

Effectiveness of School Resource Officers in Society Today: Screening, Selection and Training

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Abstract

School resource officers have a challenging task of being a law enforcement officer, educator, counselor and mentor. Agencies should strive to select the most appropriate candidates for this position as it is far from standard law enforcement work. The training required for this position is specialized and goes far above what is required by a patrol level officer. By being proactive in the screening, selection and training process for school resource officers, agencies can minimize any negative actions associated with improperly placing an unsuitable candidate in that position. Multiple law enforcement agencies throughout Florida were surveyed to determine their process for choosing school resource officers.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, youth violence in our society has appeared to increase drastically despite a steady downward trend in crime associated with this age group, as reported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 2019). Many attribute this violence as beginning within our communities and as a result, spilling over into our schools. This can adversely affect our youth in the way they develop, interact, behave, and learn.

An approach which was designed to protect one of our society's most valuable and vulnerable demographic was to assign a full-time law enforcement officer to the schools. An anticipated advantage of this program was to reduce crime through positive relationships developed as the officers participated as teachers and counselors.

How effective are these school resource officers at the jobs they are assigned? Do they receive the proper training and are they the proper candidates for the job?

Many prevention programs for juveniles have been developed over the years with the intent of decreasing violence, increasing awareness or preventing drug use. Has this been effective or are they just feel good programs to give parents and communities peace of mind that these goals are being met?

Can law enforcement play a vital role in crime reduction through their interaction with youth? Do they need to obtain advanced training to cope with and work with youth? Are agencies engaged and proactive in their approach toward selection and assignment of officers to schools or are they just filling another position with a "warm body?"

Literature Review

History of School Resource Officers

What exactly is a School Resource Officer? According to the National Association for School Resource Officers (NASRO), it can be defined as a “career, law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is deployed by an employing police department or agency in a community-oriented policing assignment to work in collaboration with one or more schools.” (NASRO, 2020)

In the early days of law enforcement in the United States, the responsibility of dealing with juveniles mainly fell to female officers. This idea was formed from a bias that the female officers were particularly well qualified to perform protective and preventive work among juveniles. Alice Wells was considered one of the nation’s first sworn female law enforcement officers with arrest powers and was credited with being a pioneer in preventive protection principles concerning youth. (LAPD, 2020)

The first nationally recognized and accepted school resource officer program began in Flint Michigan near the end of the 1950s. The success of this program resulted in the Flint model becoming the national model. This program was followed by Tucson, Arizona in 1963 and then between 1969 and 1970 by the Miami Police Department. The Orlando Police Department began their pilot program around 1973. Each of these programs were designed to improve relations between law enforcement and school staff. These programs exhibited positive outcomes over the years and resulted in a noticeable decrease in juvenile crime. (NCJRS, 1995)

Because of the positive feedback from these newly created school resource officer programs, nationwide many other agencies began developing and creating their own programs. Near the beginning of the school resource officer conception in 1950, there were less than one percent of schools that reported having a permanent officer assigned to their school. These statistics steadily rose to 40 percent by the 2007-2008 school year. As of today, the National Association for School Resource Officers estimates that there are approximately 14,000 to 20,000 SROs even though this number cannot be verified. (TSSC, 2016)

Approximately one quarter of schools reported that their implementation of a school resource officer program was because of national media attention and as a result of school violence incidents. In 1999, a component of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), developed the Cop in Schools program. This was in response to the Columbine school massacre which resulted in 15 deaths and 24 injuries. Due to this initiative, it was estimated that approximately 7,200 school resource officers were funded through the program. Similar to the push for more SROs nationwide after Columbine, the recent Parkland shooting has had a comparable effect in Florida. (James & McCallion, 2013).

As popularity of the SRO program grew among law enforcement agencies, the Florida Association for School Resource Officers (FASRO) was created at the state level. It is the nation’s oldest organization dedicated to school policing and was founded in 1979. It currently estimates its membership at 800 members. (FASRO, n.d.)

At the national and global level, the National Association for School Resource Officers was later founded in 1991. This organization boasts to be the world’s leader in

school-based policing and provides various training opportunities related to school-based policing. (NASRO, 2020)

Role of School Resource Officers

What is the role of a school resource officer? For many people, they feel a school resource officer's only purpose is to be an armed security presence for the school. If someone with hostile intentions decided to enter a school to inflict violence, the officer should deal with it. While this responsibility is an important and primary role of an SRO, it is not by no means their only function. (James & McCallion, 2013)

Advocates for retaining and increasing the SRO program praise it for being responsible for reducing school violence as well as keeping the school, staff and students safe. They feel that these officers are also able to assist with mentoring students and provide other proactive approaches within the school. (Lynch, Gaaney, Chappell, 2016)

Critics of the SRO program argue that the presence of law enforcement officers have resulted in creating a negative impact both in the social and educational areas. They feel that many, minor school related offenses that were typically handled by school officials will now be handled by the SRO which may create a further distrust between youth and police. These opponents identify one particular disadvantage as being labeled the school-to-prison pipeline. This is where the presence of an officer ends up in criminalization of trivial violations of school rules and as a result, there is an increase in a student potentially being isolated, punished or removed from school through suspensions, expulsions or arrests. (Lynch, Gaaney, Chappell, 2016)

Regardless of the argument for or against law enforcement officers in schools, today's modern-day law enforcement professional has a wide range of tasks and numerous responsibilities compared to many other professions. These tasks and responsibilities have generally been expressed as "wearing many hats". As a school resource officer, the number of hats that an officer is expected to wear increases significantly. The "triad concept" was coined for these many roles, which outlines three specific duties of a school resource officer. The first being a law enforcement officer, the second an educator, and the third an informal counselor. (Zercoe, 2019)

This triad concept portrays a hybrid officer, which has been argued to be an all-new type of public servant. One role is that of a safety expert and law enforcer. This role tasks the officer with being responsible for the overall school security, effecting arrests, and enforcing the law. This generally encompasses the standard role every law enforcement officer is tasked with on a daily basis. (James & McCallion, 2013)

The second role is that of a problem solver and liaison to community resources. This role tasks the officer with the responsibility of being able to resolve non-criminal issues such as bullying and other predictable behavioral problems that may eventually lead to criminal incidents. Community oriented policing initiatives can be initiated as a way to improve community relations and help provide services to members of the community. Further roles include providing informal counseling and non-judicial alternatives for students as opposed to placing them in the court system. (James & McCallion, 2013)

Finally, the role of an educator would have the officer involved in crime prevention efforts and related programs for the students, staff and parents. The Drug Abuse

Resistance Education (DARE) and Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) are just two nationally recognized programs that are examples of the courses that are taught by many SROs around the country. (James & McCallion, 2013)

Selection

How do agencies approach the selection process when they are considering assigning an officer to a school? Most people who decide to pursue a career in law enforcement do not anticipate or have a desire to be assigned to a school. Instead, most new officers are interested in making arrests, conducting traffic stops, and doing what is considered to be the exciting part of law enforcement work. Many officers that do voluntarily accept the assignment do so for the easy work hours or they are forced to take the assignment. (Saul, Williams, Hartocollis, 2018)

For some officers there is a negative stigma generally associated with the term school resource officer which conveys images of lazy or incompetent officers who are not suited for other divisions or are deemed to not be good patrol officers. They are sometimes categorized as being one of three categories; “hostages” who are forced into the assignment, “retirees” who are riding out their remaining time until retirement, and finally “vacationers” who are in it for the good work hours associated with that type of assignment. (Saul, Williams, Hartocollis, 2018)

Regardless of how the decision is made to assign officers to the role of school resource officer, agencies are typically burdened with the task of how to select the appropriate person for this role. This assignment is not considered a glory assignment by many officers; however; agencies should consider it a special assignment and it should be treated that way in both the selection process and when training. Finding the right temperament, attitude, and adaptability can be a challenging task. (Zercoe, 2019)

Furthermore, agencies should seek to recruit qualified candidates who meet the above-mentioned qualities in addition to other attributes. They should have around three years of experience in law enforcement and have a desire to be involved with working with youth. Individuals who are involved in community organizations that work with youth such as sport coaches, Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Boy and Girl Scout leaders may exhibit the qualities suitable for this role, as working with youth is a challenging task. (Zercoe, 2019)

To further increase the effectiveness of SROs, agencies should seek officers who understand child development and general psychology. Officers who are proficient in public speaking and can exhibit teaching or instructor skills typically result in having positive effects when implementing prevention programs. This, along with the aptitude to work well with others outside of law enforcement can help in building a positive rapport with staff, students and parents. (James & McCallion, 2013)

Many Florida agencies experienced pressure to fill newly created vacant school resource officer positions under a time crunch after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis executed executive order number 19-45 which outlines “ensuring the safety of our children in our schools”. This order was a result of the outcome from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission investigation. These agencies may be tempted to fill these positions as quickly as possible; however,

shortchanging screening, selection and training can have adverse consequences. (Staff of DeSantis, 2019)

Negative media attention on SROs

In recent media events, some SROs have made national news because of negative actions on their part. As the SRO program continues to grow and positions steadily increase, their participation within the communities and their schools broadens. It is imperative to ensure that proper screening, selection, and training occur for each and every candidate in order to avoid these negative consequences. (TSSC, 2016)

In 2016 a Vance County North Carolina SRO was recorded on school surveillance camera picking up an eleven-year-old student and body slamming him in the school's hallway. The officer then slams him to the ground a second time before dragging him down the hallway. (Vera & Chen, 2019)

More recently, one Orlando, Florida SRO arrested and handcuffed two six-year-old children for misdemeanor battery charges. This all occurred despite the school's principal requesting that the officer not arrest the juveniles. (Hider, 2019)

Some media attention creates controversy for SROs actions, such as a recent event that occurred with a North Miami, Florida SRO. This officer responded to break up a fight amongst several students. This officer was recorded yelling multiple expletives, grabbing the grip of her holstered gun and telling students she would shoot them. Critics and advocates were split on the officers' actions. (Anwer, 2020)

One of the most recent and highlighted events were the actions or inaction of Deputy Scot Peterson, who was the SRO for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School during the Parkland, Florida shooting on February 14, 2018. His lack of action and refusal to enter and engage the suspect resulted in additional victims and not only disgraced his agency but law enforcement as a whole. This resulted in 17 people killed and many more wounded. (Federal Commission on School Safety, 2018)

Training

What type of training should agencies provide for this special assignment? Is law enforcement specific training the only relevant type required, or should it consist of broader types?

Many agencies nationwide require their school resource officers to be sworn officers within their state, aside from private security contractors. Aside from this, many agencies in the state of Florida require that their SROs obtain basic entry-level training specific to their assignment. This training should be specialized and focused on related training topics. NASRO recommends that SROs obtain 40 hours of specialized training but there is no specific requirement. This base-line training would provide officers with the necessary tools to accomplish their goals. (Javdani, 2019)

One study reported that less than 40% of SROs had obtained any training on special education despite the fact that they claim those students were more disruptive than other students. In another study, over 50% of SROs wanted to receive more training regarding juvenile law and school policies. (Javdani, 2019).

Another study conducted for NASRO reported that between 17% and 34% of the SROs surveyed, did not receive any specialized training in juvenile related topics such as child behavior, counseling, instructor techniques, school crisis planning, school security assessments and related issues. In 48% of the SRO supervisors surveyed, they reported not having been properly trained in supervision of school-based officers. (Trump, 2002)

At the national level, NASRO offers a nationally recognized, basic, 40-hour school resource officer course that is designed to provide officers with the necessary tools to help them create positive working interactions with students and staff; however, there is no national requirement. Beyond the basic course, there are multiple other opportunities for SROs to enhance their skills. SROs can participate in the advanced SRO course, adolescent mental health training, school crime prevention through environmental design, and management courses specific to SRO supervisors (NASRO, 2020)

Agencies emphasize and provide advanced and specialized training for many positions within their specialized divisions such as Investigations, Narcotics, and S.W.A.T.; however, the SRO position is neglected many times. Numerous police academies spend less than 1% of their overall training hours on juvenile justice related issues. In order to improve relations and performance, agencies should seek to provide continuing training for these officers. This is important as various aspects of the job changes throughout the years, which will result in the officer needing to change to adapt to these changes. (Counts, Randall, Ryan, Katsiyannis, 2018)

There were less than one-third of the state's nationwide that provided any specific requirements for SROs to be assigned to schools. Out of 15 states that required specialized training for SROs, only six actually stated a number of hours. Five of those states did require a minimum of 40 hours initial SRO training. Tennessee requires 40 hours of initial training and a minimum of 16 hours of annual refresher training. (Counts, Randall, Ryan, & Katsiyannis, 2018)

Training for school resource officers should go well beyond any 40-hour basic course on being an SRO. Implementing a program similar to the Field Training Program would allow a newly assigned SRO the ability to demonstrate their proficiency while under the tutelage and supervision of an experienced SRO officer. Similar field training programs have been implemented at some agencies such as the Boone Police Departments in North Carolina. Their program consists of a structured 12-week FTO program where the outgoing SRO or another experienced SRO documents the new SROs performance on daily observation reports. (Finn, Townsend, Shively, & Rich, 2020)

Further specialized training should include some type of crisis intervention training, emphasis on juvenile justice guidelines, non-judicial processes for youth offenders and courses focused on addressing problems specifically with juveniles, including special needs students. This, alongside clear and concise directives between the school district and the law enforcement agency, would provide clear guidelines on what duties the SRO would be responsible for completing. This would eliminate officers becoming involved in non-law enforcement related problems, such as dealing with unruly students or handling civil issues not related to law enforcement functions. (James, & McCallion, 2013)

Beyond law enforcement designed training, agencies should consider other training such as higher education similar to the requirements currently in place for traditional teachers. In a survey conducted for NASRO in 2002, 87% of the SROs surveyed reported that their agencies did not require any type of college degree for the

officers assigned to SRO. College degrees or courses focused on topics related specifically to juvenile development and educational psychology would be beneficial. Along with this, each grade level would require a different approach since the age of the youth are different. For example, an SRO assigned to an elementary school would need to focus on different aspects of the job than one assigned to a middle or high school. (Trump, 2002)

Many qualities of what may be considered necessary for a good teacher correlate with the law enforcement profession. Characteristics such as being a strong communicator, good listener, focuses on collaboration, adaptable, engaging, good at showing empathy, exhibits patience, values real-world learning, shares best practices, and are lifelong learners. (Dennison, 2019)

This ability to be an effective teacher or instructor is essential especially when participating in programs aimed at crime reduction or prevention programs. While there have been many programs developed over the years with the goal of assisting law enforcement combat youth related problems, these can only be effective if the person responsible for teaching and administering the lessons are qualified to teach them. This skill set is generally possessed by educators who have the background in how to develop lesson plans, facilitate learning among students, work closely with parents regarding their child's performance and development. (Javdani, 2019)

While there are mixed reviews on the effectiveness of crime and drug prevention programs, the role an SRO plays is a small one in the overall aspect of prevention. These programs have many factors that determine their effectiveness. Several factors involve the juvenile's deviant attitude and behaviors, as well as parental support at home. Most prevention programs involving drug abuse should involve all forms of drug use, from legal forms such as alcohol or tobacco to illegal drugs such as cocaine. These programs should be tailored to the specific target audience to maximum effectiveness. Including family-based prevention programs helps as well. (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2003)

The cost of crime on society is not only monetary, but also the people who are victimized. Many juvenile criminals have numerous other influences that guide their future behavior. Frequent exposure to violence through the media, video games, home and community place them at risk. Being from broken homes, bad personal lives, negative peer pressure, and sometimes just by chance can also be guiding factors in how they turn out later in life. (McElvain & Kposowa, 2006)

One way that may be utilized to minimize these effects is through intervention. Positive influences through the proactive approaches school resource officers make in a youth's life may help carry through in to their adult life. There is not much long-term research recorded on how and if SRO involvement is a factor in whether juvenile crime is reduced or if it even has a positive impact through their adulthood. (Maybury, 2017).

A two-year study conducted by Canada's Carleton University concluded in 2018 that for every dollar that was invested in the SRO program there was a minimum of \$11.13 of social and economic value generated. Various benefits were noted from this investment to include prevention of property damage, student injury, death from violence, and drug overdoses. It was found to reduce the need for schools to utilize the emergency 9-1-1 system and reduced the chance of a student ending up with a criminal record. It increased the chance of students, especially those with mental health needs, to receive

the proper help they needed and also increased the overall feeling of safety among students and staff. (Duxbury, & Bennell, 2018)

Methods

This research was conducted to identify whether the selection process for school resource officers in Florida was effective when choosing a candidate for this role. Another part of this research was to determine if school resource officers and supervisors of these divisions received adequate training for this specific assignment.

Information was gathered through surveys submitted to various Florida law enforcement agencies across the state, who have the responsibility of providing school resource officers to public schools, specifically K-12 level. The information for the survey was submitted to the 66 sheriff's offices, 252 police departments and 18 school district police agencies within the state of Florida. A total of 336 surveys were ultimately sent to participants. The survey data was specifically directed at the supervisors of these programs instead of each individual school resource officer. If an agency was not responsible for providing or did not have a school resource officer program, it was noted on the survey and the results were adjusted accordingly.

The survey questions were developed to gauge how the supervisors of school resource officers felt their agency's selection process was for officers who were assigned to this role and whether these officers and supervisors received adequate training. Questions also elicited typical information such as how many schools their agency serviced, how many school resource officers they had, years of service for these officers, level of education, and community involvement.

The survey responses were confidential in an effort to create the most accurate information about these processes.

Results

The survey was sent to 361 Florida law enforcement agencies. This included sheriff offices, police departments and school safety law enforcement agencies. I received a total of 77 responses for a response rate of 21%.

The first question asked the participants if their agency was responsible for providing school resource officers to educational institutions within their jurisdiction such as elementary, middle and/or high schools.

- Fifty-five (71%) participants responded yes.
- Twenty-two (29%) participants responded no.

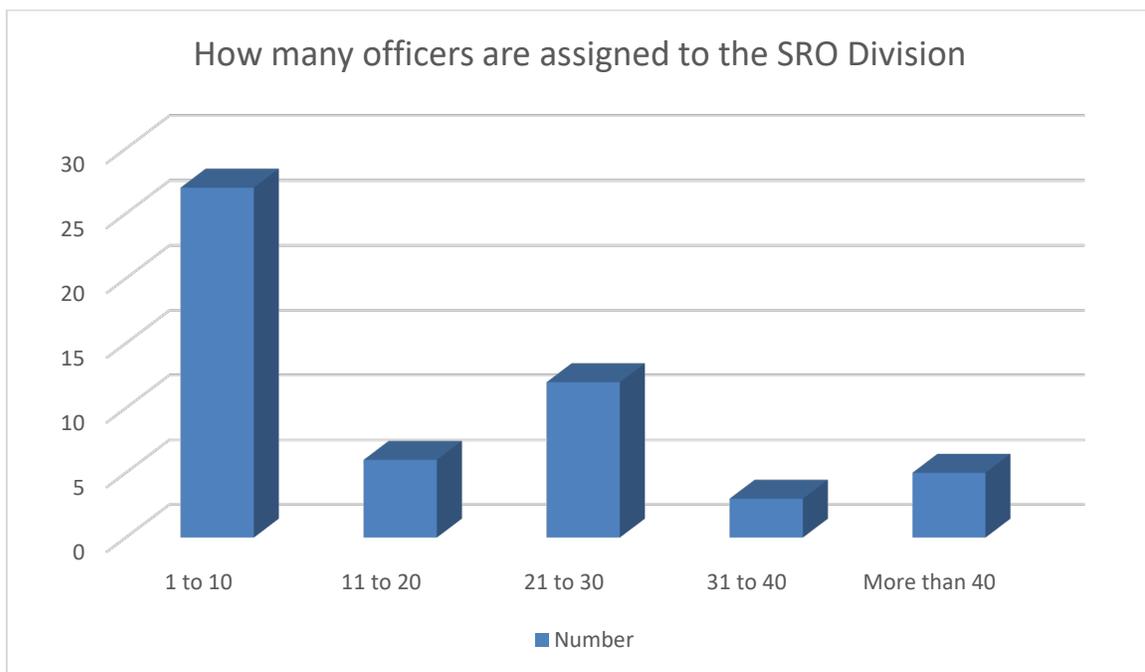
The second question asked the participants how their officers were assigned to their school resource officer division.

- Forty-seven (89%) participants responded their officers were assigned on a voluntary basis.
- Six (11%) participants responded they were directed or mandated to this assignment.
- None of the participants responded that this was a rotational assignment.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Out of the overall 77 participants, twenty-four chose not to answer any of the survey questions. Those twenty-four participants who consistency did not answer any of the follow-up questions were the same participants who indicated they did not have a school resource officer program.

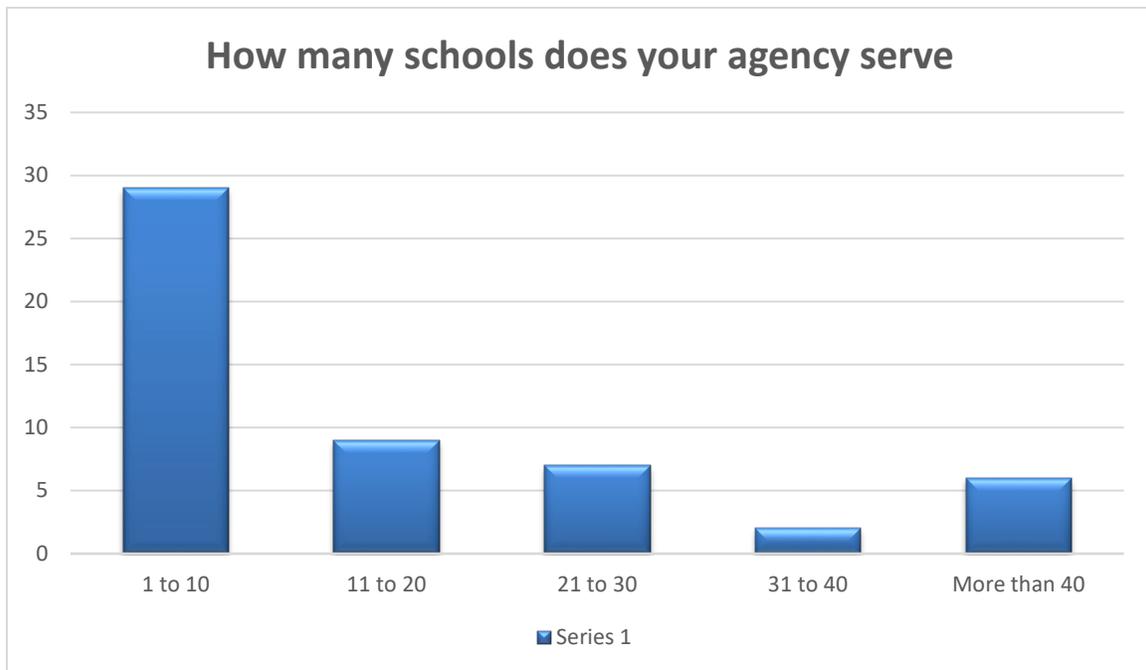
The third question asked the participants how many officers were assigned to their school resource officer division.

- Twenty-seven (51%) responded they had 1-10 officers.
- Six (11%) responded they had 11-20 officers.
- Twelve (23%) responded they had 21-30 officers.
- Three (6%) responded they had 31-40 officers.
- Five (9%) responded they had more than 40 officers.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.



The fourth question asked the participants how many schools their agency serviced.

- Twenty-nine (55%) participants responded they served 1 to 10 schools.
- Nine (17%) participants responded they served 11 to 20 schools.
- Seven (13%) participants responded they served 21 to 30 schools.
- Two (4%) participants responded they served 31 to 40 schools.
- Six (11%) responded they served more than 40 schools.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.



Question five asked the participants if they considered the driving factor for those seeking a school resource officer position voluntarily was because they considered it an “easy” assignment.

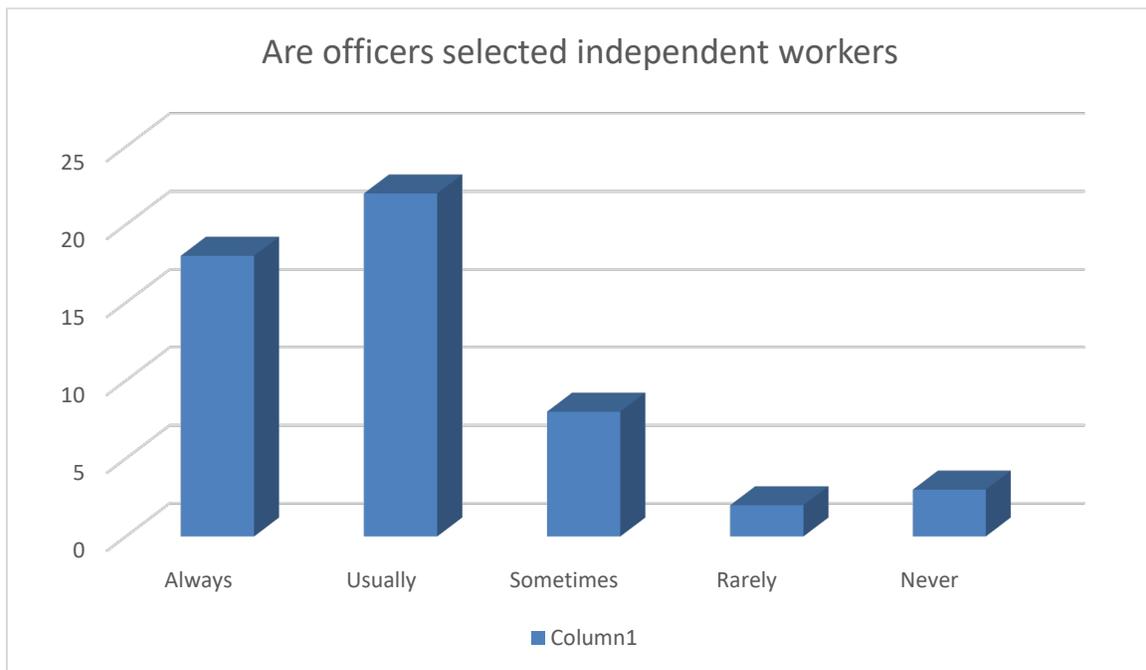
- Six (11%) participants responded yes.
- Forty-seven (89%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants skipped the question.

Question six asked the participants if their agency utilized an evaluation method to determine a school resource officer candidate’s temperament, attitude and/or adaptability to working with juveniles.

- Thirty –three ((62%) participants responded yes.
- Twenty (38%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants skipped the question.

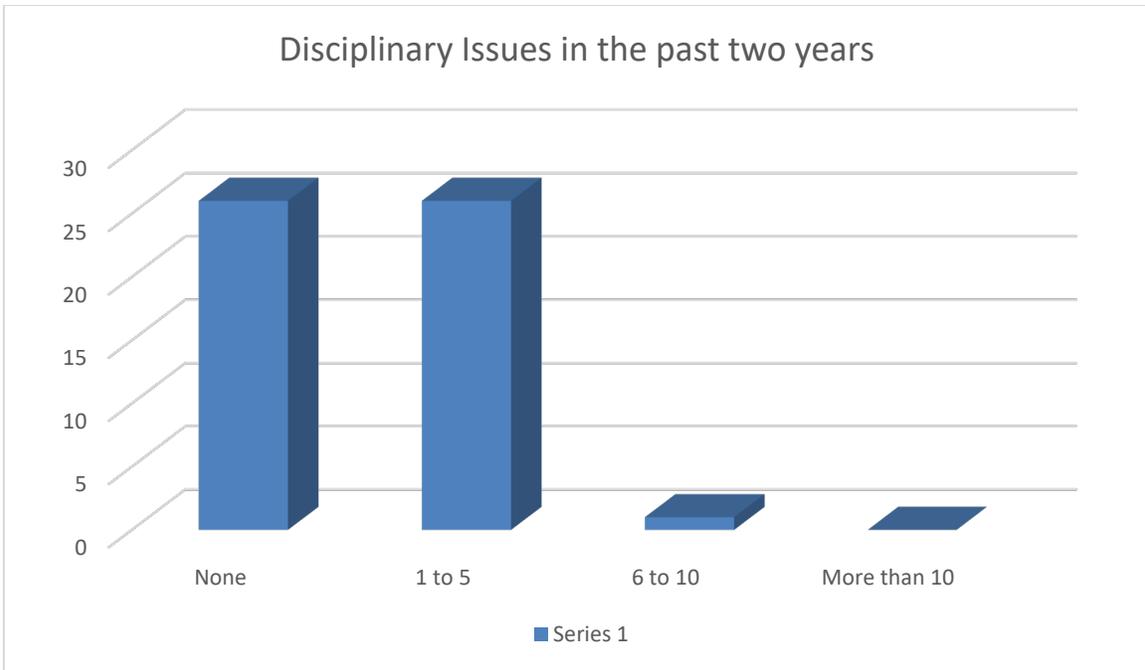
Question seven asked the participants if the officers selected or assigned to the school resource officer division were considered to be independent workers who required little to no supervision.

- Eighteen (34%) participants responded always.
- Twenty-two (41%) participants responded usually.
- Eight (15%) participants responded sometimes.
- Two (4%) participants responded rarely.
- Three (6%) participants responded never.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip the question.



Question eight asked the participants how many disciplinary issues have been addressed with their school resource officers over the past two years.

- Twenty-six (49%) participants responded none.
- Twenty-six (49%) participants responded 1 to 5 issues.
- One (2%) participant responded 6 to 10 issues.
- No participants responded to having more than 10 issues.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.



Question nine asked participants if there was a minimum years of service requirement to be eligible for this position and if so, how many years were required.

- Twelve (23%) participants responded there was no minimum requirement.
- Twenty-three (43%) participants responded there was a 1 to 2 year requirement.
- Sixteen (30%) participants responded there was a 3 to 4 year requirement.
- Two (4%) participants responded there was a 5 or more year requirement.
- Twenty-four participants skipped this question.



Question ten asked participants if their SROs were active in community organizations such as Boy Scouts or Big Brother/Big Sister programs.

- Twenty-two (42%) participants responded yes.
- Thirty-one (58%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question eleven asked participants if they felt that the recent executive order which focused on improving school safety forced agencies to shortcut screening and training related to school resource officers.

- Nine (17%) participants responded yes.
- Forty-four (83%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Questions twelve through nineteen focused on the types of training their school resource officers received. Question twelve asked participants if they had an entry level training program for new school resource officers.

- Twenty-eight (53%) participants responded yes.
- Twenty-five (47%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question thirteen asked participants if they required their school resource officers to have higher education.

- One (2%) participant responded yes.
- Fifty-two (98%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question fourteen asked participants if their agency required their school resource officers to complete specialized school resource officer related training.

- Fifty-two (98%) participants responded yes.
- One (2%) participant responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question fifteen asked participants if their school resource officers received any training related to special needs students.

- Forty-nine (92%) participants responded yes.
- Four (8%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question sixteen asked participants if their school resource officers received training related to juvenile law.

- Fifty (94%) participants responded yes.
- Three (6%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question seventeen asked participants if their school resource officers received training related to child behavior or development.

- Forty (75%) participants responded yes.
- Thirteen (25%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question eighteen asked participants if their school resource officers received training related to child counseling and/or child psychology.

- Thirty-five (66%) participants responded yes.
- Eighteen (34%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question nineteen asked participants if their school resource officer supervisors received any training specific to the management of school resource officers.

- Twenty-five (47%) participants responded yes.
- Twenty-eight (53%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question twenty asked participants if there were clear and concise directives between the school board and their agency to prevent enforcement of non-criminal issues.

- Forty-four (83%) participants responded yes.
- Nine (17%) participants responded no.
- Twenty-four participants chose to skip this question.

Question twenty-one was an open-ended question asking participants if there were any additional training or requirements for the school resource officer that was being utilized that had not already been asked. The open-ended format afforded the participant to add any relevant information. Fifty-three participants chose to add comments while twenty-four chose to skip the question. The responses received ranged from none and standard annual agency refresher training to conferences. A majority of responses included C.I.T. training, the Basic SRO training, threat assessment training and active shooter type training.

Discussion

The results of the survey indicated 89% of the school resource officers who were selected for this assignment did so on a voluntary basis as opposed to only 11% who were either mandated or directed for this assignment. For those candidates who sought the school resource officer position voluntarily, only 11% were considered to have chosen this because of it being considered an “easy” assignment versus 89% who did not.

Out of the officers who were assigned to the school resource officer program, 43% were required to have one to two years of law enforcement service to be eligible for this position followed by 30% that required three to four years of service. Approximately 23% of participants reported they did not have a minimum requirement for eligibility and only 4% required five or more years of service.

Many of the participants, 83%, did not feel that the recent Florida executive order that focused on improving the safety of schools forced them to shortcut screening and training for school resource officer positions. Around 62% of the participants indicated that their agency utilized some type of an evaluation method to determine a school resource officer candidate’s temperament, attitude, and/or adaptability to working with juveniles. One participant commented that their agency head determined who was placed in the unit without input from any of their school resource officer supervisors.

Most of the participants indicated that they either always, 34%, or usually, 42%, considered the officers selected for the school resource officer position to be independent workers who required little to no supervision. Likewise, the discipline issues addressed with these school resource officers were reportedly small. While 49% of the participants reported having no disciplinary issues with their school resource officers over the past two years, the same number reported only having between one and five issues. A relatively small number, 2%, reported having between six to ten issues and none reported having more than ten issues.

The overall results showed many of the agencies had relatively smaller school resource officer programs. Nearly 51% of the participants reported they had one to ten school resource officers while only 9% reported they had more than forty school resource officers. The number of school resource officers correlated with the number of schools which were serviced by these agencies. While 55% reported having one to ten schools, only 11% reported having more than 40 schools they were responsible for providing service to.

While 98% of the participants indicated they did not require a higher degree of education for being a school resource officer, only 2% indicated they did. Despite the majority of responses indicating they did not require a higher education similar to teachers, a large percentage of participants responded their agency required some type of specialized training for this position.

While it was almost even, 53% of the participants reported they had some type of entry-level training program similar to the field training and evaluation program for their school resource officers. An overwhelming 98% of the participants indicated they did require their school resource officers to complete specialized school resource officer related training.

Looking further into the type of training that was offered or required for these school resource officers; advanced training was provided to their personnel. Almost 92%

indicated that they provided specialized training related to working with special needs students. When it came to juvenile law training, 94% of the participants reported they provided this type of training.

Additional comments provided by the participants stated that aside from the standard annual agency training, their school resource officers participated in annual school resource officer conferences, as well as training in crisis intervention, single response for active threats, threat assessment, close quarter firearms, autism awareness, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), instructor techniques and youth mental health first aid.

Areas of training which were slightly lacking were child behavior and school resource officer supervisor training. Around 75% of the participants reported to provide specific training on child behavior and/or child development. Similarly, only 66% of participants indicated they provided training related to child counseling and/or child psychology. Regarding supervisor training, only 47% of participants reported providing training specifically related to the management of school resource officers to the supervisor responsible for managing this division.

Recommendations

The survey results indicate most of the officers chose to become school resource officers voluntarily as opposed to being forced into that position. With this being a voluntary assignment, the chances are high that the candidates are more receptive to working with juveniles instead of resentful. As most anyone who has dealt with juveniles in a law enforcement capacity, they know how different and difficult it can be than dealing with adults. The nature of this position being a voluntary assignment would allow for a more positive and constructive relationship between the school resource officer and the school, students, and staff.

Regarding training for school resource officers, almost all agencies surveyed indicated they do not require the candidates have a higher education similar to what teachers are required to have. Requiring every candidate to have a college degree may be an unrealistic expectation, however those who have a higher level of education especially those focused on working with juveniles may transition better to the type of work required by a school resource officer. One question that was not asked was whether school resource officers with higher level of education performed better than those who did not have one.

Aside from higher level of education, these officers do receive specialized training beyond that of the standard training which is typical for law enforcement officers. Going a step further by understanding the dynamics of child behavior, development and psychology would further enhance any school resource officer and/or the overall school resource program in general, especially as it relates to working with juveniles.

As it pertains to the selection of school resource officers, agencies which do not already have an established evaluation and screening method for their school resource officer program should look to develop their own. This should include ensuring the candidates are suitable for working with juveniles, ensuring they are independent workers

and making certain they have a well-established foundation working within law enforcement.

School resource officers should be selected from candidates who have a solid grasp on basic law enforcement as well as having a strong desire to work in that capacity. This along with proper candidate screening during the selection process can help secure personalities that are suitable for working with juveniles. In developing a successful school resource officer program, training should be specialized and tailored by not only including law enforcement related topics but also areas related to juvenile development, psychology and behavior.

Lieutenant Chris Vance began his law enforcement career in 1996. Aside from a year in 1997 where he was employed as a police officer with the Milton Police Department, he has been with Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office for the past 23 years. During his time with the agency, he has served as a Patrol Officer, School Resource Officer, and Field Training Officer. In 2011 he promoted to the rank of Sergeant and served as a supervisor in the Patrol, Field Training, and Training Divisions. In 2016, he promoted to the rank of Lieutenant where he currently supervises the agency's Training Division. He completed his Associate's degree in Criminal Justice at the Pensacola State College in 2007 and completed his Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice at the University of West Florida in 2009.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Introduction:

Good Afternoon,

My name is Chris Vance and I am participating in the Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute's Senior Leadership program Class 23. I would appreciate your assistance in completing a survey for this program. Please forward this survey to your School Resource Officer division's supervisor to complete or if your agency does not have a SRO program, indicate it on the survey by selecting no to the first question.

Thanks in advance for your participation

1. Is your agency responsible for providing school resource officers to education institutes within your jurisdiction (elementary, middle, and/or high schools)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. How are officers assigned to the SRO division?
 - a. Voluntary Assignment
 - b. Rotation Assignment
 - c. Directed/Mandated Assignment

3. How many officers are assigned to the SRO division?
 - a. 1-10
 - b. 11-20
 - c. 21-30
 - d. 31-40
 - e. More than 40

4. How many schools does your agency service?
 - a. 1-10
 - b. 11-20
 - c. 21-30
 - d. 31-40
 - e. More than 40

5. Would you consider the driving factor for those seeking a SRO position voluntarily is that they consider it an “easy” assignment?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

6. Does your agency utilize an evaluation method to determine the candidate’s temperament, attitude, and/or adaptability to working with juveniles?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

7. Are the officers selected or assigned to the SRO division considered independent workers who require little to no supervision?
 - a. Always
 - b. Usually
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never

8. How many disciplinary issues have been addressed with your SROs over the past two years?
 - a. More than 10
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 1-5
 - d. None

9. Is there a minimum years of service requirement to be eligible for this position and if so, how many years are required to be eligible:
 - a. No minimum required
 - b. 1-2
 - c. 3-4
 - d. 5 or more

10. Would you consider a majority of SROs are active in community organizations such as Boy Scouts, Big Brother/Big Sisters, etc...
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

11. Do you feel that the recent Florida executive order 19-45 which focuses on improving the safety of schools has forced agencies to shortcut screening and training related to SROs in order to quickly fill these positions?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

12. Is there an entry-level training program for new school resource officers, similar to the FTO program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

13. Are officers assigned to SRO required to have higher education such as college degrees?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

14. Are officers assigned to SRO required to complete specialized school resource officer related training?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

15. Do officers receive training related to special needs students?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

16. Do officers receive training related to juvenile law?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

17. Do officers receive training related to child behavior/development?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

18. Do officers receive training related to child counseling/psychology?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

19. Do SRO supervisors receive training related to the management of school resource officers?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

20. Are there clear and concise directives between the school board and your agency to prevent enforcement of non-criminal issues?

- a. Yes
- b. No

21. Are there any additional training or requirements for the SRO position that are utilized by your agency that have not already been discussed?