (2011) reported that students rated feelings of disruption higher and feelings of safety lower when security measures were observable at their school. In a sample of 25 schools and 938 students, Curran et al. (2021) examined the trust and comfort between students and SROs related to feelings of safety and perceptions of danger. The authors found that students perceive SROs as increasing safety (seventy-six percent of students reported feeling safer at school with an SRO present). However, their qualitative data indicated heightened students’ sense of danger. In this study, it appears that SROs were linked to students’ sense of danger but they were also viewed as a tactic for enhancing safety, which the authors called a contradictory effect to their utilization.

Limited research has examined the perceptions and attitudes students have toward the specific use of SROs as a safety tactic. Schlosser (2014) determined that having an SRO does not lower the frequency or severity of violence, but actually has the opposite effect. This is consistent with findings as mentioned previously, where the implementation of visible security
measures coupled with zero-tolerance policies create an over policing condition in schools resulting in contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline (Gonzalez, 2012; King et al., 2018). Hurst and Frank (2000) did not find widespread support for SROs or other security officers from their high school student participants. Most students had neutral perceptions of their schools’ officers, but more favorable perceptions were found when the officer participated in duties that were less involved in law-enforcement (e.g., enforcing school policies, reducing drug use) and more service-based functions (e.g., providing educational trainings, student mentoring and support).

**Conclusion**

The patterns in the literature suggest that when visible security tactics and severe disciplinary policies are used, schools could be causing more negative than positive outcomes to students. Less punitive approaches, including restorative and mentorship tactics, can positively influence a trusting and stable connection between staff and students as compared to the punitive and disciplinary procedures directly associated with SROs.

The goal of the current study was to bridge the gap in literature regarding the utilization of SROs in our public schools, their participation in student mentorship versus student disciplinary measures, and the association between their presence and duties and rates of student arrests. Analysis of previous research shows limited empirical support for the use of SROs in school, while many negative consequences are observed in studies throughout several decades. A continued concern is whether having SROs on school campuses can decrease the student arrests, truly achieving better safety for students.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Participants

The current study utilized data from the 2018 bi-annual School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) by the NCES. The NCES is the primary federal organization for collecting, reporting, and interpreting data related to education in the United States for use by the U.S. Department of Education, Congress, educational policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. The data is from a public use version of the nationally-representative, a cross-sectional survey completed by school principals. This survey targeted various components relevant to school safety, including policies and procedures for emergencies, student crime and engagement in problem behaviors, school security measures (e.g., target hardening strategies), and other related domains. The SSOCS aims to provide estimates of school crime, disciplinary strategies, disorderly conduct, programs, and school policies from public schools.

In the 2017-2018 survey, 2,762 principals completed some portion of the survey. A larger portion of the completed surveys was allocated to public middle and high schools, with the majority of school violence reported at those levels. The original pool included 1,170 participants from primary schools, 1,704 participants from middle schools, 1,748 participants from high schools, and 181 participants from combined schools (i.e., combined elementary and middle schools). Table 1 shows the characteristics of the responding schools (n=2,762 schools). The majority of the completed survey responses came from middle and high schools with an enrollment of more than 500 students, located in a city or suburb in the Southern U.S. region, and had less than fifty percent white students in the population. The original data set from the survey included responses from school principals that did not have an SRO on their school
campus. For the second and third research questions that examined the activities of SROs, those responses from schools with SROs were included in the analyses.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Schools Participating in Survey</th>
<th>Total Sample n (%)</th>
<th>SRO-Yes n (%)</th>
<th>SRO-No n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>671 (24%)</td>
<td>274 (15%)</td>
<td>397 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>975 (35%)</td>
<td>718 (39%)</td>
<td>257 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>997 (37%)</td>
<td>811 (44%)</td>
<td>186 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>119 (4%)</td>
<td>56 (3%)</td>
<td>63 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,762</td>
<td>1,859 (67%)</td>
<td>903 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment Size</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 300</td>
<td>286 (10%)</td>
<td>124 (7%)</td>
<td>162 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-499</td>
<td>605 (22%)</td>
<td>314 (17%)</td>
<td>291 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>1,042 (38%)</td>
<td>709 (38%)</td>
<td>333 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 or more</td>
<td>829 (30%)</td>
<td>712 (38%)</td>
<td>117 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,762</td>
<td>1,859 (67%)</td>
<td>903 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the SSOCS data set including all 2,762 participants, approximately sixty-seven percent (n=1,859) reported to have an SRO on campus while the remaining respondents reported their school campus did not have an SRO present. Of the schools that reported to have an SRO on the campus, approximately forty-four percent (n=811) were high schools, thirty-nine percent (n=718) were middle schools, and fifteen percent (n=274) were elementary school. About thirty-eight percent (n=712) of the schools with an SRO present were a campus with 1,000 students or greater, thirty-eight percent (n=709) had between 500 and 999 students enrolled, seventeen percent (n=314) had 300 to 499 students present, and approximately seven percent (n=124) reported a student enrollment of 300 students or less.

**Measures**

The 2017-2018 annual survey was developed by the NCES and administered as a mailed paper and an online questionnaire with a telephone call follow-up. The data entered for all mail
and electronic questionnaires received were reviewed extensively to identify any anomalies and verify all responses. For the purposes of the present study, the following domains were used to examine the proposed research questions.

School Levels and Sizes. School levels were categorized into the grade levels present at each respondent’s school campus: 1) Primary Schools, 2) Middle Schools, 3) High Schools, and 4) Combined Schools. Primary schools were defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not higher than grade 3 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 8. Middle schools were defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 4 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 9. High schools were defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 9 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 13. Combined schools included all other combinations of grades, including K through 12 schools. Grade 13 was used to designate high school students who were enrolled in programs where they can earn college credit in an extended high school environment, or career and technical education (CTE) student in a high school program that continues beyond grade 12. For the purposes of the research questions examining school levels related to SRO presence, the Combined school category was not included in the analyses. In the SSOCS questionnaire, respondents were asked to report their school’s total enrollment with a write-in number. School size was then categorized into four different student enrollment sizes: 1) less than 300, 2) 300-499, 3) 500-999, and 4) 1000 or more.

SRO Presence and Activities. In the SSOCS, a formal definition of SRO was provided, which stated, “A school resource officer is defined as a career sworn law enforcement officer with arrest authority, who has specialized training and is assigned to work in collaboration with school organizations.” Principals of the schools were asked if their campus had any sworn law enforcement officers (e.g., school resource officers) present during the 2017-2018 school year.
Participants were to select either a “yes” or “no” option. SRO presence was also measured in terms of being “on campus during all instructional hours” every school day or on campus at least once per week, in which participants responded with a “yes” or “no” and they were also asked to record the quantity number of full-time or part-time SROs on their campuses.

Participants were also presented with a question item inquiring about the SROs participation in certain activities while on duty at their campuses. The principals answered “yes” or “no” to their SRO participating in the following nine activities: 1) motor vehicle traffic control, 2) security enforcement and patrol, 3) maintaining student discipline, 4) identifying problems in the school and seeking solutions to those problems, 5) training teachers and staff in school safety or crime prevention, 6) mentoring students, 7) teaching law-related education courses or training students (e.g., drug-related education, criminal law, or crime prevention courses) 8) recording or reporting discipline problems to school authorities, and 9) providing information to school authorities about the legal definitions of behavior for recording or reporting purposes (e.g., defining assault for school authorities). Based on the results of a principal component analysis with nine SRO activity items, two School Resource Officer Activities scales were created: Proactive and Reactive Activities. The results of the principal component analysis are presented in the preliminary analyses section of Chapter 4.

*Student Incidents.* The participants were asked to report counts of recorded incidents at their schools. Total incidences reported included rape or attempted rape, sexual assault other than rape, robbery with and without a weapon, physical attack or fight with and without a weapon, threat of a physical attack with and without a weapon, theft and larceny, possession of a firearm or explosive device, possession of a knife or sharp object, distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs, inappropriate distribution, possession, or use of prescription drugs, distribution,
possession, or use of alcohol, and vandalism. The sum was taken from each of the previous items to gather the total number of incidents recorded at each school for that school year.

*Student Arrests.* The number of student arrests was reported within the survey, with a question item asking respondents to record the number of arrests that occurred at that school within the 2017-2018 school year. A formal definition was added to the survey to differentiate other activities and align the same language used by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. An arrest was defined in the survey as “The act of detaining in legal custody. An ‘arrest’ is the deprivation of a person’s liberty by legal authority in response to a criminal charge.” The respondents were asked to include all arrests that occurred at the school, regardless of whether a student or non-student was arrested. The survey also mentioned that a career sworn law enforcement officer, or SRO, has arrest authority while on duty at a school. The participants were asked to rate the arrests on the following scale: 1 = none, 2 = 1 to 5 arrests, 3 = 6 to 10 arrests, and 4 = 11 or more arrests.

**Procedure**

According to the NCES, the objectives of the SSOCS 2018 sample design were to obtain overall cross-sectional and subgroup estimated measures of significant indicators of school crime and safety and to develop accurate reports of change in these domains between survey administrations. To meet these goals, a random sample of public schools was identified and recruited via an email or mail invitation with an incentive payment. It was communicated that participation in the survey was voluntary, but essential to the progress monitoring of school safety data. Principals who responded were provided access to the survey, including an individualized ID and school code. School principals that did not respond were contacted via phone call two times to complete the questionnaires provided. Surveys were administered online
or on paper with a return addressed and stamped envelope provided. The bi-annual survey was conducted in accordance with the guidelines identified by the NCES.

For the current study, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Letter of Non-Determination was completed in 2021. Consent to use data from the 2017-2018 SSOCS bi-annual survey for the purposes outlined above were approved by the U.S. Census Bureau Assistant Survey Director, Walter Lee Holmes Jr. (personal communication, January 20, 2021).

**Data Analysis**

Analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28.0. Research questions, hypotheses, variables, and planned statistical analyses are outlined in Table 2.
### Research Questions, Hypotheses, Variables, Statistical Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions and Hypotheses</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Planned Analyses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ 1:</strong> To what extent does the presence of SROs predict the number of student arrests that occur on school campuses with differing sizes and levels?</td>
<td>SRO presence, Number of student arrests reported</td>
<td>Regression analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H₁:</strong> The presence of SROs on a school campus will predict the number of student arrests that occur on campus, with a higher number of student arrests with full-time SROs on larger school campuses and higher school levels.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ 2:</strong> What are the current activities of SROs on public school campuses? How do SRO activities differ across level of school and school size?</td>
<td>SRO activity participation scores</td>
<td>Factor analysis; Descriptives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H₂:</strong> SRO participation in activities will include proactive duties (e.g., student mentoring) and reactive duties (e.g., behavioral discipline). Discipline will be a higher reported activity of SROs than other proactive activities regardless of level of school or size.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ 3:</strong> To what extent do the activities of SROs predict the number of student arrests that occur on public school campuses across school levels (e.g., primary middle school, high school) and school size?</td>
<td>SRO activity participation scores</td>
<td>Regression analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H₃:</strong> The activities in which SROs participate will predict the number of student arrests on campus; higher student arrests will occur at school campuses that report having an SRO participate in less proactive activities.</td>
<td>SRO activity participation scores</td>
<td>Regression analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of student arrests reported</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

The NCES developed the items within the SSOCS to be distributed to schools across the country on a bi-annual basis. Since the survey questions did not have established psychometric evidence, preliminary analyses were conducted to examine psychometric properties. Scale descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

**SRO Activities Scale.** The result of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) indicated that the nine items of SRO activities loaded into two components (Table 3). Using the Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, the two components explained 83% of the variance. A review of items on each component indicated two distinctive activities: Reactive (six items) and Proactive (three items). The proactive scale included activities that are considered to transpire prior to any occurrence of problem behaviors at school and considered to be a preventative approach to behavior management. The activities that fall under the proactive approach include prevention training, student mentoring, and teaching law-related courses. The other activities within the School Resource Officer Activities scale are considered to be a reactive or punitive approach to problem behavior engagement. These duties are considered to be more associated with behavior management techniques than preventive strategies. The activities considered to be a reactive approach include traffic control, patrol, discipline, solving school problems, recording or reporting discipline problems, and providing legal definitions. The internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha reliability statistics (reactive $\alpha = .73$ and proactive $\alpha = .69$), which indicated an acceptable and approaching acceptable levels, respectively.
Table 3

Component Matrix of SRO Activities Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Reactive (α = .73)</th>
<th>Proactive (α = .69)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in teaching law-related</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education courses or training students (e.g., drug-related education,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criminal law, or crime prevention courses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in training teachers and</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff in school safety or crime prevention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in mentoring students</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in recording and</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reporting discipline problems to school authorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in identifying problems</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the school and seeking solutions to those problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in maintaining student</td>
<td>.598</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in motor vehicle traffic</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in security enforcement</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and patrol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn law enforcement officers participate in providing information</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td>.291</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to school authorities about the legal definitions of behavior for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recording or reporting purposes (e.g., defining assault for school</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>authorities)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

School Levels and Size. Table 4 presents the presence of SROs on campuses at least once per week by school sizes and school levels. The school size categories include 1) less than
300 enrolled students, 2) 300-499 enrolled students, 3) 500-999 enrolled students, and 4) 1,000 or more enrolled students. The school level categories include: 1) primary (i.e., lowest grade not higher than grade 3 and highest grade not higher than grade 8), 2) middle (i.e., lowest grade not lower than grade 4 and highest grade not higher than grade 9), and 3) high (i.e., lowest grade not lower than grade 9 and highest grade not higher than grade 13).

Table 4

<p>| SRO Presence At Least Once Per Week Within School Level and Size Categories |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Characteristic Variables</th>
<th>SRO-Yes n (%)</th>
<th>SRO-No n (%)</th>
<th>Total Sample n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>274 (15%)</td>
<td>397 (55%)</td>
<td>671 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>718 (39%)</td>
<td>257 (31%)</td>
<td>975 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>811 (44%)</td>
<td>186 (12%)</td>
<td>997 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,803</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>2,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment Size</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 300</td>
<td>119 (46%)</td>
<td>141 (54%)</td>
<td>260 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-499</td>
<td>306 (53%)</td>
<td>272 (47%)</td>
<td>578 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>683 (68%)</td>
<td>319 (32%)</td>
<td>1,002 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 or more</td>
<td>695 (87%)</td>
<td>108 (13%)</td>
<td>803 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,803</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>2,643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the schools that reported to have an SRO present at their school at least once a week, participants were also asked to report if they had an SRO present during all instructional hours every day that school was in session (see Table 5). A similar finding was observed within the SRO presence for all instructional hours; whereas the school size and level increase, the SRO presence increased as well. To analyze SRO presence in the presented research questions in the current study, data from SRO presence during at least one day at a school campus was used.
Table 5

**SRO Presence For All Instructional Hours Within School Level and Size Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Characteristic Variables</th>
<th>SRO-Yes n (%)</th>
<th>SRO-No n (%)</th>
<th>Total Sample n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>45 (16%)</td>
<td>229 (84%)</td>
<td>274 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>294 (41%)</td>
<td>424 (59%)</td>
<td>718 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>455 (56%)</td>
<td>356 (44%)</td>
<td>811 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>794</td>
<td>1,009</td>
<td>1,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment Size</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 300</td>
<td>34 (29%)</td>
<td>85 (71%)</td>
<td>119 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-499</td>
<td>91 (30%)</td>
<td>215 (70%)</td>
<td>306 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>245 (36%)</td>
<td>438 (64%)</td>
<td>683 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 or more</td>
<td>424 (61%)</td>
<td>271 (39%)</td>
<td>695 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>794</td>
<td>1,009</td>
<td>1,803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 depicts the reported student arrests by school size and school levels. As observed in previous data, presence of SROs during at least one day and all instructional hours on school campuses increase as grade level and size of school increase. Likewise, there were more reported student arrests at high schools than primary schools and at schools with larger student enrollment. This preliminary finding was expected as it is assumed older students engage in more problematic behaviors and the larger the student population, the higher the likelihood of student engagement in problem behaviors.
Table 6

**Student Arrests by Grade Level and School Size**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Characteristic</th>
<th>Student Arrests</th>
<th>Student Arrests</th>
<th>Student Arrests</th>
<th>Student Arrests</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>11 or more</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2,643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Enrollment Size       |                 |                 |                 |                 |              |
|                       | 0               | 1               | 0               | 0               | 286          |
| < 300                 | 246             | 37              | 3               | 0               | 286          |
| 300-499               | 486             | 112             | 3               | 4               | 605          |
| 500-999               | 744             | 252             | 28              | 18              | 1,042        |
| > 1,000               | 282             | 384             | 81              | 82              | 829          |
| Total                 | 1,758           | 785             | 115             | 104             | 2,762        |

**Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.** The descriptive statistics of the scale used for the present study are presented in Table 7. Correlation analysis of study variables found significant correlations among most variables (see Table 8). The reactive and proactive SRO scales showed the strongest correlation, $r(1,803) = .41, p < .001$, suggesting that SRO participate in both reactive and proactive activities. Arrests and incidents also were significantly correlated, $r(1,803) = .39, p < .001$, suggesting that as the frequency in incidents increase, the frequency in arrests reported also increased. Size of school was significantly related to arrests, $r(1,803) = .37, p < .001$ and incidents, $r(1,803) = .35, p < .001$, suggesting that as the size of school increases, the reports of arrests and incidents recorded increased. Other correlations shown within Table 8 are further discussed within the following research questions addressed in the current study.
Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of SRO Activities, Arrest, and Incidents (n=1,803)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SRO Proactive Activities</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>-.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRO Reactive Activities</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrests</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidents</td>
<td>34.81</td>
<td>43.76</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>12.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

Correlational Analysis of Included Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Size of School</th>
<th>Incidents</th>
<th>Arrests</th>
<th>SRO Reactive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incidents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRO Reactive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRO Proactive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.41**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **p < .001 *p = .001

RQ 1: To what extent does the presence of SROs predict the number of student arrests that occur on school campuses in differing school sizes and school levels?

Table 9 shows the results of regression analyses predicting total number of arrests. Given a significant correlation between the number of incidents and arrests, the total number of incidents was entered in Model 1 first, R²=.18, (β = .42, p <.001). In Model 2, grade level (β = .25, p <.001) and school size (β = .20, p <.001) were added to the model, which explained additional 12% of variance. When SRO presence on school campuses was added to Model 3, the
model remained significant, $R^2 = .31$, $F(1, 2757)=42.05, p < .001$. However, the SRO presence added only 1% of variance, although it was statistically significant ($\beta = .11, p < .001$).

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE($B$)</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig. ($p$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Incidents</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>24.41</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2 = .18$, $F(1, 2760)= 595.63, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Incidents</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>17.43</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>15.05</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2 = .29$, $R^2_{change}= .12$, $F(2, 2758)= 287.87, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>Incidents</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>16.80</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>13.93</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SRO Presence</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2 = .31$, $R^2_{change}= .01$, $F(1, 2757)= 42.05, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RQ 2:** Do SRO duties differ across level of school and size of school?

To examine SRO activities across school grade levels, and school size, a set of linear regression models were conducted with the SRO activities scales (e.g., proactive scale and reactive scale) as dependent variables and school level and school size as predictor variables. For the analyses, only schools that reported to have SROs were included ($n=1,803$). Results indicate that the school level ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and school size ($\beta = .12, p < .001$) predicted the reactive SRO activity scale, explaining 12% of the variance (see Table 10). In examining the relationship
between the size of the schools and the SRO activities scales, the positive relationships indicate that as the level of the school increases, the engagement in the reactive activities increases.

Table 10

| Grade Level and Size of School Predicting SRO Reactive and Proactive Activities |
|------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Reactive Scale   | Variables | B  | SE(B) | β   | t   | Sig. (p) |
|                  | R² = .123, F(2, 1800) = 126.19, p < .001 |
|                  | Grade Level | .62 | .05 | .29 | 12.06 | < .001 |
|                  | Size of School | .19 | .04 | .12 | 4.78  | < .001 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proactive Scale</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE(B)</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Scale</td>
<td>R² = .034, F(2, 1800) = 32.05, p &lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of School</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To analyze the relationship between SRO proactive activities on school campuses and the size and level of schools, another linear regression model was conducted (Table 10). The level of school (β = .14, p < .001) and size of school (β = .08, p < .001) statistically significantly predicted the engagement in SRO proactive scale and explained 3% of variance. In examining the relationship between the size and level of the schools, the positive relationship indicated as the size and level of school increased, the engagement in proactive activities increased.

**RQ 3:** To what extent do the roles of SROs predict the number of student arrests that occur on public school campuses across school levels and across school size? For the third research question, only schools with an SRO were included in the analyses. Table 11 shows the results of regression models predicting total number of arrests with SRO proactive and reactive scale. Similar to the regression analyses for RQ1, given the significant
correlation between the number of incidents and arrests, the total number of incidents was
entered in Model 1 first, $R^2=.15$, ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$). In Model 2, grade level ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$)
and school size ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$) were added to the model, which explained an additional 14%
of variance. When SRO activity scales were added to Model 3, the model remained significant,
$R^2=.294$, $F(2, 1797)=4.52$, $p = .01$. The reactive activity score was a significant predictor ($\beta = .07$, $p = .003$), whereas the proactive activity score was not significant ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .206$).

However, the SRO activity scales together explained no additional variance, $R^2$ change = 0.

Table 11

*Linear Regression Models Predicting Arrests*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE(B)</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig. ($p$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>$R^2=.153$, $F(1, 1801)=324.09$, $p = .001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Incidents</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>$R^2=.290$, $R^2$ change=.14, $F(2, 1799)=174.34$, $p = &lt;.001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Incidents</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>11.70</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>$R^2=.294$, $R^2$ change=.00, $F(2, 1797)=4.52$, $p = .011$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Incidents</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>11.52</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>12.63</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SRO Reactive Activities</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SRO Proactive Activities</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>.206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

In conjunction with zero-tolerance policies implemented in schools, districts have adopted the use of SROs as a common practice in attempts to maintain the safety of students and campuses. The NASRO reported SROs to be one of the fastest increasing branches of policing in the country, with presence at approximately forty-five percent of public primary schools and eighty-four percent of public high schools in the United States showing a rapid increase in presence with the increase in grade level (Losen & Whitaker, 2018; NASRO, 2020; SSOCS, 2018). The purpose of the present study was to examine the roles and activities of SROs and the number of student arrest on the school campuses they serve. By exploring the relationship between hired police as SROs and their participation in recommended activities on school campuses, this study aimed to understand the relation between police presence and student arrest across varying school levels and size.

Based on the examined literature, it was hypothesized that SROs would engage in more reactive activities than proactive activities while on duty at a school campus. It was also expected that the presence of SROs would be associated with higher rates of arrests of students and their participation in certain activities (either proactive or reactive) would predict student arrests regardless of school level or school size. Specifically, schools with SROs who are more engaged in proactive activities would have less reported arrests across all schools, whereas schools with SROs who are more engaged in reactive activities will have higher reported arrests.

SRO Presence by Grade Level and School Size

The data collected through the SSOCS in the 2017-2018 school year showed significant findings associated with SRO presence in schools. Of the total sample surveyed, approximately
forty-one percent of all primary schools reported to have an SRO present on campus. Seventy-four percent of all participating middle schools, and eighty-one percent of high schools reported an SRO present. This showed a substantial increase in SRO prevalence as the grade levels of each school increased. With the analysis of school size, similar results were found. In schools of less than 300 students enrolled, forty-three percent of schools reported to have an SRO present on campus, while eighty-six percent of schools with 1,000 or more students reported yes to SRO presence. As school size and school level increased, an increase in SRO presence was observed in the data, which is in correspondence with previous research as well (Counts et al., 2018; NASRO, 2020). These preliminary findings are expected; as the age and number of students increase, it is also assumed that the possible engagement in violent activities would also increase.

**SRO Presence and Student Arrests**

In the current study, the total number of incidents significantly predicted number of arrests. As expected, higher grade level and larger school size variables were also associated with a higher number of arrests. When there was an SRO present in schools, there was a higher number of arrests recorded within the data. This is also consistent with the significant association between SRO presence and student arrests found in previous literature discussed (Fisher & Devlin, 2020; Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Although SRO presence was a statistically significant predictor after accounting for number of incidents recorded, grade level, and school size, it is important to note that it explained only an additional one percent of variance, providing weak support for the hypothesis. Given that this finding is not supported in the hypothesis, it is possible that the higher number of arrests occurring at schools reflect a necessity for an increase in SRO use. How these relationships are specific to schools with a greater number of minority students needs further investigation.
Previous studies suggested a significant association between SRO presence and student arrests, specific to minority students (Homer & Fisher, 2020; Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018; Theriot, 2009). However, the current study did not have student demographic information and was not able to discern rates of arrests by various student groups.

**SRO Activities by Grade and School Size**

A significant association between reactive and proactive activities indicated that SROs are likely to engage in both activities on a school campus. Specifically, as the level and size of the school increased, the engagement in the SRO activities also increased for both reactive and proactive - which mirrored the results found with SRO presence. This indicates that SROs are not only more prevalent and utilized at higher grade level and larger schools, but they are also more likely to perform activities that are considered to be both proactive and reactive approaches to student behavior. It was expected that SROs would be more involved in proactive activities in elementary schools. However, the results showed that in elementary school levels, SRO proactive activities are occurring at a lower prevalence rate compared to secondary levels.

Considering there are less offenses and arrests in elementary schools (NCES, 2018), this finding was surprising, but raises another question regarding SRO activities in the elementary level. The activities in which SROs engage in while on duty at smaller campuses and primary schools needs further investigation to determine what SROs are doing in schools where there are less student arrests and less student incidents. Preventative approaches in elementary schools would be expected as an effective technique to improving school climate (Booren, 2011).

Surprisingly, SROs are completing both reactive and proactive activities within their developed target hardening school protection strategy - where target hardening measures are considered punitive. Previous literature has found negative relationships between SROs and
students (Booren et al., 2011; Curran et al., 2021; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2012; Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016) but SRO activities and how they are affecting students beyond student arrests is still unknown.

**SRO Activities and Student Arrests**

The present study examined (1) what activities SROs are reported to engage in while on duty at schools, (2) if the activities change across school size and level, and (3) how the participation in certain activities are related to arrests across school size and level. Based on the PCA results, SRO duties were found in two dimensions: reactive activities and proactive activities. The proactive approach included activities that are mostly considered to transpire prior to any occurrence of problem behaviors at school (e.g., student mentorship). The reactive duties are considered to be more associated with behavior management techniques than preventive strategies (e.g., reporting problem behaviors, maintaining discipline).

As for SRO activities and arrests, the reactive or proactive activities did not predict student arrests after the number of incidents, school level, and school size were considered. This finding is unexpected, given that the reactive and proactive activity scores were significantly correlated to student arrests. It is important to note that both reactive and protective duties are related to arrests and the current study tested the predictive power of these two areas of activities. Regardless, these two types of activities did not predict student arrests. More perplexing is the non-significant finding of the proactive approach with arrests. It was expected that the proactive, preventative nature of the activities promotes more positive relationships between students and staff, possibly improving overall school climate, mental health in students, and increasing intrinsic motivation to engage in appropriate behaviors (Devine, 1996; Hoffman, 2014), resulting in lower rates of student arrests. The data was collected from principal reports, and this may have
shown a discrepancy between the reality of what SROs are actually engaging in and what is being reported by principals. The survey response options were also limited in that participants were only able to provide ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses to activity engagement, where a Likert scale of SRO activity likelihoods may have provided more valuable information into the duties occurring. This area of research should be further studied to identify specific SRO activity information and student perceptions of those activities.

The study findings do not provide empirical support for the two dimensions of SRO activities, although the PCA and internal consistency indicated acceptable levels of psychometric properties. Continued investigation is needed to understand those concepts and relations. The robust findings of SRO reactive activities (vs. the small effect of SRO presence) also suggests the importance of examining actual activities in which they engage.

**Practical Implications**

Since the mass shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, the use of SROs has continued to be controversial and the debate regarding SROs and school safety measures will continue well into the future of public schooling (Fisher et al., 2018; King & Bracy, 2019). Furthermore, policies surrounding the specific activities in which SROs should be trained and participate in while on duty at a school campus are nonexistent (Counts et al., 2018; NASRO, 2020; Ryan et al. 2018). NASP released a statement in August 2020 offering the following recommendations: a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be created that clearly defines SRO roles, training, and accountability, SROs should not be involved in school discipline, SROs hired should be knowledgeable of child development, positive discipline, implicit bias, culturally responsive education, and have skills in evidence-based intervention. The findings from the current study are aimed to help in the development of additional knowledge into future policies.
in place surrounding requirements of SROs on duty, including which activities must be fully trained to begin an SRO assigned position, and help drive guidance into helping achieve more positive outcomes for students. Since SROs are actually engaging in proactive activities in schools, the specific focus of these activities should be encouraged and promoted through trainings and policies. Furthermore, a multidisciplinary approach in preventative measures can be utilized to include SROs and other school professionals in the implementation of social-emotional learning curriculums and positive behavior intervention to maintain school safety and promote better student outcomes and school climate (Weisburst, 2019).

Currently, the roles of SROs vary considerably across school campuses depending on factors such as school needs, SRO personality, training provided, and the relationship between district administration and the SRO (Canady et al., 2012; Fisher & Devlin, 2020). Neither federal nor state policies surrounding the expectations of SRO activities exist, although SRO responsibilities have been categorized to include teaching, informal counseling, and law enforcement (Canady et al., 2012; Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018; NASRO, 2020). While SRO training should move towards a standardization method and a multidisciplinary approach should be adopted across all districts, SRO roles and activities will likely be utilized on an individualized campus needs basis. Previous research consistently explains SRO activities to fall under law enforcement duties or non-law enforcement duties, where the findings suggested that schools in which SROs engaged in only law enforcement activities recorded more crimes and violent incidents (Canady et al. 2012; Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018; Fisher & Devlin, 2020; Petteruti, 2011). Therefore, proactive and preventative activities of an SRO role should take precedence on their list of responsibilities.

The current study provides insight into how SRO participation in reactive activities is
related to the student rates of arrests. Regulations and monitoring of which activities are being completed on a school campus by SROs is essential, with emphasis on activities considered to be a proactive approach to managing behaviors and safety at schools to promote student outcomes (Kupchik, 2010; Fisher & Devlin, 2020). The standardization of preventative activities in SRO training may be critical to consistently achieve these outcomes. With regulations in place, it is probable that student arrests would decrease among all school levels and sizes as the proactive approach to problem behaviors would cultivate better climate and relationships (Bald & Harwin, 2017; Petteruti, 2011; Theriot, 2016; Theriot & Orme, 2016). Further positive implications associated with a decrease in student arrests could occur with children spending more time on campus in classrooms versus time spent through processes of being arrested. Additional benefits to student outcomes could be associated with the decrease in arrests as well including a decrease in drop-out rates, long-term incarceration, and recidivism.

With the present study findings, change to the current SRO training and utilization in schools is encouraged. Research suggests more positive outcomes for students when using a proactive approach to behavior management (Hoffman, 2014). Therefore, emphasis on proactive activities should be of focus when providing training to SROs previous to taking on their roles within schools. SROs are engaging in activities across schools, with no consistent expectations or policies in place stating what specific activities should be completed while on campus. The unintentional impact of these activities can create subsequent harm to the students they are serving. Information of implications and importance can be identified with the activities in which SROs are participating in while on school campuses and the prediction of arrests at schools.

Further consideration into the larger scope of SRO training would deepen the understanding of which activities are of focus before SROs begin their assignments at a school.
The NASRO does not provide training requirements for use at a federal or state level, and a consistent framework for areas of training is not utilized by school districts. SRO duties have been categorized in a variety of areas, including security, discipline, coordination, problem solving, training, mentoring, and teaching, but a comprehensive training in all listed areas has not been developed (Fisher & Devlin, 2020). Specifications of the training techniques used within school districts across the county will help provide insight into the activities and duties expected of an SRO while on duty at a school campus. Moreover, a multitiered system of supports training framework should be utilized with SROs before they begin on school campuses. PREPaRE is a model developed to train school-employed mental health service professionals (and other school staff) and to promote school safety, relationship building, and crisis prevention. Specifically, the model uses a multidisciplinary approach to prevent crises, reaffirm perceptions of safety and security, evaluate psychological risk, provide interventions, respond to mental health needs, and examine the efficacy of crisis preparedness (Brock et al., 2016). This model can serve as a framework with SROs so that they become part of the school community and not a contracted police force that is viewed as an extension of community police.

A strong focus on behavior change techniques through preventative measures (e.g., mental health supports, reinforcement strategies) and verbal de-escalation processes versus punitive measures would be of benefit with the scope of an SRO position. A continuation of communication between SROs and other school mental health professionals should be expected at schools that utilize police as a safety and behavior management practice.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the strength of the study (e.g., national sample and SRO activities), the present study has several limitations. The full data set accessibility to the public was limited. The
variables including school region and student demographics were withheld from the public data and not obtainable through the Department of Education when inquired. Therefore, the current study does not offer any information about how SRO presence and participation in activities may have differing impacts across students within various ethnic and racial communities. Further understanding of how SROs are utilized (e.g., SRO activities, differences regarding their use in and between all school locales) is necessary in addition to student demographics and student perceptions. These research areas are of enormous importance, given the current discussion of policing individuals of color, and will contribute to the school-based movements around the equity issues. For example, much research is needed to understand how the SRO presence and activities affect Black students on campus. As police presence on school campuses continue to expand as an approach to school safety, the opportunity of over policing and bringing students in contact with the criminal justice system becomes more possible and probable. Coming in contact with negative consequences is especially true for Black American students (Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006; Skiba et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2017). Current events surrounding Black Americans and police bring an overwhelming sense of fear from the repeated violent offenses through observed racism and police brutality (Bachman, et al. 2011). Too often unarmed Black individuals have been negatively affected by police officers as exhibited by the horrific murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Michael Brown, Treyvon Martin, Elijah McClain and Sandra Bland (among countless others). With the regular utilization of police in schools, this unsettling relationship is brought into school bounds and experienced by students of color daily. Research may look further into the occurrence of these inexcusable events and the impact between SROs and students- might it differ by school location or student population.
Additionally, the SSOCS that was utilized for analysis did not include variable items reporting on school climate or mental health of the students attending the schools. As a result, the current study was not able to examine these domains in relation to presence and activities of SROs. Future studies should explore the reactive and proactive nature of SRO activities and their impact on important student outcomes. For example, how SRO presence and their participation in specific activities might have an impact on the school climate reported of each school campus they serve is also paramount to the policy change needed to the hired position within school districts on the national level. The survey also did not include rates of violence in the surrounding communities. A mirroring effect from the community settings may have impact on activities SROs engage and problem behavior engagement of students and future research should analyze these relationships.

Despite the limitations of the current study, the findings highlighted several important issues in the SRO activities, including the nature of activities and training needs. Further research is pertinent to guide decisions that are being made for the safety of children within school grounds.
APPENDIX A

Survey Questions from the 2017-2018 School Survey on Crime and Safety

1. During the 2017-2018 school year, did you have any sworn law enforcement officers (including School Resource Officers) present at your school at least once a week?
   1) Yes
   2) No

2. During the 2017-2018 school year, did your school have a sworn law enforcement officer (including School Resource Officers) present for all instructional hours every day that school was in session?
   1) Yes
   2) No

3. Did these sworn law enforcement officers (including School Resource Officers) participate in the following activities at your school?
   a. Motor vehicle traffic control
   b. Security enforcement and patrol
   c. Maintain student discipline
   d. Identifying problems in the school and proactively seeking solutions to those problems
   e. Training teachers and staff in school safety or crime prevention
   f. Mentoring students
   g. Teaching a law-related education course or training students (e.g., drug-related education, criminal law, or crime prevention courses)
   h. Recording or reporting discipline problems to school authorities
i. Providing information to school authorities about the legal definitions of behavior for recording or reporting purposes (e.g., defining assault for school authorities)

4. Please record the number of incidents that occurred at school during the 2017-2018 school year for the offenses listed below.

*Please provide information on:*

- The number of incidents, not the number of victims or offenders.
- Recorded incidents, regardless of whether any disciplinary action was taken.
- Recorded incidents, regardless of whether students or non-students were involved.
- Incidents occurring before, during, or after normal school hours.

   a. Rape or attempted rape
   b. Sexual assault other than rape
   c. Robbery (taking things by force)
      i. With a weapon
      ii. Without a weapon
   d. Physical attack or fight
      i. With a weapon
      ii. Without a weapon
   e. Threats of physical attack
      i. With a weapon
      ii. Without a weapon
   f. Theft/larceny (taking things worth over $10 without personal confrontation)
   g. Possession of a knife or sharp object
   h. Possession of a firearm/explosive device
i. Distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs
j. Inappropriate distribution, possession, or use of prescription drugs
k. Distribution, possession, or use of alcohol
l. Vandalism

5. Please record the number of arrests that occurred at your school during the 2017-2018 school year. Please include all arrests that occurred at school, regardless of whether a student or non-student was arrested?

1) None
2) 1 – 5
3) 6 – 10
4) 11 or more

6. As of October 1, 2017, what was your school’s total enrollment?

_______ Students

7. Is _______ the correct grade range for this school?

1) Yes
2) No  → Which of the following grade are offered in this school?

*Check all that apply:*

- Prekindergarten
- Kindergarten
- 1<sup>st</sup>
- 2<sup>nd</sup>
- 3<sup>rd</sup>
- 4<sup>th</sup>
☐ 5th
☐ 6th
☐ 7th
☐ 8th
☐ 9th
☐ 10th
☐ 11th
☐ 12th
☐ Ungraded
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