

School Safety Left Behind? School Safety Threats Grow as Preparedness Stalls & Funding Decreases

NASRO 2004 National School-Based Law Enforcement Survey



Final Report on the 4th Annual National
Survey of School-Based Police Officers

Released: February, 2005

for the

**National Association of School Resource Officers
(NASRO)**

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Dedication

At a time when the hot button issues in education tend to focus on meeting mandated test scores and saving school budgets from continued financial cuts, school safety must rank as important an issue as ever. Schools must be safe in order for children to learn, teachers to teach, and academic achievement levels to increase. As a nation, we cannot fail to keep school safety “on the front burner” while simultaneously dealing with other important education issues.

The commitment we find in our SROs is unprecedented and oftentimes unrecognized by our local and national leaders. This report is dedicated to the School Resource Officers (SROs) who protect our students, school personnel, educational facilities, and school-communities on a daily basis. May they continue to fulfill their commitment to children, teachers, and parents under the safest and most productive conditions.

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2004 NASRO National Survey of School-Based Police Officers

RELEASED: February, 2005

Methodology

The *National Association of School Resource Officers* (NASRO) contracted independent professional services for the development, administration, and analysis of NASRO's fourth annual professional industry survey of school-based police officers. Surveys were independently administered by the staff of *National School Safety and Security Services*, tallied by *Scantron Corporation*, and the results analyzed and reported by Kenneth S. Trump, President of *National School Safety and Security Services*, an independent, non-product affiliated national school safety consulting firm.

The 22-question survey instrument was developed in May of 2004 and administered to attendees of the 14th Annual NASRO Conference held in Phoenix, Arizona, on July 25-30, 2004. 1,100 surveys were distributed to conference attendees upon their registration. A total of 758 surveys were tallied by *Scantron Corporation*, representing a return rate of approximately 69%. Whereas every respondent did not answer every question, the total number of respondents for each question will be shown with the chart for each question.

NASRO conferences provide the largest single yearly gathering of SROs and offer the greatest cross-section of officers with representatives from each of the 50 United States. The results from surveys administered at NASRO conferences represent the largest known bodies of data derived from school-based police officers in the world, with the 2004 survey representing the largest return (total of 758) of the four annual surveys conducted to date.

This is a professional industry survey. NASRO membership surveys are intentionally not designed as, nor are they represented as, long-term scientific academic research studies. NASRO does believe the survey to be reliable and valid as a representative cross-section and subsection of NASRO's membership.

Scientific research studies typically involve years of time for their design, implementation, analysis, and validation through professional debate and subsequent research testing. NASRO believes that its membership surveys provide timely, concrete "real time" data reflecting **today's** current school safety threats, trends, and resource needs identified by those professionals currently working on the frontlines of schools to protect America's school children and educators.

Executive Summary

This Executive Summary highlights key survey findings and conclusions from the 2004 NASRO 4th Annual National Survey of School-Based Police Officers. Detailed findings and graphic illustrations follow this section of the report.

KEY FINDINGS

Significant findings from the 2004 survey include:

- **School crime, violence, and safety offenses continue to threaten our nation's schools. An overwhelming majority of SROs took a weapon away from a student on school property during the year leading up to the survey. A significant increase in gang activity and an increase in violent incidents on school buses, along with increased concerns about technology-based misconduct and crimes, were also reported.**
 - Over 78% of school-based police officers reported they had taken a weapon from a student on school property in the past year.
 - Over 37% of the officers stated that gang activity in their school / district had increased during the past year. Only slightly more than 8% reported that gang activity in their schools actually decreased.
 - Over 35% of SROs indicated that violent incidents on school buses had increased in their districts during the past two years. Fewer than 13% of the respondents reported that violent incidents aboard school buses had decreased during this time.
 - Almost 55% of the school officers indicated that concerns regarding Internet-based crimes had increased in their school-community in the past two years. Over 41% of the officers stated that they had dealt with cases of students using cell phones for improper reasons (cheating on exams, taking photos in restrooms and/or locker areas, etc.) during the past year.

- **An overwhelming majority of school-based police officers continue to believe that their schools are “soft targets” for potential terrorist attacks. Almost three-quarters of the officers feel that their school is inadequately prepared to respond to a catastrophic terrorist attack.**
 - Over 92% of SROs believe that schools are “soft targets” for potential terrorist attacks.
 - Almost three-quarters (74%) of SROs surveyed believe that their schools are inadequately prepared to respond to a terrorist attack.

- **School-based police officers continue to report that glaring gaps remain in their schools' emergency preparedness planning.**

Over half of the officers reported that their school crisis/emergency plans are not adequate. Over two-thirds reported that their school emergency plans are not exercised (tabletop drills, full scale drills, etc.) on a regular basis. A significant percentage (over 43%) of the SROs indicated that school officials do not formally meet at least once a year with police, fire, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, and other public safety officials to review and revise school plans.

More than half of the respondents indicated that teachers, administrators, and support staff do not receive ongoing professional development training on school security and emergency preparedness issues. Almost two-thirds of the officers stated that school bus drivers and transportation personnel have not had any training in the past three years related to security measures, emergency planning and response, terrorism, and associated topics.

- Fifty-one percent (51%) of the respondents said that crisis/ emergency plans for their schools are not adequate.
- Over 66% of the SROs indicated that their crisis / emergency plans are not exercised (tabletop exercises, full scale drills, etc.) on a regular and/or ongoing basis.
- Over 43% of school-based officers indicated that their school officials do not formally meet at least once a year with police, fire, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, and other public safety officials to review and revise their school's emergency/crisis plans.
- More than 55% of the school officers stated that teachers, administrators, and support staff (secretaries, custodians, etc.) do not receive ongoing professional development training on school security and emergency preparedness issues.
- Over 65% of the SROs stated that school bus drivers and other school transportation personnel have not received training during the past three years on issues related to security measures, emergency planning and response, terrorism, and associated topics.

- **Crimes occurring on school campuses nationwide continue to be underreported to law enforcement. The majority of school-based police officers believe that federal requirements for states to create a definition of “persistently dangerous” schools will result in decreased school crime reporting. The majority of SROs also believe that a federal law mandating the reporting of serious/violent school crime would enhance law enforcement efforts to reduce school crime.**
 - Nearly 86% of respondents indicated that the number of crimes that occur on school campuses nationwide are underreported to law enforcement.
 - The majority of SROs (over 54%) stated that the federal “No Child Left Behind” law requiring states to create definitions of “persistently dangerous” schools decreases school crime reporting. Only 17% believed the law would improve school crime reporting.
 - The majority of school-based police officers (67%) believe that a federal law mandating the reporting of serious/violent school crimes to law enforcement would enhance law enforcement efforts to reduce school crime. Over 20% were uncertain as to whether such a law would improve school crime reporting.

- **Over 70% of the surveyed school officers indicated that funding for school safety in their districts is either decreasing or remaining the same. Only 15% of respondents reported an increase in safe schools funding. The vast majority of officers believe that when considering the amount of federal funding being provided to improve homeland security for non-school entities, the amount of funding made available specifically for K-12 school security and emergency preparedness planning is not enough.**
 - Over 70% of the survey respondents reported that school safety funding either decreased or remained the same in their district. Over 25% of that figure said that school safety funding was decreasing in their district, while over 44% said that funding was remaining the same. Only slightly more than 15% reported an increase in school safety funding in their districts.
 - More than 80% of the SROs believe that, considering the amount of federal funding being provided to improve homeland security for non-school entities, the amount of funding being made available specifically for K-12 school security and emergency preparedness planning is not enough.

*See detailed results section on page 10 for additional survey questions not listed above.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2004 NASRO survey data found little-to-no positive change in school safety threats, preparedness, or funding from prior years. In fact, the data shows that significant school safety threats persist and, that school preparedness and training levels are inadequate, having stalled or sliding backwards. The majority of respondents also reported that school crimes nationwide are underreported.

This 2004 survey, as well as surveys administered in the prior three years, consistently challenge federal reports claiming that school violence is decreasing and suggest that such claims are highly questionable. NASRO's members have also strongly and consistently noted over the past four surveys that school crimes are underreported to law enforcement. School-associated violent death data collected by National School Safety and Security Services also identified 49 school-associated violent deaths in 2003-2004 school year, more than the two prior school years combined and greater than any school year since before the Columbine High School tragedy.

It would be expected that three years after 9/11 and five years after the Columbine High School attack, the preparedness level of schools should have improved. Yet the 2004 NASRO survey results find very significant percentages of school-based police officers telling us that the threats to school safety are ever-strong. The nation's SROs also report that preparedness levels for responding to school emergencies / crises remain significantly inadequate.

Equally concerning is the finding that while the threats persist, funding for school safety is not increasing like other venues targeted for heightened security funding, and in fact is in jeopardy of suffering even more drastic cuts than those experienced to date. Several weeks prior to this report being issued in February of 2005, the proposed 2006 federal budget called for the complete elimination of over \$437 million in state allocations for Safe and Drug Free School program funding. In October of 2004, the U.S. Department of Education announced over \$28 million in school emergency planning grants, roughly \$10 million less than what was awarded in 2003. Local and federal funding cuts to school safety are significant and appear likely to continue, yet the majority of respondents (over 80%) believe that more federal funding is needed for schools when examined in the context of funding allocated to non-school entities for homeland security.

Public policy and funding trends are clearly headed in the opposite direction of what front-line school safety officials are saying is needed. It is illogical for public officials to cut school safety funding in general. It is even more illogical for them to cut school safety funding while over 92% of the school-based police officers feel that schools are soft targets for terrorist attack, and while public officials are providing funding for heightened security in other public environments.

In NASRO's 2002 annual survey issued over two years ago, this evaluator recommended that:

- NASRO should strongly encourage federal, state, and local education and public safety agencies, as well as elected and appointed public officials, to include schools in meaningful terrorism and homeland security planning, and in related resource allocations.
- NASRO should encourage and support meaningful legislative and programmatic initiatives geared toward assisting schools in collaborating more closely with SROs and other public safety agencies in improving school security policies, procedures, and programs, and in developing, revising, and testing emergency/crisis plans.
- NASRO should encourage and support meaningful initiatives to fund and implement greater training opportunities for school-based police officers as first responders to terrorist attacks, as well as for expanded overall specialized training for SROs and SRO supervisors.
- NASRO should maintain an awareness campaign on the findings and issues in this survey by encouraging national education and public safety organizations to disseminate the survey findings, and accurate information on best practices in school-based policing in general, nationwide within their respective professional communities.

This 2004 NASRO survey report suggests that, to date, public policy and funding has failed to reflect the needs identified by the nation's school-based police officers who are on the front lines of school safety. The evaluator recommends once again that NASRO continue pursuing the aforementioned goals. In the 2003 survey, over 97% of NASRO members responding to the survey also indicated that NASRO should be a vocal, national advocate for additional school safety resources and SRO programs.

But the responsibility for improvement rests far beyond the front-line members of NASRO and the organization's leaders. The data suggests that it is well past the time for our nation's public officials to take concrete policy and funding steps for heightened and sustained school safety funding, improved school crime reporting requirements, and measures which strengthen and sustain ongoing school safety, security, and emergency planning. Unfortunately, the 2004 data suggests more strongly than ever that our public officials are heading in the opposite direction.

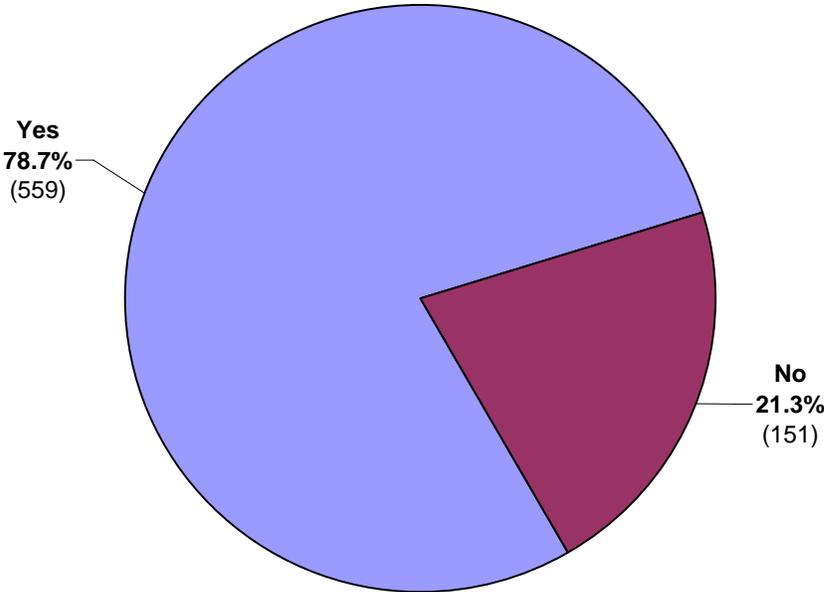
Heightened awareness and preparedness in our schools, like that advocated elsewhere across our nation, will reduce terrorism fears along with the threats stemming from within our own schoolhouses and school communities. The 2004 NASRO survey reinforces that much work remains for enhancing our nation's school safety prevention and preparedness levels.

Detailed Survey Results

This section expands upon the *Executive Summary* with percentages, number of responses (in parenthesis), and graphics of responses for each survey question. *Percentages are based on valid responses and may vary 1% due to rounding.

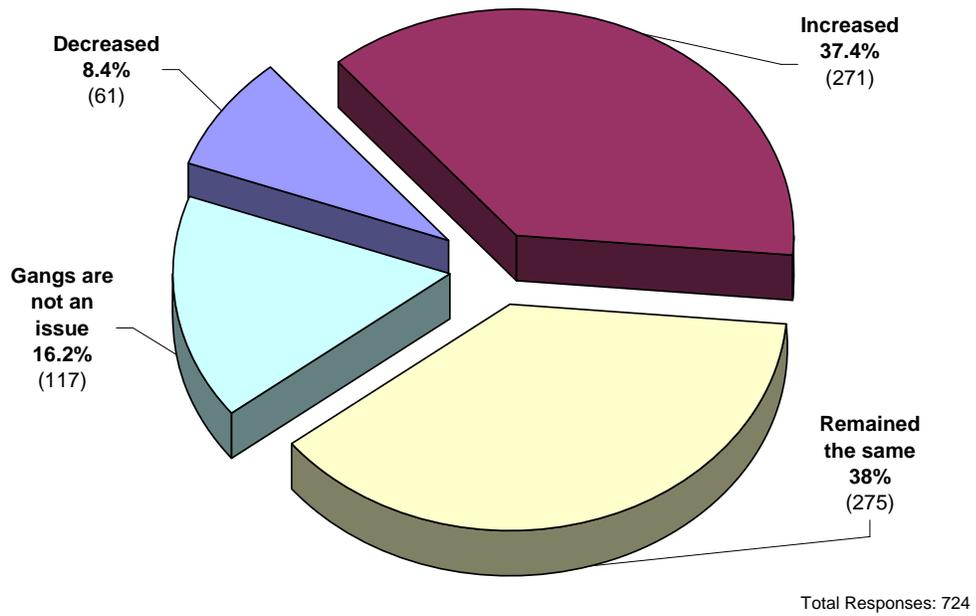
School Crime, Violence, & Safety Threats

During the past year, have you taken any type of weapon from a student while the student was on school property?

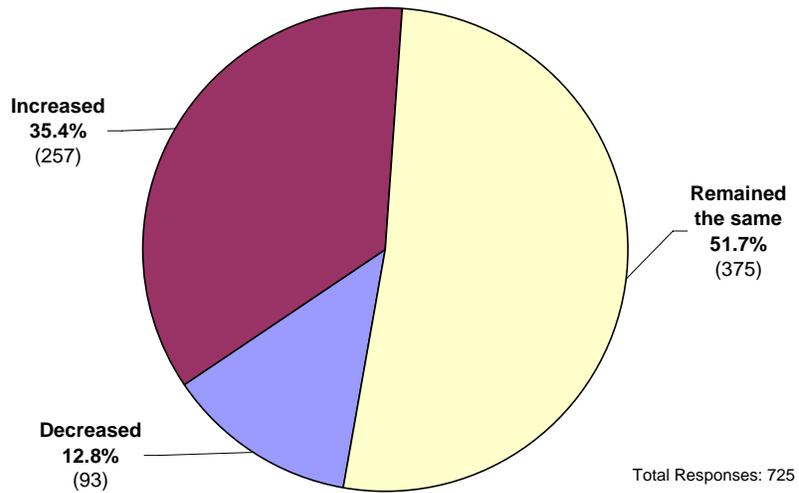


Total Responses: 710

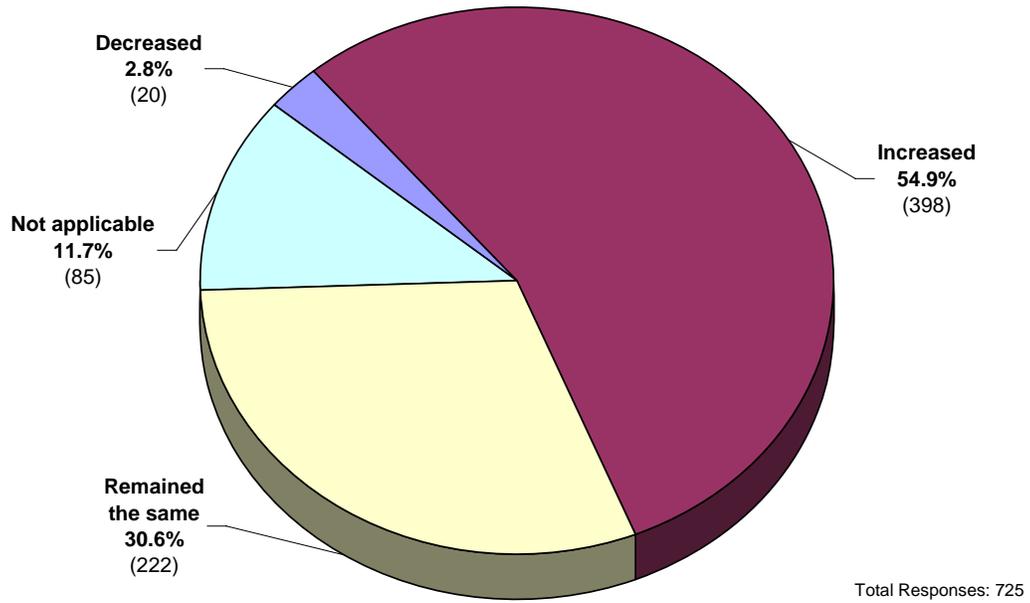
During the past year, has gang activity in your school/district:



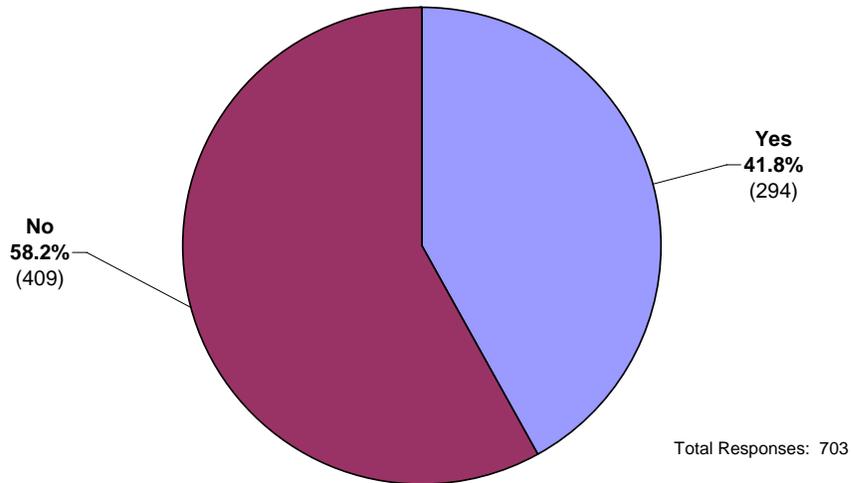
During the past two years, have violent incidents on school buses in your district:



During the past year, have concerns regarding Internet-based crimes in your school community:

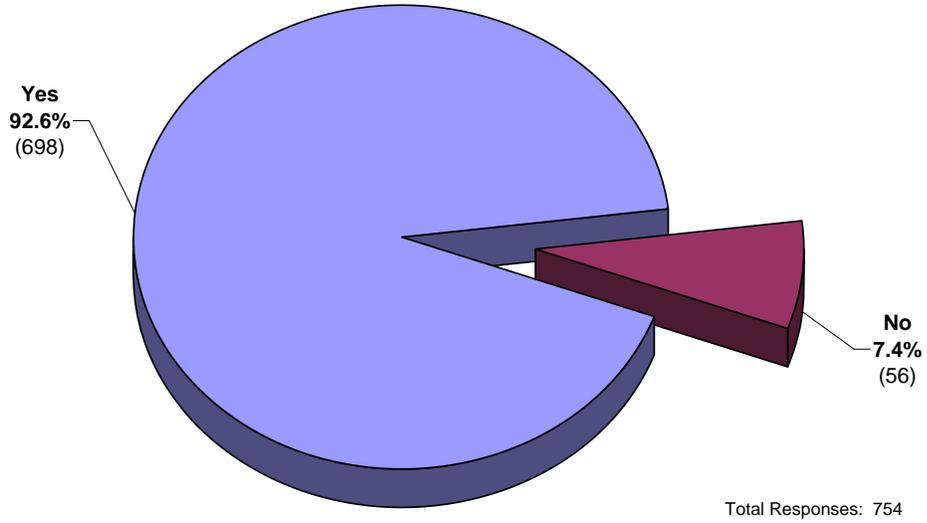


During the past year, have you dealt with any cases of students using cell phones for any improper reasons in your school (i.e., cheating on exams, taking photos in restrooms and/or locker rooms, etc.)?

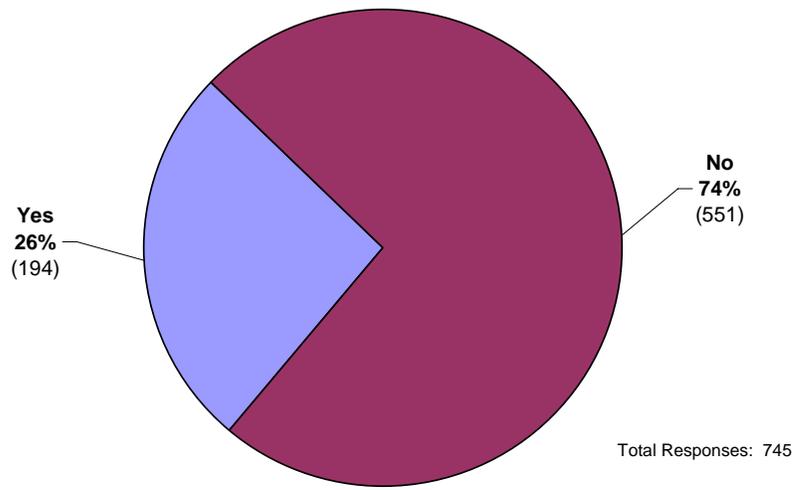


Terrorism & School Preparedness

Do you believe schools are "soft targets" for potential terrorist attacks?

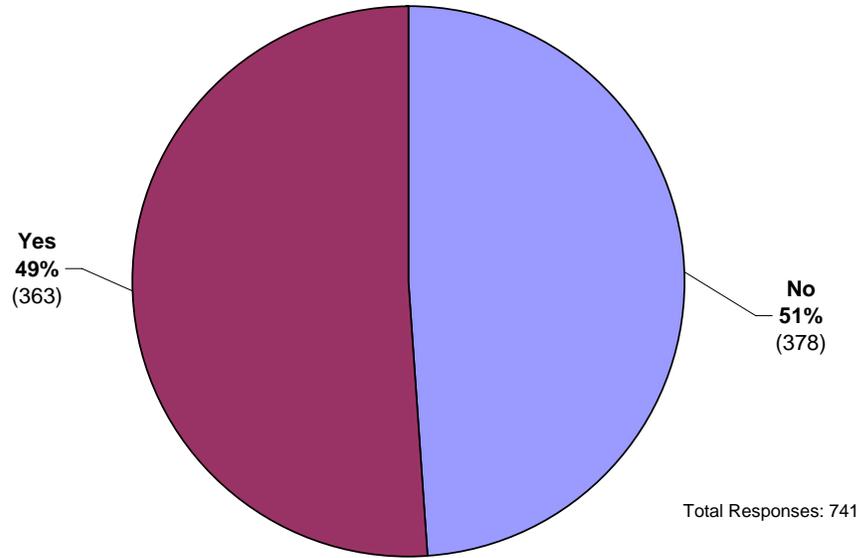


Do you feel that your school is adequately prepared to respond to a catastrophic terrorist attack now that we are close to three years after the 9/11 terror attacks?

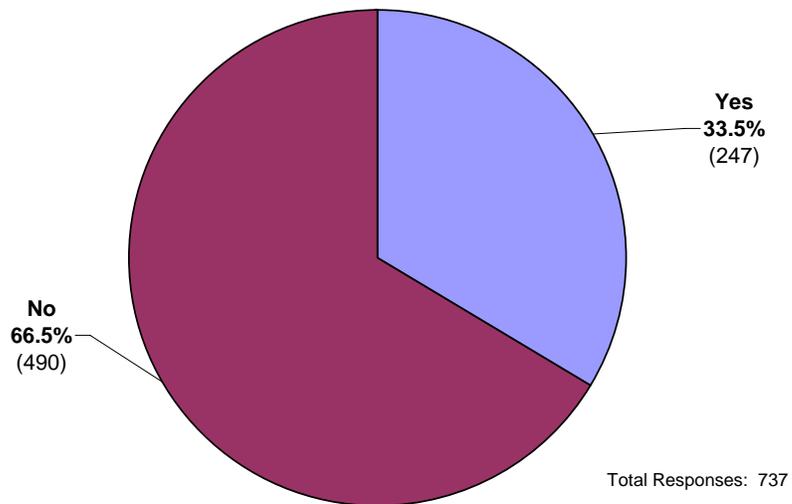


School Emergency Preparedness

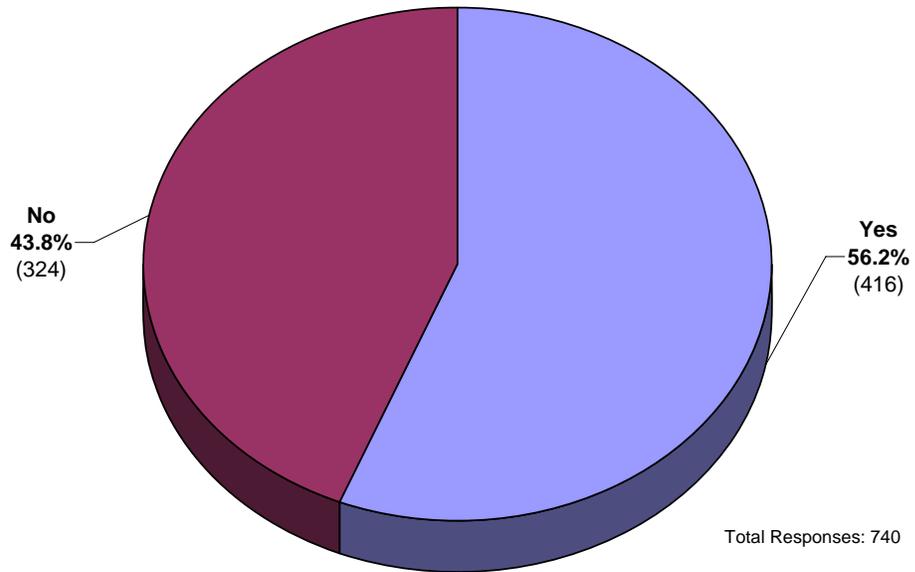
In your opinion, are crisis/emergency plans for your school(s) adequate?



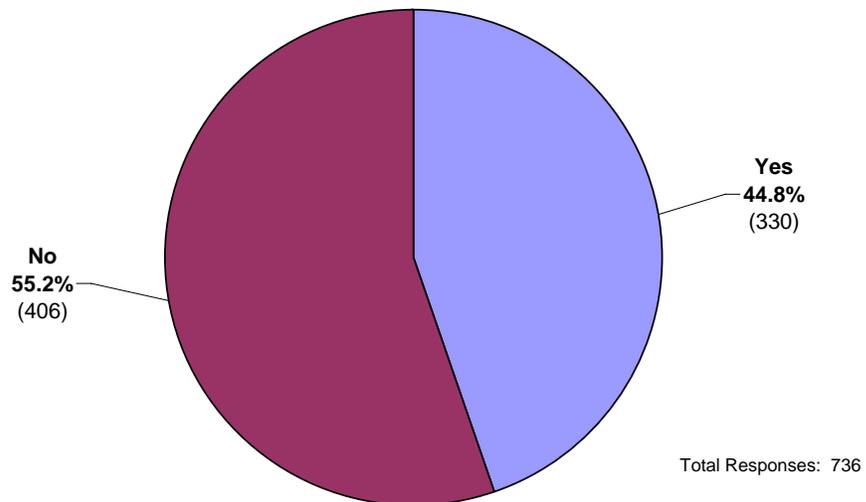
Are crisis/emergency plans for your school adequately exercised (tabletop exercises, full scale drills, etc.) on a regular and/or ongoing basis?



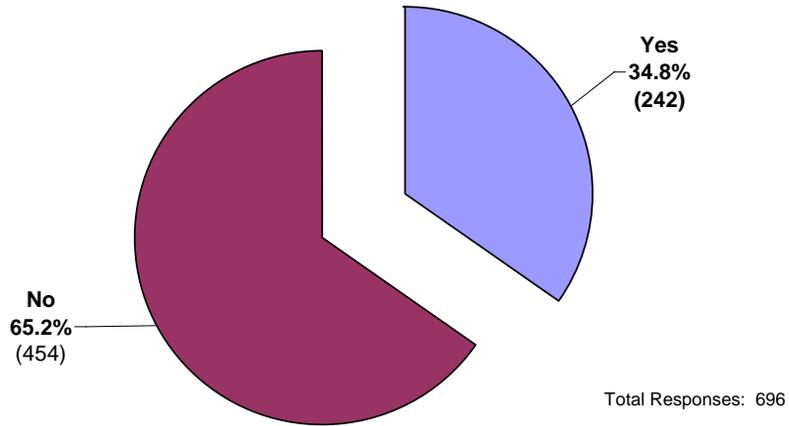
Do your school officials formally meet at least once a year with police, fire, emergency medical services, emergency management agencies, and other public safety officials to review and revise your school's emergency/crisis plans?



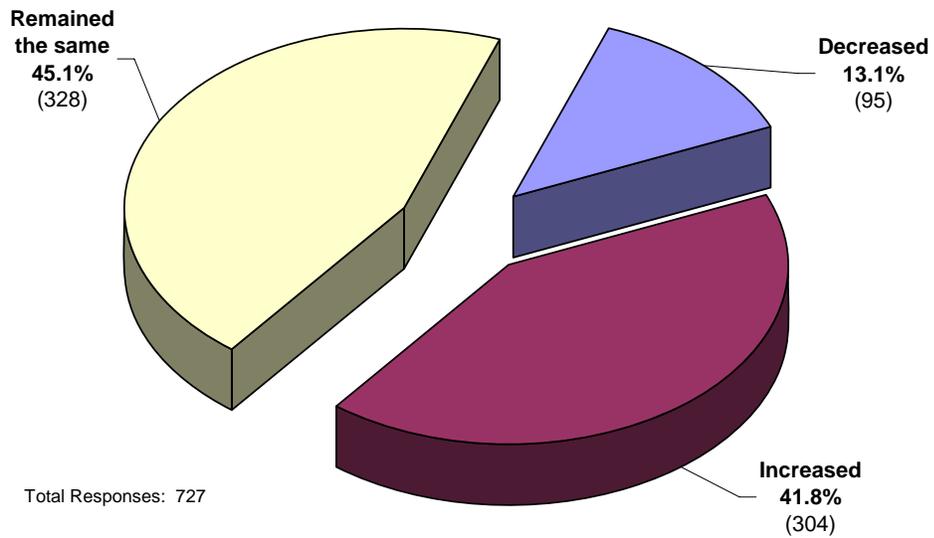
Do teachers, administrators, and support staff (secretaries, custodians, etc.) in your school district receive ongoing professional development training on school security and emergency preparedness issues?



Have bus drivers and other school transportation personnel in your school district received training during the past three years on issues related to security measures, emergency planning and response, terrorism, and associated topics?

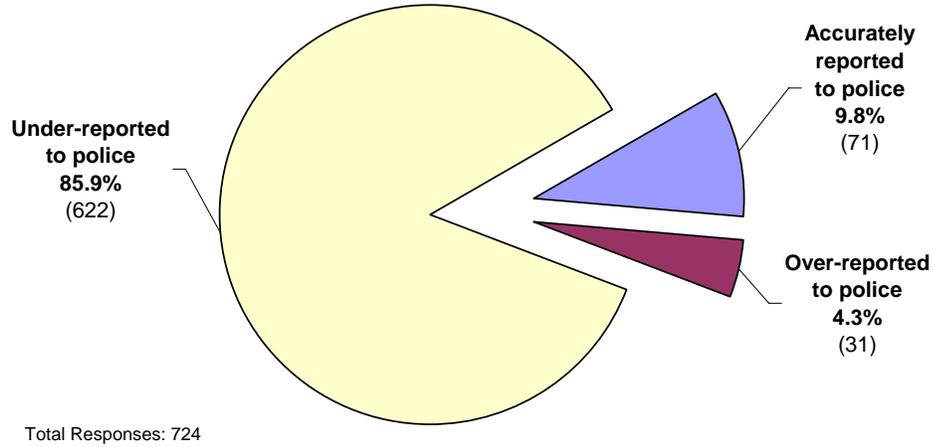


In your opinion, during the past year has attention to school safety and emergency preparedness planning issues in your school/district:

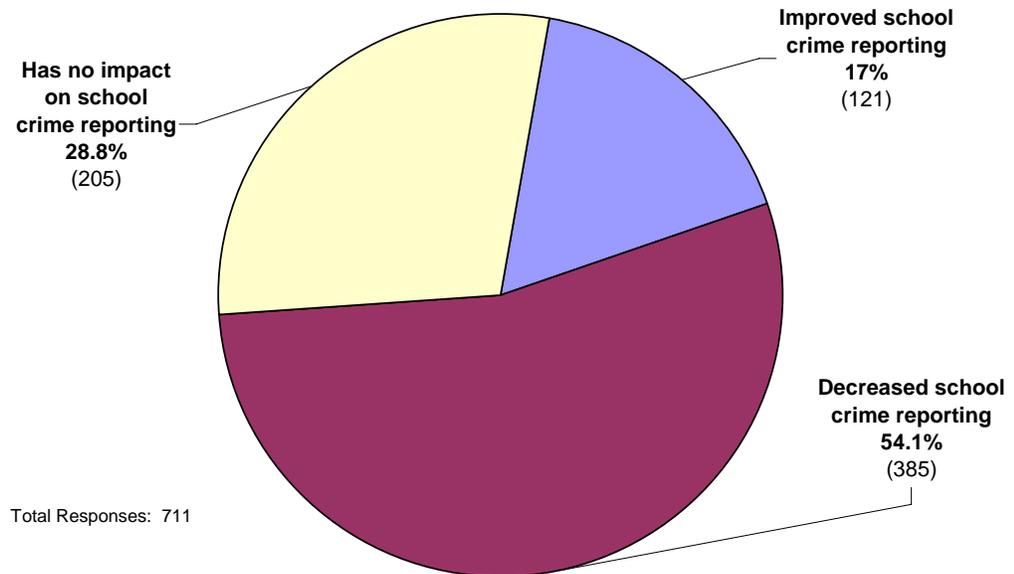


School Crime Underreporting

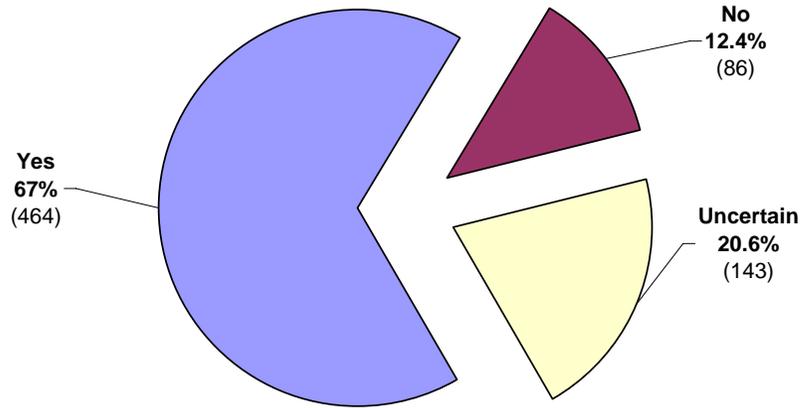
Do you believe that, in general, the number of crimes that occur on school campuses nationwide are:



The federal "No Child Left Behind" law requires each state to create definition of a "persistently dangerous school." The majority of states have said they have no persistently dangerous schools based upon their definitions. Do you believe this law:



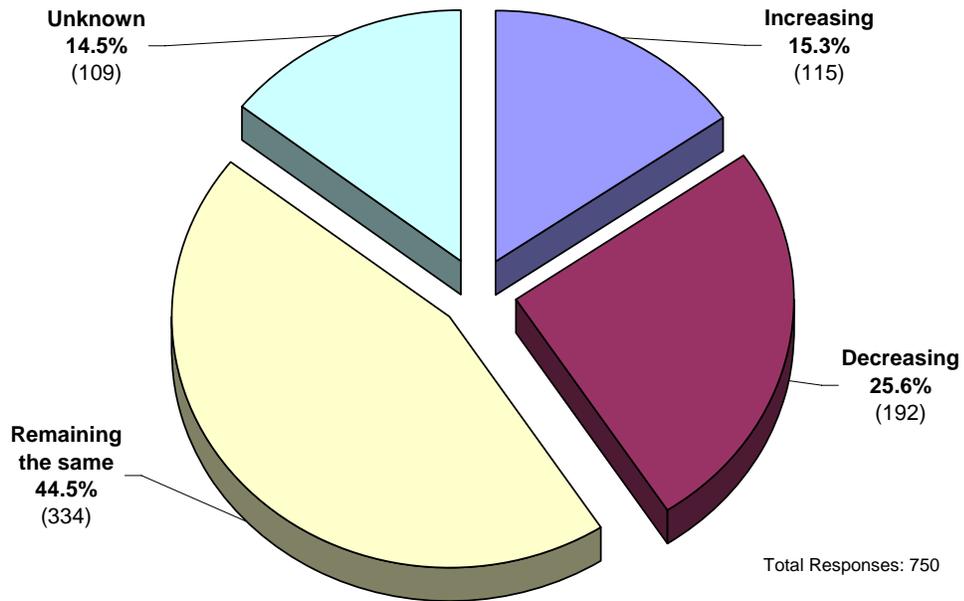
Do you believe a federal law mandating the reporting of serious/violent school crime to law enforcement would enhance law enforcement efforts to reduce school crime?



Total Responses: 693

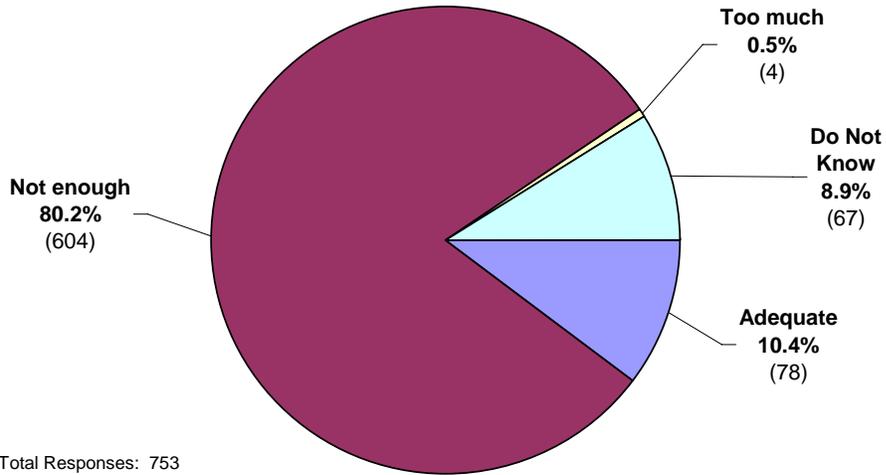
School Safety Funding Issues

Is funding for school safety in your school/district:



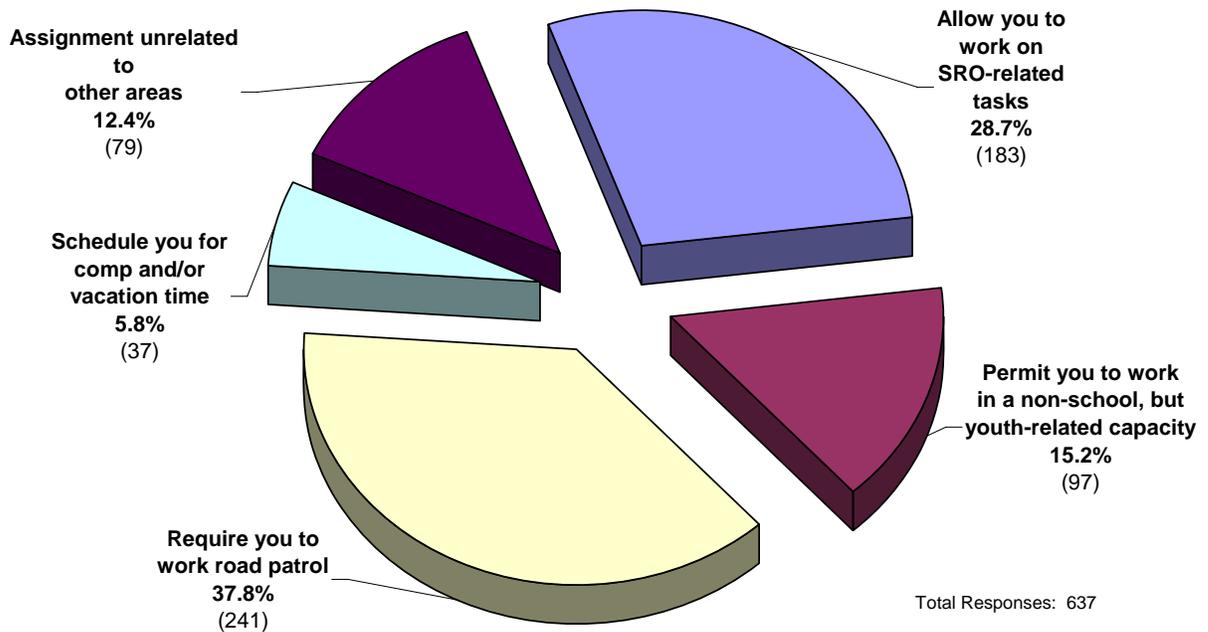
Total Responses: 750

Upon considering the amount of federal funding being provided to improve homeland security for non-school entities, do you believe that the amount of funding being made available specifically for K-12 school security and emergency preparedness planning:

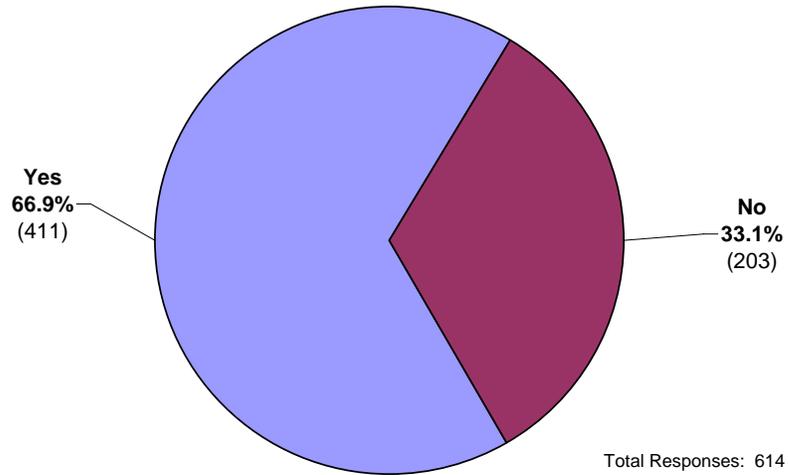


SRO Program Issues

During times when students are not in school (spring break, summer, holidays), does your law enforcement agency:

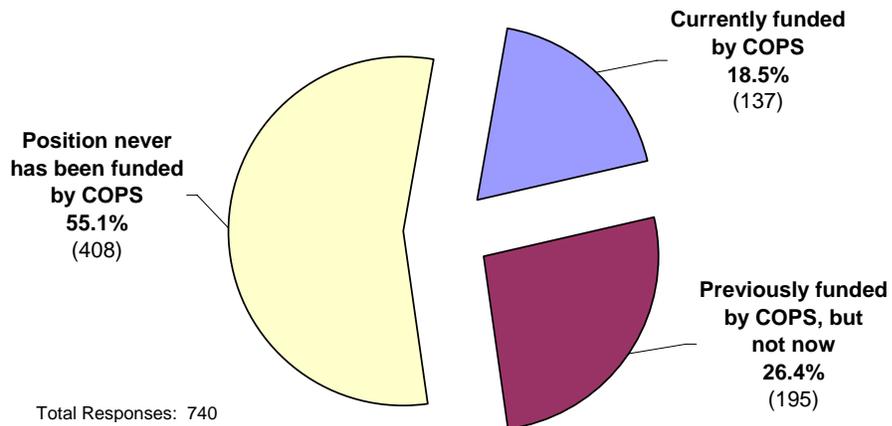


**In your capacity as a SRO, have you conducted any programs designed to reduce the number of traffic injuries and/or deaths among your student body?
(Responses are from officers in schools where question is applicable)**

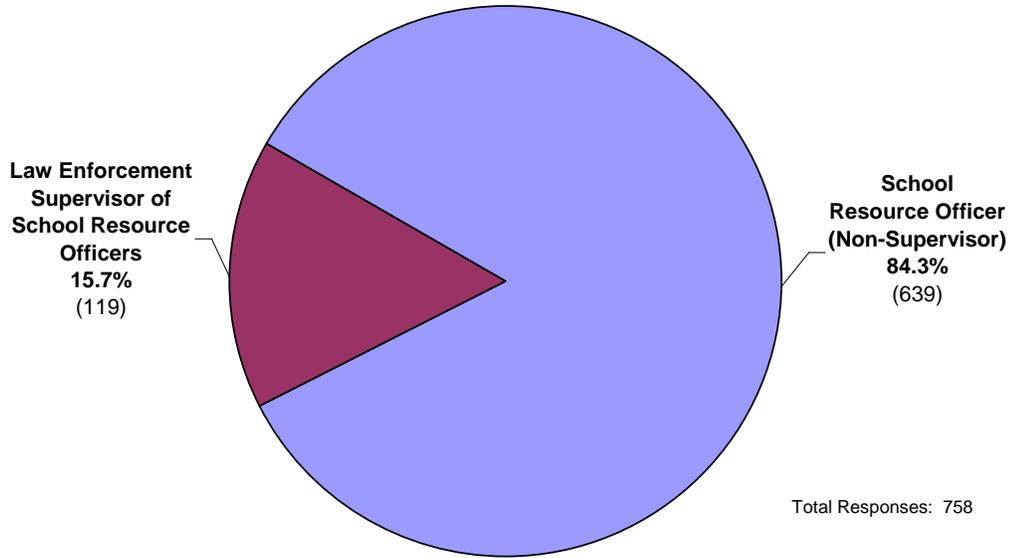


Survey Demographics

Is your position now, or has your position previously been, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice COPS in Schools grant?



What is your position?



- End of Report -