

# 2001 NASRO School Resource Officer Survey

*October 5, 2001*

*for the*  
National Association of  
School Resource Officers  
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This report is dedicated to the men and women who protect our school students, faculty and staff, educational facilities, and school-communities across the United States and internationally: Our School Resource Officers (SROs). At a time when our safety faces increasing challenges, our SROs continue to offer their commitment, dedication, and bravery in serving their schools and their communities in the best interests of our children.

## **Methodology**

In the spring of 2001, Curtis Lavarello, Executive Director of the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), and Kenneth Trump, President of National School Safety and Security Services, entered into a partnership for the development, implementation, and analysis of the nation's first large scale professional industry survey of School Resource Officers (SROs). A 61 question survey instrument was developed with input from NASRO board members and the survey was administered to attendees at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual NASRO Conference held in Miami, Florida, on July 15-20, 2001. The conference was the largest known single gathering of SROs in history.

1,000 surveys were distributed to school-based police officer conference attendees upon their registration. A total of 717 surveys were returned and 28 surveys completed by non-SRO/ non-school-based law enforcement conference attendees (primarily school administrators) were subsequently voided. The remaining 689 surveys, representing a return rate of approximately 69%, were tabulated and analyzed by Kenneth Trump over the two month period following the July conference and the results are presented herein.

This professional industry survey is just that: A professional industry survey. It was not designed, nor is it represented, as an academic research study based upon stringent scientific methods. However, unlike many academic studies and "think tank" reports, this survey information is drawn from the largest sampled population of SROs from the front-lines of school safety.

This survey represents slightly less than 10% of NASRO's 7,000-plus members. The survey was designed to provide the first nationally-known concrete data on SRO demographics, SRO program design and operations, and SRO program impact and perceptions.

## ***Executive Summary***

The following highlights key survey results from the *2001 NASRO School Resource Officer (SRO) Survey*.

**I. School Resource Officers overwhelming report that their programs improve school safety and prevent crime and violence. School Resource Officers report having very positive relationships with students, school administrators, teachers, and support personnel, while relationships with parents received average ratings. The majority of School Resource Officers also have direct contact with a significant number of students on a daily basis.**

- Over 99% (683) of the respondents reported that their SRO program has improved school safety and prevented crime and violence.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent), respondents reported having strong positive relationships with school administrators (average 4.40) and students (4.39), followed by school support staff (4.36) and teachers (4.27). Compared to the other ratings, SROs identified a lower average relationship with parents (3.12), although this rating is still in the midway range (or “average”) on this particular survey scale and therefore does not reflect a negative relationship.
- 70% (481) of the respondents reported having direct contact with 31 or more students each school day, with 39% (269) of those respondents reporting contact with over 100 students per day. 20% (136) of the remaining respondents reported daily direct contacts with between 11 and 30 students, while only 7% (50) reported having direct contact with between 1 and 10 students daily.

**II. School Resource Officers very strongly believe that the numbers of crimes that occur on school campuses nationwide are underreported to police, but that the presence of a School Resource Officer on school campuses improves the accuracy of school crime reporting.**

- 84% (578) of the survey respondents believe that, in general, crimes on school campuses nationwide are underreported to police. 12% of the respondents believe that crimes are accurately reported to police. Only 4% believe that crimes are over-reported to police.
- Based on their experience as SROs, 86% (593) of the respondents reported that the presence of a SRO improves the accuracy of school crime reporting. 7% believe that the presence of a SRO results in too many crimes being unnecessarily reported, while 6% reported that the presence of SRO has no impact on school crime reporting.

**III. Although some individuals have publicly stated that School Resource Officers should not be allowed to carry firearms while working in schools, survey respondents overwhelming do not believe that an armed School Resource Officer puts students at a greater risk of harm/injury. In fact, an overwhelming number of respondents believe that an unarmed School Resource Officer does put students at a greater risk of harm/injury. The vast majority of surveyed officers do carry a firearm in their roles as School Resource Officers.**

- 98% (673) of the respondents do not believe that an armed SRO puts students at a greater risk of harm/injury. (2% did not respond.)
- However, approximately 91% (625) of the survey respondents do believe that an unarmed SRO puts students at a greater risk of harm/injury. Only 7% stated that do not believe that an unarmed SRO puts students at greater risk. The remaining 2% of officers surveyed did not respond to the question.
- Over 97% (670) of the officers surveyed reported that they carry a firearm in their roles as SROs. Less than 2% reported that they do not carry a firearm. The remaining officers surveyed did not respond.

**IV. School Resource Officers clearly feel that, aside from school faculty/staff and students, the majority of individuals influencing school safety do not fully understand the roles and functions of School Resource Officers. This is particularly the case for media, elected officials, police officers, parents, and school violence researchers and academicians. Ironically, the majority of these individuals play major roles in shaping public opinion and/or determining policy and funding issues related to school safety and School Resource Officer programs. Students received the highest rating for understanding SRO roles.**

- SRO respondents reported that 54% (372) of school faculty/staff fully understand their roles while 44% (301) do not fully understand. They also reported that 57% (390) of students fully understand while 41% (284) of students do not understand.
- 64% (442) of respondents stated that parents do not fully understand their roles, while 69% (474) of respondents stated that other police officers do not fully understand the roles of SROs.
- 71% (488) of the School Resource Officers said that the media does not fully understand the role of SROs, while 70% (480) said that elected officials do not understand their roles. 47% (323) reported that school violence researchers and academicians do not understand SRO roles, while a matching 47% (323) said that these individuals do understand the roles and functions of SROs.

V. Although individuals outside of the school community frequently view School Resource Officer programs as being reactive, punitive, and/or as creating a “prison-like environment,” only a very small percentage of respondents described their role as reactionary (having a majority emphasis on enforcement and investigation duties). The vast majority of respondents reported that they follow the Triad Model (law enforcement officer, counselor, and classroom instructor) of School Resource Officer programs. Additionally, School Resource Officers perform an exceptionally wide range of specific tasks that focus on prevention and, in doing so, break the stereotype of police assigned to schools being strictly as a reactive measure for enforcement purposes.

- 91% (627) of the School Resource Officers reported that at least half of their job consisted of preventative duties, with 56% of them describing their role as a “50/50 mix” of preventative and reactionary duties and 35% of them saying that the majority of their role deals with proactive, preventative duties. Only 7% said that the majority of their emphasis is on enforcement and investigation duties. 2% of those surveyed did not respond to this question.
- Over 81% (560) of the respondents reported that their program follows the Triad Model (law enforcement officer, counselor, and classroom instructor) for SROs.
- Survey respondents report that they perform a wide range of tasks as School Resource Officers, the majority of which are prevention-oriented activities. Tasks and the % of officers performing them include:

<b>Tasks Performed by School Resource Officers</b>	<b>% of Officers</b>
One-on-one counseling with students	93%
Calls for service to classrooms	88%
Classroom instruction	87%
Crisis preparedness planning	83%
Security audits/assessments of school campuses	82%
Special safety programs/presentations	78%
Faculty/staff in-service presentations	75%
Truancy intervention	70%
Group counseling with students	69%
Supervising/coordinating non-athletic extracurriculars	60%
Field trip chaperone	57%
Parent organization presentations	57%
Coaching athletic programs	30%

**VI. A majority of School Resource Officers report that they have prevented assaults against school faculty and staff, as well as other acts of school violence on campus in an average school year. An overwhelming number of School Resource Officers also report that students have reported violent acts or similar safety threats to them that they (the students) believed were going to occur, suggesting that students feel comfortable in reporting safety concerns to School Resource Officers.**

- 67% (460) respondents reported that they have prevented a school faculty or staff member from being assaulted by a student or other individual on campus. These officers estimated handling an approximate total of 3,200 such cases in their careers as SROs for an average of about 7 per officer.
- A total of 92% of the respondents reported preventing from 1 to 25 violent acts in an average school year. 57% (394) of School Resource Officers report preventing 11 or more acts of violence in an average school year, with 28% (190) of them reporting that they prevent more than 25 violent acts in an average year. An additional 35% (240) of respondents report preventing between 1 and 10 violent acts in an average year. Only 2% report that they have not prevented a violent incident in an average school year.
- Over 94% (650) of School Resource Officers state that students have reported to them violent acts or similar safety threats that the students believed were going to occur. These officers estimated handling an approximate total of 11,155 such cases in their careers as SROs for an average of over 17 per officer.

**VII. While School Resource Officers play a strong role in the prevention of school crime and violence, their first and foremost role is that of a law enforcement officer. School Resource Officers do make arrests, although contrary to public perception, the majority of school arrests are for misdemeanor offenses, not felony crimes. Still, School Resource Officers can and do face dangerous and even life-threatening situations at times including encounters with loaded firearms and knives. And in spite of these serious threats, the vast majority of these officers have not had to pull their firearms in response to perceived threats, and the very, very small number of reported attempts by students or others to disarm the officers were always unsuccessful.**

- Almost 72% (495) respondents stated that the majority of their arrests are for misdemeanor offenses. Approximately 15% (102) said that their arrests are approximately an equal number of both felonies and misdemeanors. Only 7% reported that the majority of their arrests were for felonies.
- Even though the majority of school-based arrests are misdemeanors, approximately 24% (165) of the respondents have taken a loaded firearm from a student or other individual on campus, while 74% (508) have never done so. Of the 24% officers who have taken a loaded firearm, an approximate total of 344 incidents have occurred during their SRO careers for an average of over 2 times per officer.
- Over 3 ½ times as many officers have taken knives or other bladed weapons from students as have those officers who have confiscated loaded guns from students. 87% (599) of the SROs stated that they have taken knives or bladed weapons from students or other individuals, estimating a total of 6,100 such incidents in their SRO careers for an average of 10 times per officer.
- In spite of these weapons incidents, approximately 83% (571) of the SROs stated that they have not had to pull their firearm from their holster in response to a perceived threat to their safety or the safety of others at their school, while 14% (99) have had to do so. The latter respondents estimated a total of 255 such incidents during their career as a SRO for an average of about 2.5 times per officer.
- An overwhelming majority of officers have never had a student or other individual on campus attempt to disarm (take away the officers' firearms) them. 95% (652) of the respondents have never had such an experience, while 3% (23) did report that a student or other individual attempted to disarm them once in their careers as SROs. Of the 23 officers who did experience one attempt each, all 23 officers reported that none (0) of the attempts to disarm them were successful.

**VIII. In addition to firearms, the following percentage of survey respondents reported being equipped with the following law enforcement equipment:**

<b>Type of Law Enforcement Equipment</b>	<b>% of Officers</b>
Handcuffs	98%
Pepper spray / mace	93%
ASP/PR24/night stick/Kubaton, etc.	85%
Shotgun*	45%
Long Rifle*	16%
Stun Gun	7%
Handheld metal detector	32%

- *Note:* A number of officers indicated that shotguns and rifles, when assigned, are retained in SRO vehicles. Readers should not interpret the above to mean that the officers are carrying shotguns and/or rifles around as they walk through the school.

**IX. Perhaps the most useful tools School Resource Officer respondents are equipped with include significant experience and education. Although the majority of officers indicated that they have single-digit years of experience as School Resource Officers, the majority of School Resource Officers are veteran, seasoned police officers with double-digit years of overall police experience. And while the majority of departments employing School Resource Officers require only a high school diploma, a very large majority of School Resource Officer survey respondents have college-level courses and/or degrees.**

- Over 90% (624) of the respondents each have less than 10 years of experience as School Resource Officers. Over 40% (327) of this group has between 1 and 3 years of experience as a SRO, while 22% (151) has between 4 and 6 years of SRO experience. However, 9% (59) of respondents have over 10 years of experience as a SRO, with 34 having 10 to 13 years, 11 with 14 to 16 years, 6 with 17 to 19 years, and 8 with 20 or more years of experience.
- Although the majority of survey respondents have less than 10 years of experience as SROs, 67% (457) have over 10 years of total experience as police officers. In fact, 22% (152) have 20 or more years of law enforcement experience. None of the SROs surveyed had less than one year of total police experience, while 5% (34) had 1 to 3 years, 16% (108) had 4 to 6 years, and 13% (90) had 7 to 9 years of police experience.
- Almost 68% (466) of the respondents said that a high school diploma is the highest level of required education for SROs in their program, while 24% (166) require an associate's degree or some college courses. 4% (31) require a bachelor's degree.
- Although a high school diploma is the highest level of *required* education for a majority of respondents' departments, 85% (585) of the SROs surveyed have a minimum of an associate degree or some college courses. Of this 85%, 30% (210) have bachelor degrees, 4% (31) have master's degrees, and 1% (2) have doctorate degrees.

**X. The majority of states do not require specialized training (beyond standard police training) before an officer can work as a SRO. However, the majority of respondents reported that local training is available and that they are able to attend specialized courses related to their duties during the course of the school year. SROs are most limited in obtaining additional training by time constraints (conflicts in leaving the school) and funding (inadequate funding for tuition, travel, and expenses). The majority of departments lack formal field training officer (FTO) programs to help SROs prepare for their roles. Overall, most officers feel that their training is adequate or more than adequate, although they appear to want additional ongoing specialized training.**

- 66% (455) of SROs' states do not require specialized training (beyond standard police training) before an officer can work as a SRO.
- 64% (443) of the SROs report that their local law enforcement academy, department, or school district offer specialized training to prepare them as SROs, while 35% (242) do not provide such training.
- 88% (604) reported that they are able to attend specialized training programs during the course of the school year.
- 50% (343) cited lack of funding for tuition, 53% (363) identified lack of funding for travel and expenses, and 57% (390) pointed to training times conflicting with school hours as limitations to their obtaining more training. Only 22% (149) stated that the absence of funds for overtime pay keep them from attending training outside of regular school hours.
- 76% (526) of the surveyed SROs reported that their department does not provide a formal field training officer (FTO) program to help them prepare for their roles as SROs.
- 64% (441) of the respondents described their training as adequate/appropriate, while 17% (116) described their training as more than adequate. 16% (108) reported that their training was less than adequate and 2% (14) described their training as very poor.
- An overwhelming number of officers want additional training. 87% (599) indicate that they would attend a NASRO training program during the course of the school year if it was available for free (no cost).
- 60% (412) reported that evening and/or night classes would not better serve their training needs. 38% (261) stated that classes during these times would better serve their needs. Several respondents noted that evening and/or night classes would not help because of their family commitments and/or commitments to extracurricular, after-school programs with students.

**XI. While law enforcement agencies pay the majority of training costs for SRO training, a number of school districts pay some or all of the costs in less than half of the cases. SROs rated NASRO training the highest, followed by other national training programs, local training, and state-sponsored training. SROs gave private training companies the lowest rating for the quality and effectiveness of training.**

- 53% (365) of respondents said that their law enforcement agency pays for the majority of training, while 22% (149) reported that school districts pay the majority and 19% (130) said that schools and law enforcement split the tab.
- Not all of the respondents have attended training offered by all types of organizations. SROs were asked to rate their training on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent). Officers who did attend training provided by each source below offered the following average ratings:

<b>Source of Training</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
NASRO-sponsored training	4.51
National organization other than NASRO	4.07
Local/regional-sponsored training	4.05
U.S. Department of Justice/COPS SRO training	4.02
State-sponsored training	3.76
Private training company SRO training	3.47

**XII. School Resource Officers report varying degrees of how their constituents view them as part of the overall school staff.**

- 81% (558) of the SROs feel that their students view them as a member of the overall school staff, while only 54% (508) believe that school faculty and staff view SROs as part of the overall school staff. 74% (508) of the respondents feel that parents view them as a part of the overall school staff.

**XIII. A demographic snapshot of SRO survey respondents shows:**

- 83% are male and 17% are female.
- 76% are SROs, 19% are SRO supervisors, 1% have other related law enforcement titles, and 3% did not respond to the question.
- Respondents came from 47 states and 9 from international locations.
- 56% of respondents are employed by city/township law enforcement agencies, while 28% are employed by county agencies, 14% from school district law enforcement agencies, 1.5% from state agencies, and .5% from federal agencies.
- Respondents represented various sizes of school districts:

<b>Size of Student Populations</b>	<b>% of Officers</b>
1-5,000	17%
5,001-10,000	17%
10,001-15,000	10%
15,001-20,000	8%
20,001-30,000	7%
30,001-40,000	8%
40,001-50,000	4%
50,001-60,000	5%
More than 60,000	23%

**XIV. The vast majority of School Resource Officers volunteered for assignments as SROs and the majority of programs have school officials participating in interviews and the selection process. A significant majority of programs have contracts or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) documents between the law enforcement and school agencies. The large majority of SROs have written job descriptions and the majority of those descriptions are accurate. The majority of programs are full-time programs. SROs are typically evaluated by their law enforcement supervisor and/or by their law enforcement supervisor with school administrator input.**

- 87% (599) of the SROs volunteered or applied for the SRO job.
- 61% (421) of officers required to interview for SRO positions had school officials participating in interviews and the selection process.
- 86% (592) of the SROs' departments have written contracts and/or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) documents between the law enforcement departments and school districts.
- 88% (609) of the respondents have written job descriptions and 62% (429) of the SROs say that the descriptions accurately described what they do as a SRO.
- 89% (614) of respondents said that their SRO program is run full-time.
- 48% (329) of the SROs are evaluated only by their law enforcement supervisor, while 42% (291) are evaluated by their law enforcement supervisor with input from school administrators. 3% are evaluated by school administrators only and 5% report having no performance evaluations at all. 91% (626) identify their police supervisor as their primary supervisor.

## **XV. Other program design and operational aspects of SRO programs include:**

- 51% (350) of the SROs are responsible for one school. 11% are responsible for two schools, 9% for three schools, 6% for four schools, and 19% for five or more schools.
- 95% (655) of respondents' SRO programs assign officers to high schools, while 83% (572) assign SROs to middle/junior high schools and 45% (309) have officers assigned to elementary schools.
- 89% (612) of SROs have been called off campus for administrative issues, such as training, while 91% (628) have been pulled away due to court appearances. Fewer officers, but still a majority of 51% (353), have been called from the school for community emergencies, while 34% (234) have been pulled from school due to departmental manpower shortages.
- 64% (441) of the SROs do not have substitutes to replace them when they are not on campus.
- 57% (394) of SROs indicated that their school district also employs non-commissioned, non-peace-officer school district employees who perform security-related functions in addition to SROs.
- 88% (610) of respondents report that school officials provide them with private office space, while 11% (73) do not have such space.
- 53% (365) of officers wear full police uniforms the majority of time while working as a SRO, while 30% (205) wear a combination of full uniform and soft uniform. Only 10% (67) report wearing only a soft uniform. 3% wear a suit or business attire. 3% wear casual/street clothes.
- 28% (193) of police departments split the cost of SRO programs with their schools, while 26% (180) fund the program primarily from police department budgets and 21% (142) fund it primarily through the school district budget. 24% (163) fund the programs primarily through grants.
- 54% (372) of the respondents' receive federal COPS (U.S. Department of Justice) funding while 41% (285) do not receive COPS funding.
- 25% (173) of the SRO programs are located in community policing / community services / community relations type units or divisions, while another 25% are specialized, independent departments, divisions, or units (including school police departments). 18% reported being housed in patrol/uniform divisions, while 14% are located under criminal investigations divisions and another 14% are housed in juvenile bureaus, youth and family services bureaus, or similar units.

# CONCLUSIONS

The growth of SRO programs, especially in recent years, has brought about a number of misunderstandings, misconceptions, philosophical debates, and other rhetoric about SROs and SRO programs. This professional industry survey, the first and largest of its kind, introduces the insights of the actual SROs themselves --- the men and women on the front-lines of school safety each day in our schools and in our communities. While like any survey this one has its limitations, it still provides concrete data and insights into the demographics, program operations, impact and perceptions, and related items that have otherwise been left to mere anecdotes, speculation, and rhetoric prior to this survey.

It is clear from the SROs perspective that their programs are successful in improving school safety and that overall they have very good relationships with the key players in their school communities. It is also clear that the officers in SRO programs are better educated, trained, and experienced than what is typically portrayed in public discourse about police officers assigned to schools. It would appear that creativity, flexibility, funding, and strong management support for training, equipment, and program stability are all needed as SRO programs continue to grow.

Additionally, it appears from this survey that crimes on school campuses are underreported to police, yet the presence of a SRO improves school crime reporting. SROs deal with a wide range of functions, roles, and tasks that focus heavily on prevention activities. Still, the safety threats to SROs and those they protect are clear and real, and officers need to be equipped and trained to effectively do their job in protecting our students, faculty and staff, and school communities. Media, elected officials, researchers, and parents are in a position to help SRO programs, and to in turn help school safety, but they need to have a much better understanding of SRO programs and the role of police officers in schools.

Hopefully this survey, as the first and largest of its kind, will be a step in the right direction for further improving our nation's understanding of SROs and for improving safety in our nation's schools.

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