



Policing Connecticut's Hallways: The Prevalence and Impact of School Resource Officers in Connecticut

Policy Report
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Camara Stokes Hudson
Associate Policy Fellow

Lauren Ruth, PhD
Advocacy Director

Wendy Waithe Simmons, PhD
Director of Education and Equity

Introduction

Statewide, there is a growing conversation regarding how state policy and school practices can best keep students safe while in school, both from external threats, such as school shootings, and internal conflicts, like bullying. In many local and national discussions about improving school safety, the use of law enforcement officials in schools — or school resource officers (SROs)—is proposed as a potential solution. This interest in Connecticut is reflected in various local news publications that discuss topics related to SROs, including school district plans to fund new SROs and SRO conduct.^{1,2} Due to this growing interest, the Connecticut General Assembly Office of Legislative Research conducted a survey of school districts that employ SROs.³ Despite the fact that school resource officers have been present in Connecticut since the late 1990s,⁴ the last analysis of the use and impacts of SROs in the state was conducted a decade ago by the Connecticut American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), addressing the use of SROs in the Hartford region.⁵ In addition to the lack of recent analysis within the state, the nationwide research on the use and impact of SROs, while growing, has clear gaps.⁶

The presence of sworn law enforcement in Connecticut schools deserves close attention. Given a national rise in school shootings⁷ and other external threats to school safety, stationing police in schools may seem like an intuitive way to ensure the safety of America's most valuable resource—its children. However, police also have the power to arrest these very same children in their schools, which is traumatizing for children who are arrested, their families, and other observers who may be present. Even one arrest can result in children experiencing reduced access to future educational and employment opportunities.⁸ Parents, educators, and lawmakers may also think that stationing police in schools helps young children learn about the law and develop positive attitudes about community policing. However, if children experience negative interactions with police officers—even when an arrest does not occur—they may face lifelong mistrust of police officers. Trusting that police officers are people who are invested in keeping the community safe

and use their power fairly is an essential factor in crime reduction.⁹ Therefore, it is important to consider both desired positive outcomes as well as potential negative outcomes of stationing police officers in Connecticut schools. By using both quantitative and qualitative data, analysts can help determine whether stationing police within schools is the best policy for ensuring the safety of Connecticut's children.

Defining School Resource Officers

There is no uniform national definition of who can be a school resource officer and what the role of a school resource officer is; definitions vary widely across states and jurisdictions. Broadly speaking, SROs are sworn police officers employed by the local law enforcement and assigned to a school or multiple schools.¹⁰ In Connecticut, law identifies a SRO as “a sworn police officer of a local law enforcement agency who has been assigned to a school pursuant to an agreement between the local or regional board of education and the chief of police of a local law enforcement agency.”¹¹

The type of personnel who manage or assist with school safety within a school can vary and not all are school resource officers. Many schools hire school security guards who are employed by private companies; and, while they may be armed in some school districts, they do not have the power to arrest. For the purposes of this paper, when the terms “school resource officer,” “SRO,” or “officer” are used, they are in reference to sworn law enforcement—individuals employed by local law enforcement agencies who have the authority to arrest. The term “school safety staff” will be used more broadly. This latter term encompasses SROs, security guards and administrators tasked with school security or student discipline.

The Rise of School Resource Officers Nationally and Locally

SROs have existed in the United States since 1953 where they were first deployed in Flint, Michigan schools.¹² The number of schools with SROs expanded significantly in the 1990s in response to school shootings such as the one in Columbine, Colorado and rising rates of youth crime which have since fallen.¹³ In 1994, the United States Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which allocated \$9 billion in grant funding through the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) to increase the number of police overall doing work in communities, including in schools.¹⁴ Congress approved specific federal funding for school resource officers in 1998. In the next two years, the federal government awarded more than \$30 million in COPS grants to 275 jurisdictions.¹⁵ While designated federal funding for the use of police in schools ended in 2005, SRO programs continue to be financially supported through more general federal grants, school districts, and police departments. Between 1995 and 2016, the federal government spent a total of \$300 million on the creation of school policing infrastructure; no estimates currently exist regarding how much states and localities spent on this endeavor.¹⁶ As one example of the impact of federal funding on the growth of SRO programs, in 1997 only 10 percent of schools nationwide had full time SROs; by 2015, an estimated 42 percent of public schools had SROs present at least one day a week.¹⁷

Schools in Connecticut began to hire designated school resource officers in the late 1990s. Many of the school districts that adopted SROs in this early period did so both in a climate of increasingly punitive responses to youth misbehavior and following community and local law enforcement public safety concerns regarding specific, high-profile crimes involving youth.¹⁸ The relationship between rising concerns about

school safety due to mass shootings in schools and the call for the adoption of SROs cannot be overstated. Tragedies like that at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, where 26 elementary school aged students and their teachers were killed, have in some way contributed to an increased interest in expanding the number of SROs nationally and statewide.¹⁹ Connecticut was also a direct beneficiary of the funding from the COPS program. Between 1998 and 2003, the program assisted 39 towns in the state hiring 74 School Resource Officers.²⁰ While the federal funding of SROs has decreased in the last 10 years, many of the towns that received COPS grants have maintained their programs with continued funding from their local police departments.²¹ After the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2013, the Connecticut General Assembly signed into law Public Act No. 15-168,²² which requires that all school districts maintain a memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding “the roles and responsibilities of a school resource officer,” including a requirement that clear expectations be set for daily interaction between SROs, students, and school personnel. There are very few data on the presence of SROs in the state prior to 2008. The US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection shows that between the 2012-2013 and 2015-2016 school years the number of schools reporting SROs increased by 29 percent.²³ Please see Appendix B to see a full list of schools reporting school resource officers to the Civil Rights Data Collection in the 2015-2016 school year

Purpose of this Report

After identifying the gaps that exist in research regarding school resource officers in Connecticut, Connecticut Voices for Children staff decided that it was important to understand the prevalence and the potential impacts of school resource officers on students and education. To that end, this paper accomplishes two goals. First, it reviews the existing scholarly literature related to the impact of school resource officers nationally. Second, it presents an analysis of Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and Federal Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) data on the prevalence of SROs in Connecticut and the relationships between the presence of SROs and student/school climate outcomes.

Literature Review

The Varying Roles of School Resource Officers

Just as definitions of school resource officers vary widely, so do their assigned roles and responsibilities. Generally, the roles of school resource officers can be placed in to four categories: maintaining school security, teaching classes such as DARE or gang prevention courses, mentoring students who are at-risk of offending or need adult prosocial supports, and supporting diversion efforts.²⁴ Diversion is the practice of preventing children who have committed low level offenses or disciplinary actions from escalating their behaviors and ending up in the juvenile justice system.^{25,26} Police may choose to divert a child or youth from the justice system by issuing an informal caution, using informal mediation, using a police-initiated or police-led diversion program, or recommending community resolutions.²⁷ Prosecutors and Probation Officers may also choose to divert a child or youth from the justice system by recommending the child engage in a formal program, attend counseling, pay restitution, or a number of other options.²⁸ Finally, judges may choose to divert a child from the juvenile justice system utilizing similar methods as Prosecutors and Probation Officers but while retaining jurisdiction over the case.²⁹ As a response to delinquent youth behaviors (like fighting or theft), it is preferable to divert children from further involvement with the juvenile justice system as soon as possible, because it acknowledges that any arrest and court processing is traumatic for youth and

can lead to both negative physical health impacts and limit access to education, employment and future income.³⁰

Beyond responding to incidents in schools that rise to the level of a criminal offense, there is evidence that some SROs are also providing general disciplinary support to teachers and administrators, especially in schools where the administrative staff perceives a high level of disorder.³¹ This is in direct violation of the stated policies of the National School Resource Officer Association 2015 position statement, which states that all schools should have MOUs with police departments that prohibit SROs from becoming involved in disciplinary situations that are the responsibility of school administrators.³²

The role of a school resource officer seems to differ depending on the characteristics of the student body. For example, one study comparing schools of varying socio-economic status found that in schools with greater levels of social and educational disadvantage, SROs performed more law enforcement-related functions (security enforcement, maintaining school discipline, coordinating with local police, etc.) than in schools with less social and educational disadvantage, where SROs tended to perform more education-related functions (mentoring students, teaching classes and training teachers on school safety).³³

Finally, because of their knowledge of police emergency procedure, SROs can play an important role in managing a crisis event, like a school shooting or bomb threat. But research also shows that their presence cannot supplant the efforts of other administrative staff like guidance counselors and school psychologists as key stakeholders in creating a safe school climate and reducing crisis events.³⁴

School Resource Officers and School Safety

Even if SROs can be effective mentors and teachers for students, traditional teachers, counselors and school administrators should be the primary choice to fulfill these roles. Teachers, counselors and administrators often have years of training and experience in both subject-area knowledge (including health/wellbeing) and in youth development that go beyond common school resource officer trainings.³⁵ SROs are unique in schools in that they are often the sole law enforcers in this setting, and law enforcement in schools is the defining feature of SROs as a category. Students, school staff, and SROs view law enforcement as central to the identity of school resource officers.³⁶ For example, in a series of focus groups with SROs and girls of color, both groups identified the central role was ensuring “safety” in school.³⁷

While law enforcement may support efforts to keep schools safe from external threats, their ability to arrest students and engage in searches raise serious concerns about what it means to “ensure safety in school.”³⁸ These concerns include the freedom to search students for non-criminal offenses, the possibility of additional information sharing between courts and schools, and the ability for SROs to question students. Because legal standards for searches and interrogations have a much lower standard within schools than in other locations, SROs may operate with more leeway than other police officers, in certain jurisdictions without adequate legal protections.³⁹ To engage in a search, school officials only need “reasonable suspicion;”⁴⁰ this gives space for officers acting at the request of school officials to engage in searches that they otherwise may not have been able to conduct under normal legal standards.

The potential for SROs to encroach on student rights should also be a cause for concern. Students who have contact with the legal system through arrests and searches experience worse outcomes than students who have no contact with the legal system. For example, one study found that when comparing youth who

were arrested to youth who engaged in similar behaviors but were diverted from the system before an arrest, the youth who were diverted to social services or school officials before the arrest were 2.4 times less likely to reoffend than their peers who had been arrested.⁴¹ Even when comparing youth who were diverted to other services before the arrest to students who were diverted after being arrested, the impacts of the arrest are clear, while pre-arrest diverted youth are 2.4 times less likely to reoffend, post-arrest diverted youth are only 1.5 times less likely to reoffend.⁴²

Second, there is a connection between the maintenance of student's rights and those students' own perceptions of respect and fairness⁴³ that has been shown in several studies. Research suggests that, for youth, trauma and anxiety symptoms can increase with the frequency of police contact, regardless of where that contact occurs.⁴⁴ The prevention of further student trauma and student perceptions of fairness and respect are important to youth development as they have been linked to positive outcomes including stronger school connectedness, improved academic performance and, improvements in staff-student relationships.⁴⁵



Not all incidents that SROs are called to intervene in are crimes. SROs may be involved in “lower-end” disciplinary violations like school policy violations, bullying, or classroom disruptions that won’t result in court involvement but may include some other discipline response. “Exclusionary discipline” is a broad term that refers to any disciplinary action that removes students from their usual educational settings and can include in- and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement and arrests. Although SROs do not issue suspensions or expulsions, understanding the role that SROs play at all levels of disciplinary responses in school is essential because of the negative impacts that most forms of exclusionary discipline have on students. While national guidance suggests that SROs should not have a role in enforcing non-criminal disciplinary concerns, focus groups with SROs show that many times SROs feel pressured by educators and administrators to enforce school rules.⁴⁶ A study done to understand the arrest decision making of SROs, including a survey of school resource officers in Delaware, showed that in many instances, SROs arrested students for incidents where the SRO had significant discretion on how to respond.⁴⁷ For example, 77 percent of SROs in the survey reported that they had at some point arrested a student simply to calm them down.⁴⁸

The evidence regarding the impact of SROs on arrest and other disciplinary rates is complicated. Several different studies suggest that having a SRO does not predict more arrests of students generally, but the presence of a SRO does increase the number of arrests for “disorderly conduct.”⁴⁹ Arrests, especially for misdemeanor offenses like disorderly conduct, have a very serious impact on a young person’s life and ought to be avoided. Youth who are arrested while in school are three times less likely to graduate from high school, and even if the arrest does not involve future court involvement, the record of an arrest can

stigmatize a young person preventing them from accessing higher education and future employment.⁵⁰ For other types of student removals like suspensions and expulsions, the presence of SROs in high schools specifically did not have an impact on the level of student removals.⁵¹

Student, Teacher, and Community Perceptions of School Resource Officers

Most of the research on the perceptions of school resource officers is put in the context of feelings of safety in school. Several different studies have assessed whether or not students, teachers, and the public believed that students and schools were safer because of the presence of SROs. Two separate surveys showed that teachers⁵² and administrators⁵³ see SROs as a valuable resource in protecting school safety.

Students, on the other hand, report greater variance in their feelings about school resource officers. Understanding these perceptions is especially important because, as discussed above, student's feelings of safety and fairness have been linked to positive outcomes and are critical for violence prevention in schools.⁵⁴ Students in one survey, on average, seemed to have a positive view of school resource officers, sought guidance from SROs, and were willing to engage with SROs to report crimes.⁵⁵ In the same study, even students with multiple interactions did not seem to have negative perceptions of their SRO; in some instances the more interactions with a SRO the more positively the student felt about SROs generally.⁵⁶ This is tempered by a 2010 study that found that the physical presence of SROs in a school setting was negatively associated with students' feelings of safety in schools,⁵⁷ and a similar survey showed repeated interactions with a SRO could have a negative impact on a student's school connectedness.⁵⁸ In these studies, students felt negatively about overly aggressive or authoritative officers and expressed concerns that they could be or had been treated unfairly by SROs.⁵⁹ The reason for these differences between these studies is unclear, but later research shows that a student's identity significantly impacted how they were likely to feel about SROs. While interacting with a SRO was not directly correlated with overall student feelings of safety in the study, Black students and students who had experienced victimization felt less safe in schools where SROs were present.⁶⁰

There is a dearth of information regarding parent and community perceptions of school resource officers. What little information exists about parental perceptions suggests that while they are generally supportive of SROs, they worry about what the presence says about schools being dangerous and the potential surveillance of their children.⁶¹ Only one study explores how the general public understands SROs; this study, which surveys residents of Alaska, reflects the same ambivalence voiced by students and parents as well as a wide variance in responses that is predictable based upon race, gender and past police contact.⁶² For example, respondents who reported socializing with a police officer within in the previous year expressed more confidence in the ability of SROs and were less concerned about the potential consequences of introducing police into schools.⁶³

Our Analysis of Connecticut Data

Research Questions

Given that Connecticut has few empirical studies of the impact of SROs in its schools, this analysis is meant to work in conjunction with the ACLU study from 2008 and the Office of Legislative Research report from 2018 to provide a foundation for deeper exploration. Our analyses sought to answer three questions:

1. Are there differences in the presence of SROs across District Reference Groups (DRGs)?

2. Statewide, are there differences between the characteristics of schools that have SROs versus schools that do not have SROs?
3. When comparing schools with and without SROs, what is the impact of the presence of SROs on exclusionary discipline, school climate, and academic achievement?

Methods

Data Sources

The data used in this report come from three sources: the 2015-2016 and 2013-2014 United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), the 2015-2016 school year reporting from the Connecticut State Department of Education data reporting tool “EdSight,”⁶⁴ and District Reference Groups (DRG) designations that are used to group school districts according to similar community characteristics and resources. We used the 2015 SDE DRG designations.⁶⁵ While SDE no longer uses this designation, it is still a useful way of understanding district demographics. The CRDC is a federally mandated reporting of school-level data regarding educational access for protected classes of students (gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, disability status, etc.). All public schools (PreK-12) in the country are required to report to the federal government on issues such as the use of exclusionary discipline, teacher experience, and enrollment in advanced courses. EdSight is a state repository of school-, state-, and district-level education data taken from all school districts in Connecticut. The authors of this paper acknowledge that the data in this study are now two years out of date. Because there is no central public reporting of the presence of SROs in Connecticut, data on which schools employ SROs are most available and accessible through the CRDC website, but the last available year of data available through this data set is School Year (SY) 2015-2016.

Wherever possible, this paper attempts to disaggregate the data by race/ethnicity. When populations of students are small enough that individual students might be identifiable, state and federal student data privacy regulations prevent access to data on these students. This is done through a process called data “suppression.” Suppressed data are represented in a data set by displaying an asterisk (*) instead of a numerical value. SDE regulations dictate that when a number of students in a category is between one and five, SDE suppresses that data.⁶⁶ We used a formula in Excel to impute a random digit between 1 and 5 so that we could include schools with suppressed data within our analyses. When data from the CRDC indicated more precise counts of students from mutually exclusive categories (such as saying two Black students with disabilities were expelled and one Black student without disabilities was expelled, therefore there must be at least three Black students present at a school) falling within the data suppression range, we adjusted the random data generator to generate a number between the one reported through the CRDC data (in our example, three) and five. We chose to use a random number generator for suppressed data because a large number of schools had unreported/missing data, and treating suppressed data as missing could have

District Reference Groups are a way of grouping school districts based on the socio-economic status of the surrounding community. Districts are grouped into seven groups (A-I) by the town’s relative family income with group A being comprised of school districts in towns with relatively higher family incomes and Group I being comprises of school districts in towns relatively lower family incomes.

Example School Districts by DRG:

DRG A: Westport, Darien
 DRG B: Avon, Glastonbury
 DRG C: Oxford, Andover
 DRG D: Cromwell, Milford
 DRG E: Woodstock, Lebanon
 DRG F: Windsor Locks, Regional District #11
 DRG G: Bloomfield, Hamden
 DRG H: Norwalk, Danbury
 DRG I: Bridgeport, New London

covered up important differences caused by smaller numbers of students. An additional discussion of our methods and our detailed statistical analyses can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Analyzing the relationships between two variables, like the presence of school resource officers and student arrests, requires that we go beyond basic data analysis to understand the extent to which the variables are actually related or if differences can be attributed to other factors we did not include. For this reason, we used SPSS, a statistical analysis software to run a between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-test analyses. We used the MedCalc online relative risk calculator to run our risk ratio analyses.⁶⁷ In describing results from these analyses we refer to some of the findings as “statistically significant.” When something is identified as statistically significant, it means that there is a high degree of certainty that the differences seen can be attributed to one of our identified variables as opposed to something unforeseen or random variation.

Question 1: Are there differences in the presence of SROs across District Reference Groups?

We performed a between-subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine whether DRGs vary in the proportion of schools that have SROs. We only included schools that had both a DRG designation and information about SRO presence in our analyses. A between-subjects ANOVA allows us to compare differences between averages in two or more separate groups. Because the data set we analyze in this paper is a natural sample rather than one with experimental controls, an ANOVA can tell us when differences are unlikely to be due to chance, but it cannot tell us that differences are caused by the factor upon which we split groups. For example, while we note that DRGs vary systemically regarding community resources, we cannot determine that community resources cause differences in the presence of SROs in schools.

To understand the overall presence of SROs by DRG we performed one-sample t-tests comparing the number of schools with SROs to the number of schools without SROs within each DRG with a test value of 0.5. T-tests allow us to statistically test whether a value significantly differs from another real or hypothesized value. Setting the test value at 0.5 tests the hypothesis of whether schools are as likely to have a SRO as not to have a SRO. If this hypothesis is true, we expect half the schools (50 percent) will have a SRO and half the schools will not have a SRO. A significant difference from 0.5 indicates that the distribution is not half-and-half.

Question 2: Across District Reference Groups, are there differences between the characteristics of schools that have SROs versus schools that do not have SROs?

We performed several chi-square tests of goodness-of-fit to examine the relationship between the presence of cohorts of preschool, kindergarten, 8th grade, 9th grade, and 12th grade students in schools with and without SROs. To better understand the relationship between the presence of certain groups of students and the presence of a SRO, we performed several one-way ANOVAs to determine whether schools with SROs and without SROs differ in the average percentage of Black, Latino, White, and Asian students attending those schools. Chi-square tests are used to determine whether two categories are independent of each other. It calculates the frequency with which we'd expect to see an outcome if there is no relationship between the two categories being tested. In this case, chi-square tests allow us to see whether assigning SROs to schools is independent from the presence of a grade level. A significant effect indicates that there are more or fewer SROs assigned to schools with a particular grade level present than we would expect if there was no relationship.

Question 3: When comparing schools with and without SROs, what is the impact of the presence of SROs on exclusionary discipline, school climate, and achievement?

Exclusionary Discipline

To understand the relationship between the presence of SROs in schools and the use of exclusionary discipline, we performed relative risk analyses to understand the likelihood that the presence of a SRO impacts the count of Black, White, Latino and Asian students expelled, referred to law enforcement, and arrested. Relative risk analyses are tools that help examine the chance that an event will happen based upon which group (school with a SRO versus school without a SRO), but absent a controlled experiment, they are not appropriate statistical tools to infer causal relationships.

To dig deeper into the results of the relative risk analyses, we performed several one-way ANOVAs between the presence of SROs and the rates of expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, and arrests for Black, White, Asian and Latino students. These analyses controlled for school size, DRG and the percentage of students of that race/ethnicity in the school, all of which were variables we determined to impact which schools had SROs as well as exclusionary discipline rates. Controlling for the impact of these variables in our models helps determine that any significant effects detected are not better explained by the variance contributed by school size, DRG, or greater presence of particular student groups.

School Climate and Achievement

Because school climate is a rather large and diffuse concept, we identified incident rates (the number of times an incident occurred in a school) as our metric. Like the analysis of exclusionary discipline, we performed several one-way ANOVAs to explore the difference in the numbers of specific school incidences occurring based upon the presence of SROs in schools. To understand the relationship between the presence of SROs and achievement, we chose to look at Smarter Balanced test scores. There was a significant amount of missing data for other indicators of achievement, such as graduation rates. We were only able to analyze Math and English Language Arts (ELA) Smarter Balanced test scores for White students and all students. This is because a significant amount of the data regarding other racial/ethnic groups of students was suppressed or simply unavailable. We performed several one-way ANOVAS examining the percentage of White and all students that had met or exceeded SBAC benchmarks in both Math and ELA based upon SROs in schools.

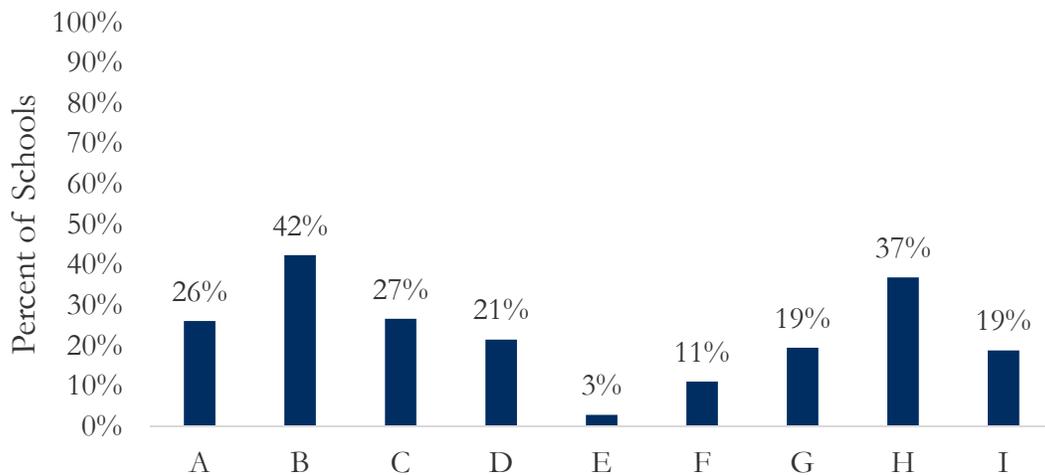
Results

Question 1: Are there differences in the presence of SROs across District Reference Groups?

After performing the ANOVA analysis, we found that there was a significant effect of DRG on the presence of SROs. There are differences between DRGs in the presence of SROs. SROs were most present in DRGs B and H and least present in DRGs E and F.

Fewer schools across all DRGs had SROs (N=262, or 24% of schools) than did not have a SRO (N=811).

Figure 1. The percentage of schools with SROs assigned differs across District Reference Groups.



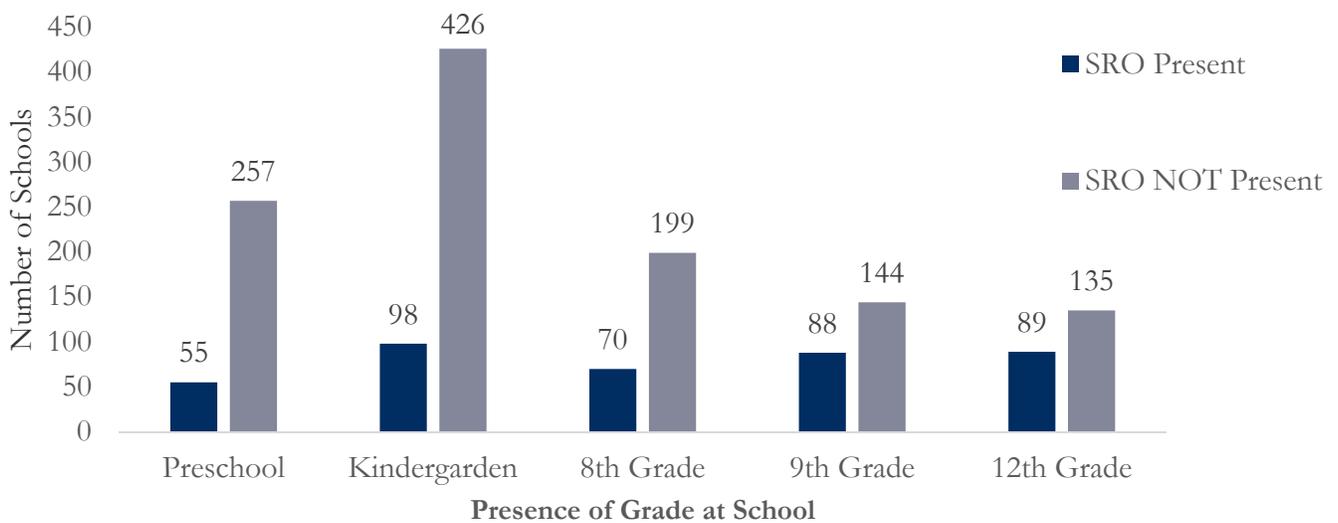
Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015 CT DRG Designations

Question 2: Across District Reference Groups, are there differences between the characteristics of schools that have SROs versus schools that do not have SROs?

Grades Present

Regardless of the grades present, more schools do not have a SRO than do have a SRO. Regarding specific grades, schools with younger cohorts of student's present are more likely to not have SROs present than to have SROs present.

Figure 2. Schools with younger cohorts of student's present are less likely to have SROs.

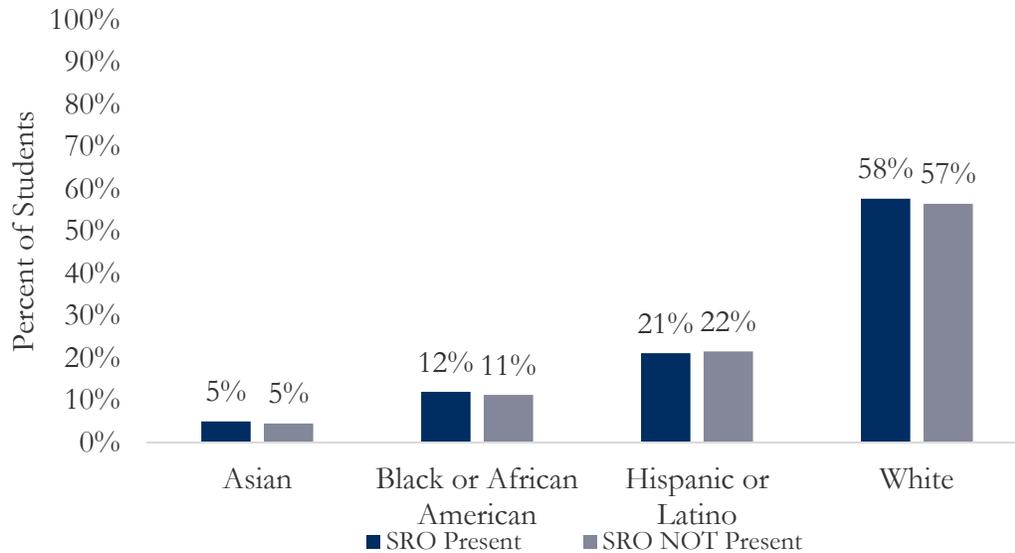


Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

School Characteristics

We found no significant relationship between the percentage of Black, White, Asian and Latino students in schools with and without SROs. For all groups of students there is a one percent or less difference in their proportions in schools with and without SROs.

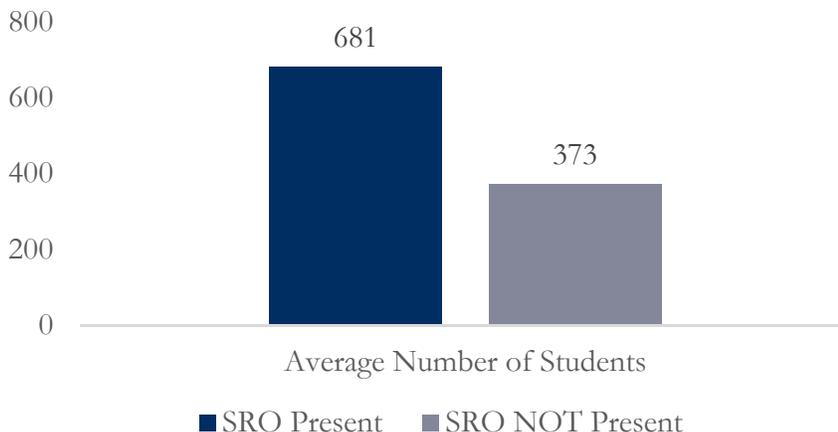
Figure 3. The percentage of Black, White, Asian and Latino students does not differ in schools with SROs versus schools without SROs.



Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

The effect of school size on the presence of SROs in schools was significant. The average number of students in schools with a SRO was significantly larger than the average number of students in schools without a SRO.

Figure 4. Schools with SROs present have significantly more students than schools without SROs present.



Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

Question 3: When comparing schools with and without SROs, what is the impact of the presence of SROs on school climate, exclusionary discipline and achievement?

Exclusionary Discipline

Relative risk analyses show that for Black, White, and Latino children, the presence of a SRO has a significant impact on their risk of being expelled. For these three groups, the presence of a SRO increases the chance that they will be expelled when compared to students of the same race in schools without SROs. Latino students, for example, are over two times more likely to be expelled from school where a SRO is present than a Latino child who attends a school where a SRO is not present.

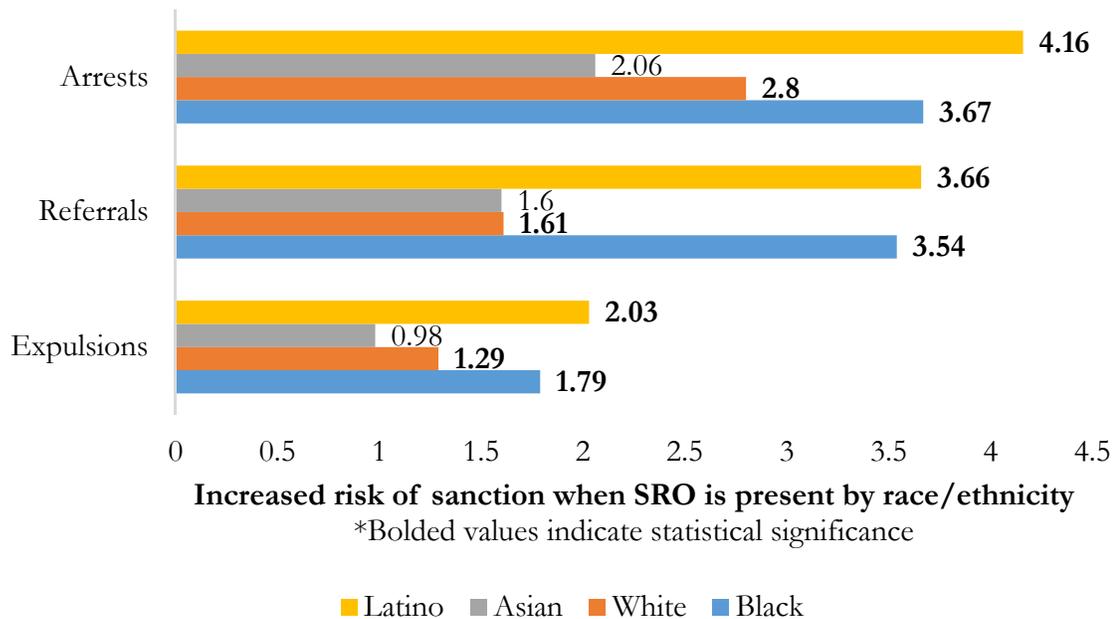
Similar patterns persist for referrals to law enforcement and arrests. While all student groups experienced an increased likelihood of referrals and arrests, there were clear disparities by race/ethnicity. Black and Latino students who are in a school with a SRO are over three and four times, respectively, more likely to be arrested or referred to law enforcement than Black or Latino children in schools without SROs. White students were 2.8 times more likely to be arrested in schools with SROs present than in schools without SROs present.

Because school administrators, not police officers, are responsible for issuing expulsions to students, our analyses showing that students are at greater risk of being expelled in schools that have SROs than in schools that do not have SROs indicates that schools with SROs are likely to have some other variable contributing to this increased risk. Our data set cannot speak to whether schools with SROs are asking that SROs participate in school discipline before it rises to the level of arrest or



whether an external variable is contributing to the relationship between presence of an SRO in schools and students experiencing greater risk of expulsion. A 2015 meta-analysis with seven effect sizes found that schools with SROs have significantly higher rates of exclusionary discipline and hypothesized that schools with SROs are more likely to create cultures of discipline.⁶⁸ Thus, while SROs may or may not be responsible for the students' increased risk of experiencing expulsion, most students face increased risk of exclusionary discipline when they attend a school with an SRO present.

Figure 5. Black and Latino students have significantly higher risk of being arrested or referred to law enforcement when a SRO is present when compared to Black, White, and Latino students in schools without SROs.



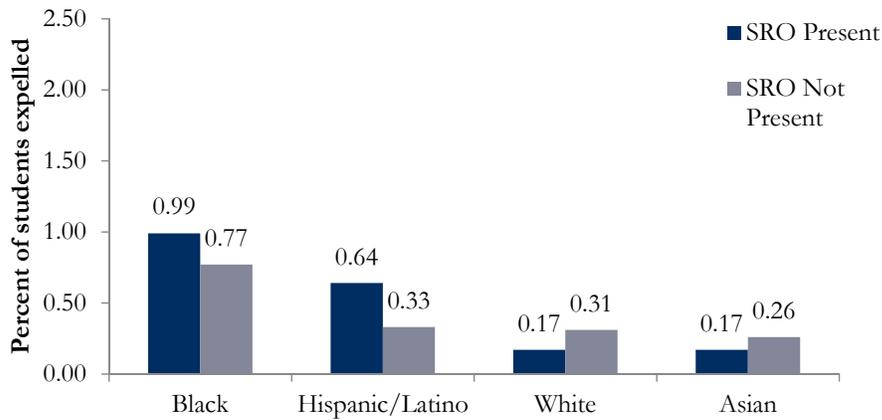
Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

We ran the following analyses to begin to understand the extent to which the increased risk students in schools with SROs face of expulsion, referral to law enforcement, and arrest is explained by the presence of SROs rather than being better explained by other related variables that have been known to impact school climate. To understand the impact of the presence of SROs rather than something else, we included total school enrollment count, percent of student populations enrolled in a school, and DRG as covariates in our models. From earlier analyses, we know that larger schools are more likely to have SROs, so we wanted to remove the possibility that differences in discipline simply reflect this effect. We would also imagine that schools with greater populations of students of specific racial and ethnic groups would discipline greater percentages of students from these groups, so in each model we adjusted for the percent of children in a school belonging to the racial/ethnic group being examined. Finally, Connecticut uses DRG designation to group schools according to similar community characteristics and resources. Research suggests that schools with higher levels of poverty often have higher levels of discipline, so including DRG in these analyses is a proxy measure to adjust for community resources.⁶⁹ Including these variables as covariates in our model allows us to draw conclusions that any statistically significant effect is the result of variance *not explained* by schools having more students (and thus more discipline), schools having greater representation from certain groups of students, or school resources. This gives us greater confidence that statistically significant differences may, in fact, be best explained by the presence or absence of SROs.

Our analyses revealed no statistically significant effects of SROs on the average percent of Black, Latino, White and Asian students expelled in schools. Regarding referrals to law enforcement, the only result that was found to be statistically significant once adjusting for school size, student body demographics, and DRG was the effect of SROs on discipline for Latino students. In schools with SROs, the percentage of Latino students referred to law enforcement was just over six times higher than that of Latino students in

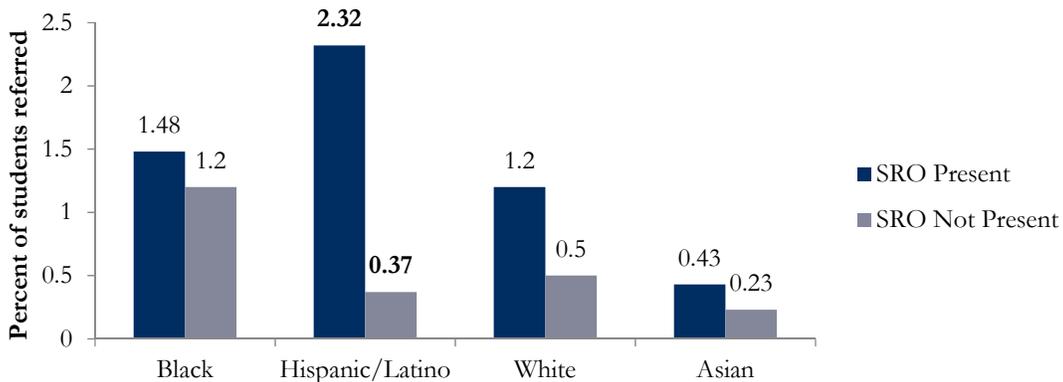
schools without SROs. For Black, White, and Asian students, all groups showed higher numbers of referrals when in schools where SROs were present, but this relationship may not be exclusively due to the presence of an SRO but by other factors. Similar effects were found for arrest rates for Black, White and Asian students. Latino students, on the other hand, were over six times more likely to be arrested in school if there was a SRO present.

Figure 6. The presence of SROs in schools did not significantly impact the percent of enrolled Black, Latino, White, and Asian students expelled at schools.



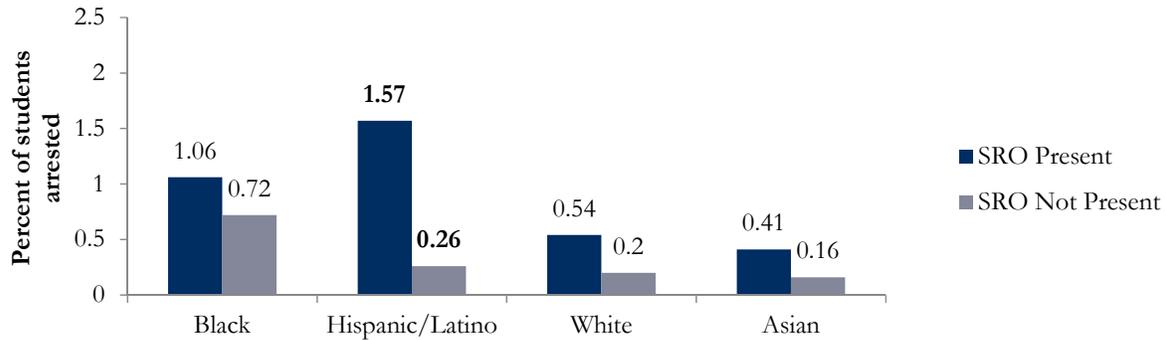
Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

Figure 7. The percent of Latino students referred to law enforcement in schools with SROs was six times higher than in schools without SROs.



Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

Figure 8. The percentage of Latino students arrested in schools with SROs was over six times higher than in schools without SROs.



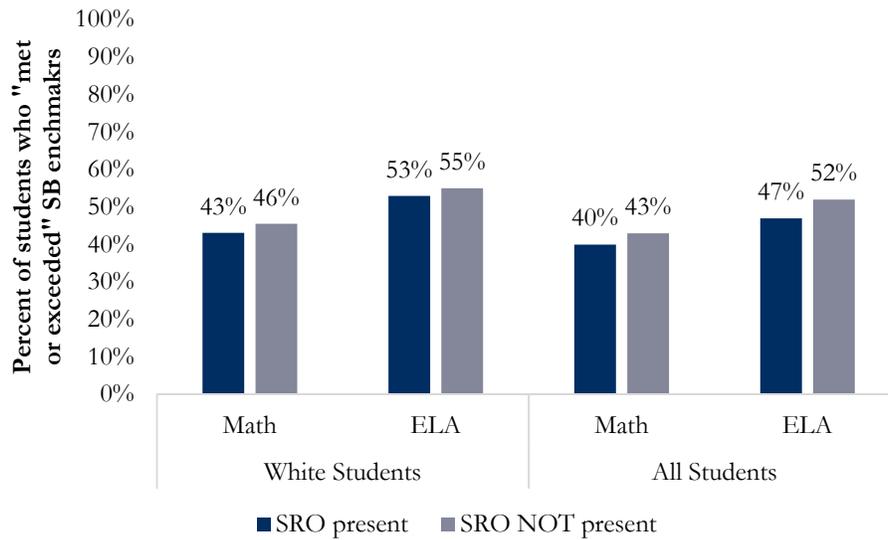
Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

The risk ratios showed that when not controlling for other variables that may impact school disciplinary climate, most student groups faced greater risk of expulsion, referral to law enforcement, and arrest if they attended a school with a SRO present than if they attended a school without a SRO present. When controlling for a few variables that could impact school discipline, we still find that the presence of SROs contributes significant variance to the percentage of Latino students referred to law enforcement and arrested. We will speculate upon this finding later in the report, but for now we provide evidence showing that some Connecticut students face increased discipline when they attend schools with school resource officers present, and the difference in discipline is not better explained by some other variable impacting school climate. While our data does not allow us to make causal conclusions, it suggests that school resource officers may uniquely contribute to disparities in school discipline for Connecticut’s Latino students.

Student Achievement and School Climate

There was no statistically significant effect of the presence of a SRO on the percentage of White or all students who scored at or above the benchmark on the Smarter Balance ELA and Math exams. The percentage of students who scored at or above each benchmark was slightly—but not significantly—higher in schools without a SRO present. This suggests that school resource officers do not have a significant positive or negative impact on students’ ability to learn, as is hypothesized in literature promoting or preventing the use of school resource officers.⁷⁰

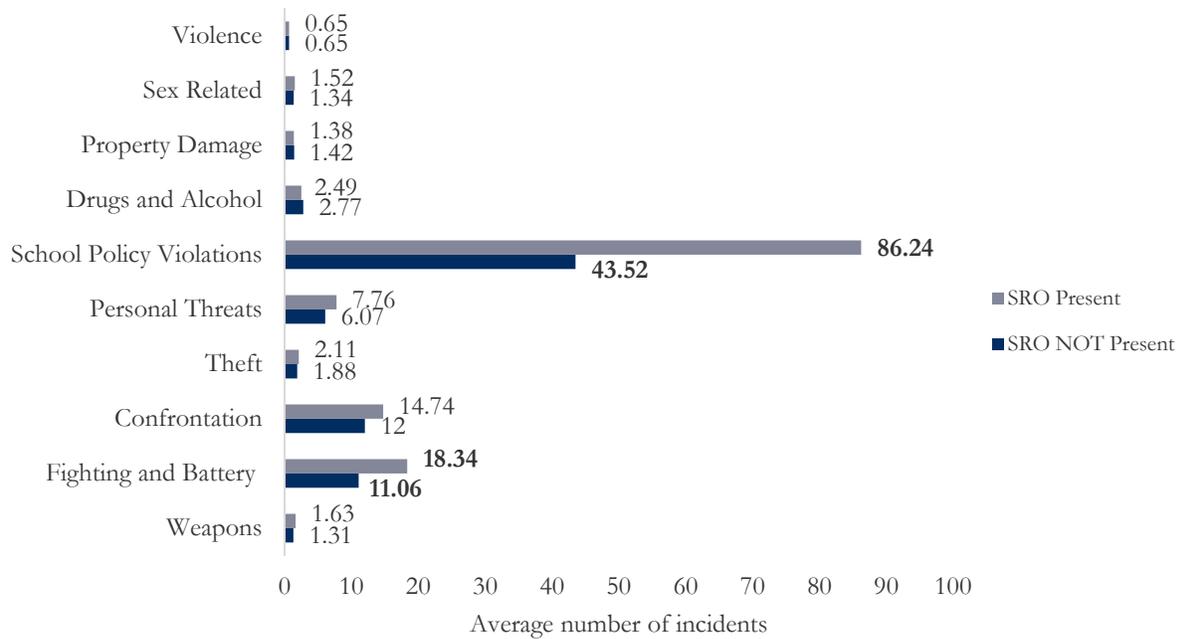
Figure 9. ELA and Math Smarter Balance scores are not significantly impacted by the presence of SROs in schools.



Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-2015 Smarter Balanced Test Scores as Reported on Edsight.ct.gov

The only two categories of school incidents in which the presence of a SRO has a significant effect are in the counts of school policy violations and fighting/battery incidences. In both instances, the presence of an SRO is related to increases in the average number of school policy violations and in the average number of fights. Further investigation shows that there are two outliers in the number of fights reported by schools with SROs that may have an impact on these finding (i.e., schools with an unusually high number of fights). Similarly, in schools with SROs, school policy violations are significantly higher than in schools without SROs. Although there are schools with outliers that pull up the average number of school policy violations, there are an equal number of outlier schools among schools with SROs present and schools without SROs present. Therefore, we conclude that the difference in the count of school policy violations reported in schools with SROs present is not due to a few outlier schools. Rather, the increased reporting of school policy violations among schools with SROs may be due to these schools imposing more disciplinary actions on students. It is possible that when a SRO is present to address very serious behaviors, school administrators have more time to report minor behaviors. It is also possible that SROs present mean that there are more eyes watching for behaviors to report. Finally, it is possible that schools with SROs have a more punitive school climate that leads to normal adolescent behaviors being punished. Our data cannot speak to which of these may explain the difference in reporting of school policy violations between schools with SROs and schools without SROs. The presence of an SRO does not appear to have a significant effect on the counts of violent, sexual, property damage, drug, personal threat, theft, confrontation and, weapons incidences.

Figure 10. Schools with SROs present have higher counts of fighting and school policy violations reported than schools without SROs present. Other types of incidences do not differ based on SROs.



Source: 2015-2016 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-2015 incident counts as reported on Edsight.ct.gov

Discussion

When looking at the prevalence of SROs in different DRGs, we anticipated that there would be more school resource officers in school districts with greater socioeconomic disadvantage because national scholarly literature has identified this relationship.⁷¹ We found a different pattern in Connecticut; the DRGs with the highest numbers of SROs were DRG B and DRG H, which are on opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. DRG I, which represents most of Connecticut’s urban centers, had a low percentage of schools with SROs present. This could be due to a wide range of factors including fiscal constraints like understaffed police departments⁷² and the presence of private security guards who may be used as a proxy in some schools for SROs or other school safety personnel.

Broadly speaking, more schools do not have an SRO than have an SRO, regardless of the grades present within a school. Generally, though, schools with younger cohorts of children are less likely to have SROs present than schools with high school aged children present. The presence of students of color, especially Black and Latino students, does not seem to have a significant impact on whether or not a school has an SRO. By far, the clearest difference in school characteristics between schools with and without SROs was the difference in school size. On average, schools with SROs are nearly twice as large as schools without SROs. The reasons for this are unclear, but schools with higher levels of perceived disorder are more likely to have an SRO present⁷³ and national research shows that larger schools (1,000 students or more) often have higher rates of disciplinary violations.⁷⁴

When looking at exclusionary discipline rates, the data tell a more complicated story. Initial relative risk analyses showed that for Black, White, and Latino students, being in a school with an SRO did increase risk of expulsion, arrest, and referral to law enforcement. Asian students, on the other hand, did not show a statistically significant increase in their rates of expulsion, referral or arrest. We also found disparities within risk of increased exclusionary discipline. For example, Black students in schools with SROs are over three times more likely to be arrested if they are in school with an SRO than a Black student in a school without an SRO. For White students, there is only a 1.61 times larger chance they are arrested. The pattern of increased relative risk of discipline in schools with SROs, combined with increasing racial and ethnic disparities in relative risk rates as the type of discipline becomes more punitive, suggests two things that should not be ignored and warrant future exploration. First, schools with SROs may have a different disciplinary climate than schools without SROs, and second, SROs appear to contribute to disproportionate minority contact with the justice system over and above the contribution of school disciplinary climate.

As discussed in the methods section, a relative risk analysis does not take into account many of the other factors that may impact discipline rates, like a generally more punitive school climate. To incorporate a few factors associated with disciplinary climate, our additional ANOVA analyses shows a slightly deeper story. When accounting for school size; the percentage of a school consisting of Black, White, Latino and Asian students; and DRG, we found slightly different impacts. The relationship between the presence of SROs

and expulsion rates across all races was not found to be statistically significant for any racial group. Our analyses show that students are at greater risk of being expelled in schools that have SROs than in schools that do not have SROs. But because school administrators, not police officers, are responsible for issuing expulsions to students, our finding may indicate that schools with SROs are likely to have some other variable contributing to this increased risk. Contributing variables could include the differences in school climate contributed by



school size, DRG, or increased percentage of students at a school, which we modeled out, or the difference in expulsions may be due to a factor we did not include in our model. For example, a 2015 meta-analysis found that schools with SROs have significantly higher rates of exclusionary discipline and hypothesized that schools with SROs are more likely to create cultures of discipline.⁷⁵ Similarly, we found that after adjusting for other factors that impact school discipline, the percent of Black, White, and Asian students referred to law enforcement and arrested did not significantly differ as a function of the presence of SROs in schools. Across these categories of students, we found evidence that greater percentages of students were referred to law enforcement and arrested in schools with SROs than in schools without SROs, but the ANOVA analysis indicated that these differences are not explained by the presence of SROs.

However, for Latino students, there appears to be a large and statistically significant impact of the presence of an SRO on the rates of arrest and referrals. In both instances, the percent of Latino students who were arrested or referred was six times higher in schools with SROs than schools without SROs. The increase in the rates of arrest and referral rates should be a cause for concern and indicate that deeper, more nuanced

investigation across time is necessary. Any arrest of a young person can be traumatic and have real impacts on their health and future success. Efforts to ensure that in-school arrests are only used in situations where an arrest is mandated by law or eliminated entirely is essential.⁷⁶ This is especially true of disparate impacts on certain racial/ethnic groups – especially Black and Latino youth who already experience high rates of discipline, despite national evidence that Black and Latino youth are not likely to misbehave more frequently than their White counterparts.⁷⁷

The results of our analysis of student achievement data were inconclusive. Due to high rates of missing and suppressed data, we could only analyze data for two categories of students – White students and all students in aggregate—making it impossible to make claims about racial/ethnic disparities. Furthermore, there seems to be, for both groups, no statistically significant impact of SRO presence in schools on overall ELA and Math test scores.

The rates of disciplinary incidences, on the other hand, tell a far more interesting story. Two categories of incidences exhibit a statistically significant difference when comparing schools with SROs to schools without SROs – school policy violations and fighting. Schools with SROs present are much more likely to report either of these incidences. It should be noted that for the fighting category of instances we found at least two schools where there were significant outliers in the schools that had SROs which could have some impact on the overall average. For both school policy violations and fighting, the reason for the increase is unclear. It is possible that in schools that hire SROs there are already more fights or more school policy violations occurring. Alternatively, it is possible that when a designated school safety person is present, more incidences that would have otherwise been ignored by teachers and administrators are addressed. This is an area that will require future analysis into the nature of the relationships. Finally, the presence of SROs seems to have little to no impact on drug/alcohol incidences or weapons incidences.

Conclusion

Overall, we find that school size is the most significant predictor of which schools will have SROs. Within schools that have SROs, we do not find evidence that SROs are associated with better academic outcomes for students, nor are they associated with worse academic outcomes for students. They also do not appear to statistically contribute to a measurably safer school climate in most cases. However, they may contribute to more students experiencing discipline for minor offenses such as wearing a hat in school or similar school policy violations. We do find that students attending schools with SROs are at greater risk of exclusionary discipline overall. The presence of SROs may uniquely contribute to Latino students in Connecticut being arrested and referred to law enforcement. Both of these findings warrant more precise study using longitudinal data that allow for causal analyses, and we also encourage the State Department of Education and State Board of Education to study this topic so that they can examine patterns without data suppression and availability impacting analyses. However, this analysis should give schools reason to pause and review their own disciplinary data before deciding whether they want to employ or retain a school resource officer.

Policy Recommendations

The Connecticut General Assembly should request a study on:

- a. The presence and prevalence of SROs versus security guards across the state;
- b. The use and content of MOUs and;
- c. The impact on exclusionary discipline rates by race, gender and disability status.

While analyses like this one can show general trends, our study does not allow for causal conclusions, nor does it paint a nuanced picture that incorporates students' experiences with SROs. Because of data suppression rules and how long it takes to obtain data, the data presented above do not tell the complete up-to-date story. To be able to ensure that school districts are informed about what the actual impacts of the presence of SROs are, deeper investigation is needed. Areas that specifically need exploration are the impact of SROs on Latino students and the reasons for the large difference in the number of school policy violations between schools that do have SROs and schools that do not. Understanding why schools with SROs have an increased risk of discipline when compared to schools without SROs is also important for understanding which policy changes Connecticut could make to create safer, more developmentally supportive school experiences for children. This study should include interviews or surveys with current students in schools with and without SROs present, teachers, administrators and SROs themselves to represent the entirety of the experience of policing in schools.

All school districts with school resource officers present should have clear, publically accessible memoranda of understanding pursuant to Public Act 15-168.⁷⁸

Successful SRO programs have clearly defined roles and continuous support and funding.⁷⁹ In Connecticut, school districts can achieve the first requirement—clearly defined roles—by implementing MOUs between the school district and the police department outlining the expected roles of the SRO. This is an opportunity to narrow the role of SROs to focusing on criminal acts and prevent their involvement in non-criminal acts and school policy violations. There has not been a public review of the MOUs since 2013,⁸⁰ and there is currently no requirement that the MOUs be publically accessible on school district websites or another centralized location. This hinders the ability of all school stakeholders to hold their school districts and police departments accountable to the agreed upon MOUs or edit them to include things like moratoriums on SROs engagement with school policy violations and other non-criminal acts.

All school districts with SROs present should be required to include questions regarding student experiences of school resource officers in school climate surveys.

Student voice is an essential part of education policy. Young people experience the impacts of the policies that are made in Hartford and beyond, making them some of our best experts on what actual relationships between SROs and students are like. Currently, there is no real way to measure student experiences of SROs in the state. All school districts are required to create and administer school climate surveys, while many focus on experiences of bullying and general “safety”, the presence of a SRO has some impact on school climate as we have seen above. Ensuring that there is an outlet for youth to give feedback about their experiences with SROs will give school districts and policy makers a clearer picture of the impact of SROs in schools.

All school districts should be required to include information on the legal rights of students in their student handbooks and to review these rights with parents on an annual basis.

The United States Supreme Court determined in *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* that—unlike in a workplace, home, or vehicle—in a school, school officials may search a student’s person or possession if the school has “reasonable suspicion” of illegal or dangerous activity as opposed to court-determined probable cause.⁸¹ This means that school officials need only consider “factual and practical considerations of everyday life on which reasonable and prudent men, not legal technicians, act” (p. 695).⁸² When considering electronic devices and student data, schools in Connecticut have vastly differing privacy policies, and school officials often ignore this already lowered legal standard.⁸³ To appropriately balance children’s Fourth Amendment right to security against unreasonable searches and seizures⁸⁴ and Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination with concerns regarding school safety,⁸⁵ schools should report in an accessible and widely-distributed document their written policies regarding:

- student’s rights when being questioned by a school official,
- student’s rights when being questioned by a School Resource Officer,
- student’s rights regarding providing voluntary consent to a search,
- student’s rights regarding search and seizure of their body and physical property,
- student’s rights regarding search and seizure of their data property, and
- school protocol and student’s rights during a random search.

Once Connecticut’s working group studying search and seizure of student’s personal electronic devices has concluded their work and made recommendations to the Connecticut General Assembly,⁸⁶ schools should integrate best-practice recommendations into their official school policies and student handbooks. Furthermore, because children and juveniles may not have the power to demand respect for their rights⁸⁷ or may not have the cognitive or socioemotional capacity to understand their rights,⁸⁸ schools should create processes to ensure that parents understand the lowered threshold for search and seizure on school grounds as well as school policies surrounding questioning, search, and seizure. Whenever possible, schools should secure parental permission before engaging in questioning, search, or seizure.

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