CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

PROTECTING OR PUSHING OUT: THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN CONNECTICUT

SAMAILA ADELAIYE, PH.D., RESEARCH & POLICY FELLOW
LAUREN RUTH, PH.D., RESEARCH & POLICY DIRECTOR

DECEMBER 2021

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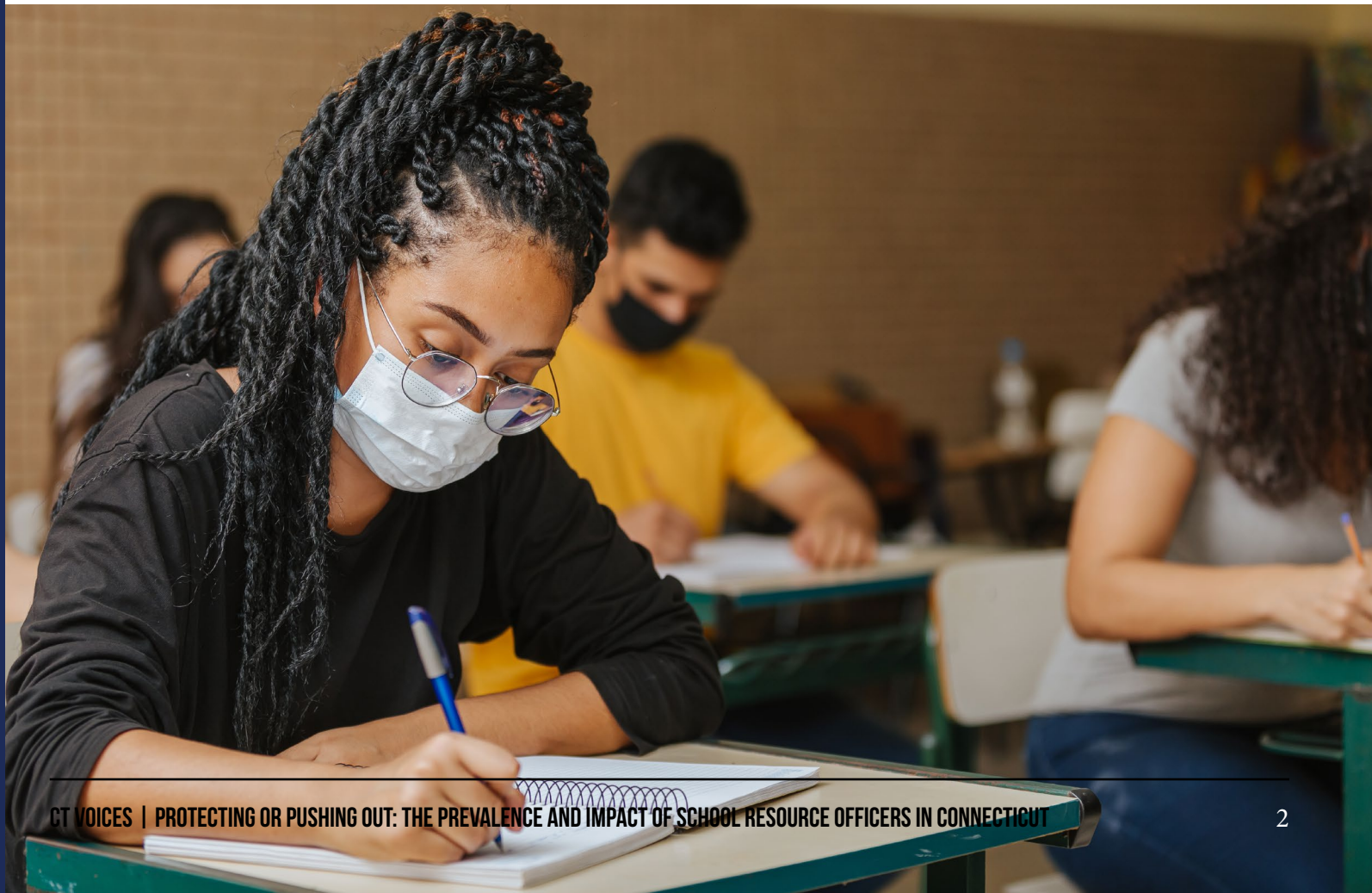


INTRODUCTION

Sworn law officers, called School Resource Officers (SROs), have been a regular part of many Connecticut schools since the late 1990s.[1] They have also been present in many schools across the United States since the 1950s, when the first program began in Flint, MI.[2] Recently, conversations about the impact of police in schools have swept the country, with passionate arguments both for and against police officers being stationed in schools.

Proponents have touted the benefits of SROs, pointing to how they can increase youth diversion, mentor students, and teach students about police interactions.[3] There are even be testimonials and viral videos of individual students expressing their love for SROs.[4] This may lead to the erroneous view that this is every student's experience and the representation of every school resource officer. As the country continues on a path of growing scrutiny of the police, reflections on racism in policing and its historical roots have opened a larger national discussion on their impact on people of color. Attention has been drawn to how in some parts of the country, the police were developed during slavery and were used to enforce slavery and reduce the risk of uprisings.[5] The fiery debate on SROs and how they affect students, especially Black and Brown students, should come as no surprise.

Municipal, state, and federal policymakers are often deadlocked in these discussions. Federally, following the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, the Trump presidential administration prioritized SRO positions when selecting Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant recipients.[6] On the other side of the federal policy debate, federal legislators introduced the "Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools" Act in 2020. The bill sought to prohibit the use of federal funds for maintaining police in schools and help schools hire more counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other behavioral health support staff.[7] The legislative champions re-introduced the bill in 2021 with seven new Senate co-sponsors and 10 new House co-sponsors.[8]

During this time, several states introduced bills to remove police from schools, including Maryland,[9] New Hampshire,[10] and Vermont.[11] Several cities have already made changes to their policies surrounding police stationed in schools, including Chicago, Denver, New York, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Portland.[12] The Connecticut General Assembly introduced seven bills related to school policing in 2021. These bills spanned removing SROs from schools, to providing expanded training for SROs, to increasing funding from SROs.

Despite the Connecticut legislature's heated debate regarding SROs, there remains a small body of research about the impact of police in Connecticut schools. In 2019, Connecticut Voices for Children (CT Voices) published a report titled *Policing Connecticut's Hallways: The Prevalence and Impact of School Resource Officers in Connecticut.*[13] This report examined data from the 2015-2016 school year pertaining to exclusionary discipline, school incidence reports, and standardized test scores, comparing student outcomes in schools with SROs to student outcomes in schools without SROs. At the time, it was the third report to examine the impact of police officers in Connecticut schools.

In addition to this 2019 CT Voices report, an ACLU Connecticut report from 2008,[14] and a 2018 report by the Connecticut General Assembly Office of Legislative Research,[15] two more studies narrowing the impact in Connecticut were published in 2020 and 2021: one by the Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate and one by the Center for Public Integrity.

A 2020 report by Connecticut's Office of the Child Advocate regarding calls made by Waterbury Public Schools to the police found that during the 2018-2019 school year, teachers and administrators in Waterbury called the police about 162 children in grades PreK-8.[16] Fifty-two percent of the children reported were ages eight and under, 41 percent of calls were related to child mental health concerns, 18 percent of calls resulted in children being arrested, and many of these children had documented special needs.

In 2021, the Center for Public Integrity analyzed data about referrals to police from the federal Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) from the 2017-2018 school year for every state in the country, including Connecticut.[17] This report found that nationally, 4.5 out of every 1000 students were referred to police. Connecticut fell below the national average with a rate of 3.9 per 1000. In 46 states, the rate of referring Black students to the police was higher than the overall state rate. In Connecticut, it was twice as high as the state average at 7.8 Black students per 1000. The study also found that in every state, students with disabilities were referred to law enforcement at a higher rate than the overall state average. Connecticut referred students with disabilities to the police 2.3 times more than the overall state average, at 8.9 students with disabilities per 1000. While Connecticut has made progress in reducing the use of exclusionary discipline, this study shows that schools disproportionately rely on the police to discipline Black students and students with disabilities.

While the Office of the Child Advocate and Center for Public Integrity reports both provide important information about policing in Connecticut schools, they include outcomes from schools with police stationed within the school as well as schools that call the local police department to dispatch an officer. Thus, they do not explicitly study the impact of School Resource Officers on student outcomes. This 2021 report by CT Voices seeks to further build the minimal literature on the impact of SROs in Connecticut. We replicate our 2019 report using newer data from the 2017-2018 school year and adjust a few of our methods to provide cleaner, more conservative estimates of the impacts of SROs on students. These updated findings can be compared to our findings from the 2015-2016 school year to begin to illuminate trends over time.

THE RATIONALE FOR THIS UPDATED REPORT

The Connecticut Voices for Children team chose to update our report about SROs both to continue to build the state's knowledge base and to provide a newer tool for community advocates.

From a methodological perspective, examining more than one year of data allows us to tease out whether the statistically significant relationships we saw within the 2015-2016 data were a product of the particular year or whether they are stable over time. When we see the same pattern occurring within different datasets, this provides convergent evidence that a relationship is real and predictable. Thus, if this report once again finds that the presence of SROs in schools is related to increased exclusionary discipline but not to increased academic outcomes or decreased incidents in schools, we can draw more robust conclusions about the relationship between police in schools and student outcomes. For comparative purposes, we review findings from our 2019 report in the Data Analysis section.

From a policy and advocacy perspective, the number of bills introduced during the 2021 legislative session regarding SROs makes it clear that people in Connecticut feel strongly about SROs. This report provides advocates and policymakers with information to assist in creating policy decisions. The findings within this report are based on Connecticut's data and seen across multiple years. Reflecting on these findings will help policymakers make sound policy decisions *for Connecticut* based on Connecticut-specific data trends. Advocates in impacted communities can use the findings from this report to advocate for policies that best serve them and the youth in their schools.

In Connecticut, a group of young advocates is leading the push to recognize the harmful impacts of SROs on students of color and mitigate these impacts by removing police from schools and increasing funding for behavioral health support staff. Many of these advocates are young people of color whose lives have been personally impacted by over-policing.[18] After CT Voices analyzed these data, we held a data and policy conversation (called a data walk) with young advocates from the Community First Coalition and the Connecticut Justice Advisors. These young people helped provide context regarding our quantitative findings as well as policy recommendations to better help Connecticut schools meet the needs of students and reduce the unfair criminalization of Black and Latino/a/x students in Connecticut schools.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND CONTEXT

KEY FINDINGS FROM NATIONAL RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN 2019-2021

The 2019 CT Voices report on SROs included a thorough literature review, so we encourage readers to reference that report for additional context.[19] Since the publication of that report, new national research has been released regarding attitudes toward SROs, the impact of SROs on learning, school climate, exclusionary discipline, and the disproportionate impact of SROs on students of color.

Attitudes Toward SROs

In the summer of 2021, Lancaster School District in California commissioned a survey of students, parents, and staff.[20] Seventy-five percent of parents and school district staff surveyed indicated that they supported having armed deputies in schools. In contrast, less than 33 percent of students supported having deputies in schools; most were undecided. These differences in attitude suggest a lack of awareness or understanding on the part of adults regarding how young people feel about police in their schools. Thus, while policymakers should continue to consider the attitudes of school staff and parents, they cannot assume that these attitudes reflect the feelings of the people closest to problems in schools—the students. Policymakers must seek out ways to assess student attitudes to pass more informed policies.

Impact of SROs on Learning, School Climate, and Exclusionary Discipline

A 2021 study of the impact of SROs in North Carolina schools that was similar in design to the study conducted by CT Voices, diverged from our previous findings in that it did link the presence of SROs to a decrease in violent school incidents.[21] Convergent with the findings in Connecticut, the same study did not find evidence that SROs in schools are linked with positive learning outcomes. It additionally found that SROs in schools were linked with increased suspensions, expulsions, transfers, and referrals to law enforcement, suggesting that SROs exist in schools with more punitive climates *and* contribute to those climates by increasing the school to prison pipeline.

While the CT Voices report examined the impact of SROs based on the presence or absence of an SRO in a school, the presence of an SRO occurs in degrees. In some districts, one SRO spends time at many schools throughout the week. Other districts have more than one SRO in a single school. A 2019 study conducted in Texas sought to look at the impact of SROs on students based upon the degree to which SROs were present in schools, as measured by the amount of federal funding for police in schools through COPS grants.[22] The study finds that increased COPS funding was associated with *reduced* student achievement because of increased school discipline. Tying these findings to the literature on economic returns from education, the authors estimate that the impact of police in schools increasing discipline would cost Texas children $105 million in lost potential earnings over time in combination with an aggregate cost of $162 million to pay for these police.

An additional 2020 study that sought to understand the impact of SROs as a matter of degree examined California schools that increased SRO staffing hours per week to those that did not increase SRO staffing hours.[23] Their analysis found that schools with increased SRO staffing hours reported an

increased number of incidents in schools and increased disciplinary action in response to incidents. While these increases were present for Black, Latino/a/x, and white students, they were higher for Black and Latino/a/x students than for white students.

Disproportionate Impact of SROs on Children of Color
Despite the previously mentioned studies varying school location, methodologies, and how they operationalize the presence of SROs, one thing they all converge upon is that SROs have a disproportionately negative impact on children of color—particularly Black and Latino/a/x students.

The 2021 study conducted in Lancaster, California, found that Black students were disproportionately more likely to be stopped by law enforcement on school campuses.[24] While Black students made up only 20 percent of the high schools' enrollment within the analysis, Black students made up 60 percent of on-campus interactions with police. Additionally, Black students made up a disproportionate share of reasonable suspicion contacts with police in Lancaster schools.

The 2021 study of North Carolina schools found that while all students experienced increased exclusionary discipline in schools with SROs, the SRO influence on school discipline resulted in the harsher treatment of Black and Latino/a/x students than white students.[25] A 2020 national study on the impact of SROs in schools that utilized CRDC data from the 2013-2014 school year found that SROs in schools increase school arrest rates, and it's particularly salient for Black students in the country.[26] This study linked the presence of an SRO in a school to an increased arrest rate of 1.2 Black students per 1000, .48 Latino/a/x students per 1000, and .38 white students per 1000.

A 2020 study that surveyed 73 SROs from two school districts—one suburban and one urban—found that the way SROs perceived threats in these districts varied.[27] In the predominantly white and suburban district, SROs expressed more concern about external threats. In the urban district with more Black students, SROs expressed a greater tendency to view students themselves as the threat. This difference suggests that racial stereotypes about communities where SROs work strongly influence how SROs perceive threats. This is very likely to influence SRO behavior toward students, resulting in disproportionately directing students of color into the criminal legal system.

CHANGES OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS IMPACT STUDENTS

Students have Experienced Trauma Amidst a Pandemic
The research we reviewed resoundingly found that Black and Latino/a/x students are more likely to be pushed out of school and into the criminal legal system than white students when SROs are present in schools. The COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate these disparities.

Across Connecticut, Latino/a/x residents were most likely to have contracted COVID-19 and Black residents were most likely to have died from COVID-19. This suggests that Black and Latino/a/x children are more likely than white and Asian students in Connecticut to have suffered the trauma of watching a family member hurt by the virus.[28] Additionally, due to the economic shutdown, Black and Latino/a/x workers were more likely to lose employment and income than white workers, and workers

with children were more likely to lose employment income than workers without children during the pandemic.[29] Families losing income during the pandemic has resulted in thousands of children across the state experiencing food and housing insecurity over the past year and a half.[30] Students who experience food and housing insecurity are at a greater risk of poor academic achievement and delayed graduation,[31] both of which may influence behavior in the classroom.

As schools worked to continue educating students despite being physically shut down, Black and Latino/a/x students in Connecticut were more likely to fall behind.[32] Black and Latino/a/x students disproportionately had schools cancel classes and send paper materials home as a learning tool compared to white students in Connecticut.[33] Black and Latino/a/x students whose classes were taught online disproportionately did not have access to computers and the internet compared to white students in Connecticut.[34] Trauma,[35] economic insecurity,[36] and falling behind in learning[37] are all associated with acting out behaviors.

Controlled experiments have found that teachers and administrators are more likely to punish Black students than white students for the same misbehaviors, and the punishments are more severe.[38] Given that these disparities exist when Black and Latino/a/x students are not experiencing contextual factors that may prompt acting out, CT Voices is concerned that Black and Latino/a/x students will come to school with greater levels of need than they did in 2019, and they will be met with handcuffs instead of help.

Students have Experienced Racial Trauma

In addition to the trauma students have experienced as a result of the coronavirus and economic shutdown; students are also likely to have experienced trauma from witnessing the public murders of numerous Black individuals at the hands of the police. Protests spread across the country in response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, Daniel Prude, Manuel Ellis, Andre Hill, Daunte Wright, and over 175 others,[39] and schools must adjust to account for the impact of this moment on Black and Latino/a/x students. Witnessing police violence—whether in-person or on video—can lead to anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for Black and Latino/a/x students.[40] Individual and systemic racism and the resulting need for hyper-vigilant behaviors to reduce the risk of violence influence individuals' mental and physical health in impacted communities,[41] including students. Educators must work to understand the impact that having a police presence in schools could have on the learning and health of students traumatized by racism.

Students' Lives Are Impacted by Political Divisions

In response to recorded and publicized police violence, police departments across the country have come under increased scrutiny. Connecticut is no exception. Waterbury schools and police are currently under scrutiny following a fight between two middle school boys in September.[42] Videos posted on Facebook show a police officer kneeling over a Black boy while handcuffing the boy. Coupled with the data released from the Office of the Child Advocate regarding the Waterbury School District placing hundreds of calls to the police regarding young children,[43] a growing number of community

members are expressing concern about the over-policing of students in Waterbury schools.

Within the Connecticut General Assembly, conversations regarding police violence took the form of passage of a sweeping police accountability bill[44] that passed almost entirely along party lines. The bill incentivizes creating alternatives to policing in municipalities, creates mechanisms to evaluate police officers' fitness to serve, increases transparency around policing, limits police power, and establishes accountability toward injured residents through a civil cause of action. This last piece, creating a mechanism for injured parties to sue officers who knowingly broke the law, sparked controversy across party lines.[45] While officers and critics claim that the law makes police officers' jobs more difficult, proponents of the bill called out the racism in defending immunity within a system built from slavery.[46]

Simultaneously, Connecticut, like many other states in the country, is engaged in (often partisan) conversations about teaching critical race theory in schools.[47] These conversations and their intersections with racism and policing are not lost on students. During a roundtable discussion with Senator Chris Murphy, Middletown student Pilar Brooks said that she believed some white people didn't want students to learn about racism because it threatens their sense of identity and power.[48] Students see that protests against critical race theory began shortly after protests over the killing of George Floyd.[49] They understand the connection between protests about police violence and backlash against anti-racism movements. Students in Connecticut told Senator Murphy that American history taught in schools makes white people feel comfortable.[50]

As students return to school carrying big traumas and engaging in big conversations, we must ask ourselves whether current policies regarding police in schools reflect the desire to make white people feel comfortable at the expense of Black and Latino/a/x students.

DATA ANALYSIS

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE 2019 CT VOICES REPORT ON SROS

In 2019, CT Voices conducted a study regarding SROs in Connecticut that sought to explore the prevalence of SROs in the state, the placement of SROs, and the impact of SROs. We ran statistical analyses using data from the 2015-2016 CRDC and EdSight to explore these questions. For comparative purposes, we summarize the findings of that report below. The report focused on three questions.

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

We found that statewide, 24 percent of schools had an SRO present at least some of the time. This means that more schools did not have an SRO than did have an SRO.

We examined the presence of SROs across DRGs as a proxy for community characteristics. CSDE assigned districts to DRGs based on the size and wealth of the community. Districts in DRG A and B represent some of the wealthiest communities in the state, while DRGs H and I represent some of the most under-resourced districts.

In the SY 2015-2016 data, we found a significant difference in the DRGs where SROs were most present. SROs were most present in DRGs B and H and least present in DRGs E and F. Looking at a graph of the data formed a "U" shape where SROs were most present in the second wealthiest and second most under-resourced districts.

2. Statewide, are there differences between the characteristics of schools that have SROs versus schools that do not have SROs?

We found a significant difference in the presence of SROs in schools based on the age of students in the school. Schools with young children—those in preschool and kindergarten—were less likely to have SROs than schools with older students—those in 9th and 12th grade.

We also found a significant difference in the presence of SROs based on the size of the school. Schools with SROs were, on average, almost twice as large as schools without SROs.

In the SY 2015-2016 data, we did not find a significant difference in students' racial and ethnic makeup in schools with SROs versus schools without SROs. The average percent of Asian, Black, Latino/a/x, and white students in schools with SROs and schools without SROs differed only by about one percent.

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?

Exclusionary Discipline

We examined differences in exclusionary discipline as it varied by the presence of SROs using two different types of statistical analyses. First, we used relative risk analyses to examine whether Black, Latino/a/x, Asian, and white students in schools with SROs face a greater risk of experiencing expulsion, referral to law enforcement, and arrest than students in schools without SROs. We found that across all three categories of exclusionary discipline (expulsion, referral, and arrest), Black, Latino/a/x, and white students experienced a statistically significantly greater risk of experiencing discipline in schools with SROs than in schools without SROs. SROs do not issue expulsions, though—school administrators do—suggesting that schools with SROs may have another variable that contributes to a greater amount of disciplinary action, such as more student surveillance or more punitive environments.

Additionally, we ran univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) analyses to better isolate the degree to which SROs contributed to greater discipline over and above other variables that may impact discipline. We adjusted these analyses for school size, DRG, and the demographic makeup of the schools when examining differences. Once we adjusted analyses for these factors, the percentage of students expelled did not differ significantly in schools that have SROs and schools that do not have SROs. However, the percent of students referred to law enforcement and arrested was higher for all students and statistically significantly higher for Latino/a/x students in schools that had SROs compared to schools that did not have SROs.

School Climate

If not the main reason communities station the police in schools, a primary reason is to keep students safe. Police in schools are responsible for ensuring that outside intruders don't come in and threaten students and for ensuring that students do not threaten each other or school staff. To begin to understand if the police actually do keep schools safer, we analyzed the average number of incidents reported in schools with SROs compared to schools without SROs.

We did not find statistically significant differences in the average counts of violence, sex-related incidents, property damage, drug and alcohol violations, personal threats, theft, confrontation, or weapons incidents in schools with SROs versus those without SROs. On average, we found that schools with SROs had significantly higher average numbers of school policy violations and fighting/battery. These findings further suggest that, on average, schools employing SROs may be more likely to have different—possibly more punitive—climates than schools that do not employ SROs.

Academic Achievement

Physical safety and emotional safety, while related, are theoretically different concepts. It is possible that students feel safer when an SRO is present, even though the average number of harmful incidents doesn't differ in schools with SROs and schools without SROs. Emotional safety is a precursor to

learning.[51] If students feel more emotionally safe in schools with an SRO present, we'd expect to see higher levels of academic achievement in schools with an SRO present than in schools without SROs present.

We did not find statistically significant differences in academic achievement, measured using Smarter Balanced English Language Arts (ELA) and math scores. Students in schools with SROs had similar average standardized test scores as students in schools without SROs.

In sum, the 2019 CT Voices report did not find a measurable positive impact of SROs on learning or safety. We did detect a measurable negative impact of SROs on exclusionary discipline and increasing the school to prison pipeline, which was particularly noticeable for Latino/a/x students.

METHODS

DATA SOURCES

We used three primary data sources for the analysis in this report.

1. 2017-2018 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)
2. 2017-2018 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) school year reports, accessed from EdSight.ct.gov
3. 2015 CSDE District Reference Group (DRG) designations

The CRDC has been collecting key education and civil rights data in US public schools since 1968.[52] 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 must report to the federal government on issues such as exclusionary discipline, teacher experience, and enrollment in advanced courses.

There is no state-level public reporting on SRO presence in Connecticut, so we used data from the CRDC website. The data is from the 2017-2018 school year. While this data is from three years ago, it reflects the most current published data.[53]

EdSight is a state repository of school-, state-, and district-level education data taken from public school districts in Connecticut. We used EdSight for data on school incidents and academic performance. For the state of Connecticut, Edsight is the primary source of these data points. In the spirit of reanalyzing the same variables as our previous reports, we were unable to find an alternative data source that quantified the same indicators.

DRG designations group school districts according to similar community characteristics and resources. We used the 2015 CSDE DRG designations.[54] Our dataset included data from charter schools where possible. Still, we should note that charter schools are their own district, so any analyses where we include District Reference Groups do not include charter schools or special schools for children in the State's care.

In some cases, where the populations of students are small enough to make them identifiable, federal student privacy laws mandate that access to data on these students be protected. The State Department of Education does this through a practice called data suppression. Data suppression is a process of protecting data on students by displaying an asterisk (*) instead of a numerical value when the value is small enough that individual students may be identifiable through the data. When the value in a category is more than zero but less than five, the CSDE suppresses the data. With this suppression policy, we were sometimes unable to have complete data on some categories.

Where possible, we disaggregated data by race/ethnicity to capture the conditional impact of SROs. Where possible, we used the data from the CRDC to supplement some of the data that is suppressed

via EdSight. We used the missing data imputation model in STATA to estimate the values in such cases where the data was missing, using a multivariate normal distribution (MVN) method.[55] By doing this, we could include schools with suppressed data in our analysis. All analyses were conducted in STATA, release 14.[56]

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Our analysis included t-tests, ANOVA, risk ratio analyses, and regressions. In describing our results, we refer to findings as statistically significant, which indicates our confidence that a result isn't due purely to chance. We use the conventional threshold level of 95 percent confidence interval for all our analyses in this work. Thus, we do not report it as a statistically significant relationship where the findings do not fall within this confidence interval. In other words, since we cannot confidently say that the results are not likely to be due to chance, we cannot argue that we find evidence of a relationship.

Because our analysis focuses on a slice in time, replicating our 2015-2016 school year analysis using 2017-2018 data provides an extra layer of confidence over and above statistical significance. Findings that correspond with our previous analysis will indicate that the pattern seen within the data exists beyond a particular point in time, a particular cohort of students, and particular SROs. Thus, while the schools that employ SROs may have changed, while the students interacting with SROs may have changed, while the policies guiding student behavior and SRO behavior may have changed, and while the individual SROs may have changed, the pattern we see in the student-SRO interactions exists over and above these other variables.

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

We conducted a one-way ANOVA to see if there was a relationship between DRG and the number of schools that recorded having an SRO. Statistical significance will indicate differences in the prevalence of SROs based on DRG classifications, and these differences are not by chance. We also used a t-test to evaluate this relationship, comparing the numerical DRG values for the schools with SROs and those without. For this, the numerical values for DRG are in alphabetical order, with DRG A = 1 and DRG I= 9. A statistically significant t-test suggests that the mean DRG value for schools with SROs is different than for schools without SROs and that this relationship is unlikely to be due to chance.

Question 2: Are there differences between the characteristics of schools that have SROs versus schools that do not have SROs?

We performed several chi-square tests 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. We also looked at race as a predictor of SRO presence. To better understand the role of student demographics on SRO presence, we performed a series of ANOVAs to determine whether schools with and without SROs differed in the percentage of students of different races/ethnic groups. We ran ANOVAs comparing the average percentage of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino/a/x,

white, and Asian students attending those schools.[57] We included covariates in our analysis to make sure we were capturing the said relationship. We include controls for DRG classification and total student enrollment in the ANOVA analysis of the relationship between the presence of SROs and the average percentage of students in schools identifying as a race/ethnicity. These represent factors that have been indicated to possibly explain the presence of sworn law enforcement on school campuses.

For grade level, a chi-square test allows us to see whether assigning SROs to schools is independent of the presence of a grade level. A significant effect indicates that there are more or fewer schools with a particular grade level present employing an SRO than we would expect if there was no relationship. We also ran regression analysis using the same covariates as our analyses of SROs impact on the exclusionary discipline to test this relationship.

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

To examine the relationship between the presence of SROs and the use of exclusionary discipline, we look at three main areas. We consider arrests, referrals to law enforcement, and expulsions. We performed a relative risk analysis to understand the likelihood that the presence of an SRO increases the risk that students will face this form of discipline. We were able to break this down by race to examine the impact of SROs on the likelihood of these forms of discipline for Asian, Black, Latino/a/x, and white students. We acknowledge that this may not be the best tool for inferring causal relationships. Still is reflects the observed differences, and before digging deeper, this gives us a preliminary analysis of the probability of exclusionary discipline for both groups of schools. However, it does not take into account other possible factors that may be driving these results. It will thus require alternative analysis to infer a causal relationship.

We performed ANOVA analysis with continuous covariates to dig deeper into these analyses, comparing the percentages of students who face exclusionary discipline in schools with and without SRO presence. For these analyses, we included controls for school size and DRG, which have been determined to influence both the presence of SROs and exclusionary discipline. Including them in our analyses increases our ability to test whether SROs affects exclusionary discipline after removing the differences better accounted for by DRG classification and school size. This way, we are more confident that the presence of an SRO is the driving factor when we find a relationship.

School Climate and Achievement

For school climate, we have considered the number of incidents that occur in the school. We thus consider the relationship between the presence of SROs and the average count of school incidents. We use linear regressions to test the relationship for these analyses, and like our analyses for exclusionary discipline, we include controls for DRG and school size.

For achievement, we analyze math and English Language Arts (ELA) Smarter Balanced test scores for white students and the general student population. This is because a significant amount of the data regarding other racial/ethnic groups of students was suppressed or simply unavailable. We use

linear regressions to compare the percentage of students who met or exceeded the Smarter Balanced assessment benchmarks. We only tested SROs' impact on Smarter Balanced performance for all students and white students due to large amounts (>45 percent) of data suppression for students belonging to other racial/ethnic groups. Our analyses include controls for DRG and school size.

We used a missing data imputation model for incidents and Smarter Balanced test performance to calculate accurate estimates despite data suppression. Even when we used the missing data imputation model, the amount of data missing did not allow us to confidently analyze the impact of SROs on other racial/ethnic groups.

Additionally, we safeguarded our analysis against district-specific outliers by clustering our standard errors. This way, we know that our results are not driven by district-specific factors not captured in our model. Given our statistical choices to use imputation for missing data, not analyze data where more than 45 percent of cases were suppressed, and to use clustering of standard errors, we are confident that our findings present a conservative estimate of impact.

RESULTS

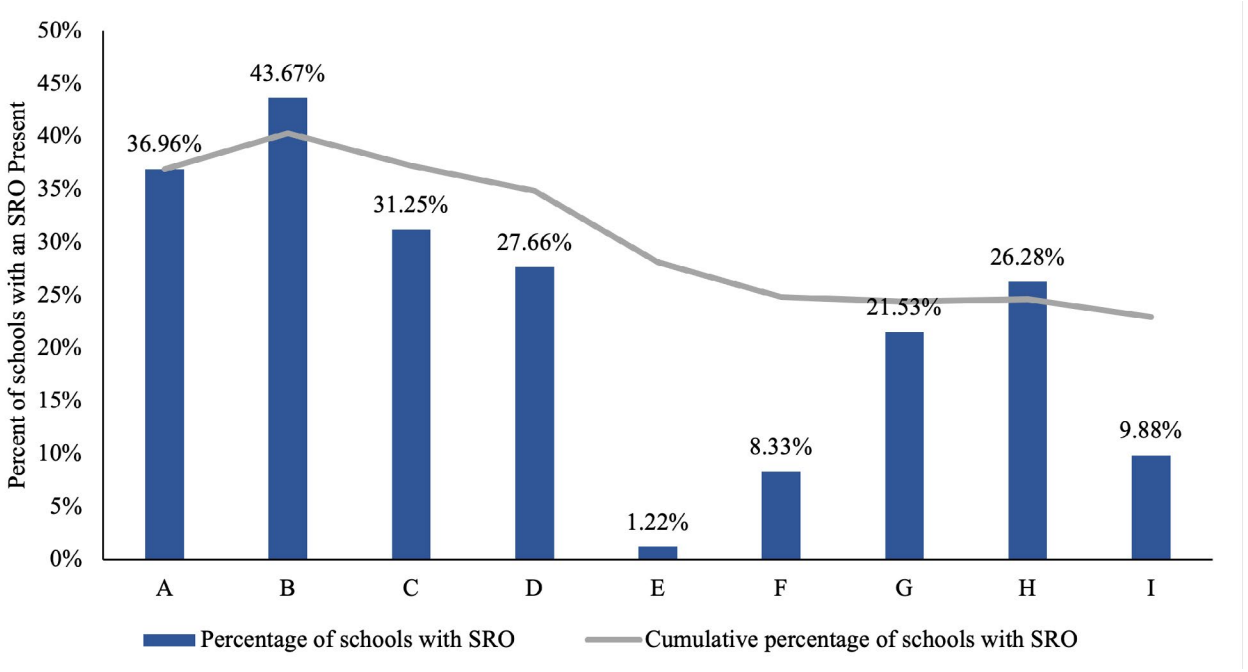
Question 1: Are there differences in the presence of SROs across District Reference Groups?

After performing the ANOVA analysis, we found a significant difference in the presence of SROs by DRG. This result means SROs were more present within schools in DRGs A to D, the relatively better-resourced districts, and they were less present in DRGs E to I, the relatively less-resourced districts. Consistent with findings from our 2019 report, schools in DRG E were least likely to report having SROs, and schools in DRG classification B were most likely to report having SROs. However, the percentage of schools with SROs in DRGs A, C, and D increased between the 2015-2016 school year that we reported on in 2019 and the 2017-2018 school year reported on in this study.

Fewer schools across all DRGs had SROs (N=254, or 22.5 percent of schools) than did not have an SRO (N=877). This percentage reflects an overall reduction compared to the 2015-2016 school year.

Figure 1 shows the different District Reference Groups (DRG) and the percentage of schools within that DRG that reported having SROs present in the 2017-2018 school year. The line shows the cumulative average percentage of schools in each group that reported having SROs. We used the cumulative average to capture the trend of SRO prevalence as we move from the better-resourced DRGs to the DRGs that are more in need. Thus, the cumulative average value at DRG A will be equal to the percentage of schools with SROs in DRG A. For DRG C, however, it is the average percentage of DRG A, B, and C, and so it continues. DRG I has the most schools, but less than 10 percent of them reported having an SRO. Further tests reflected a significant relationship with better-resourced schools more likely to have SROs than schools in less affluent DRGs. This suggests that schools in more affluent or better-resourced school districts were more likely to have SROs in their schools.

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



Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015 CT DRG Designations

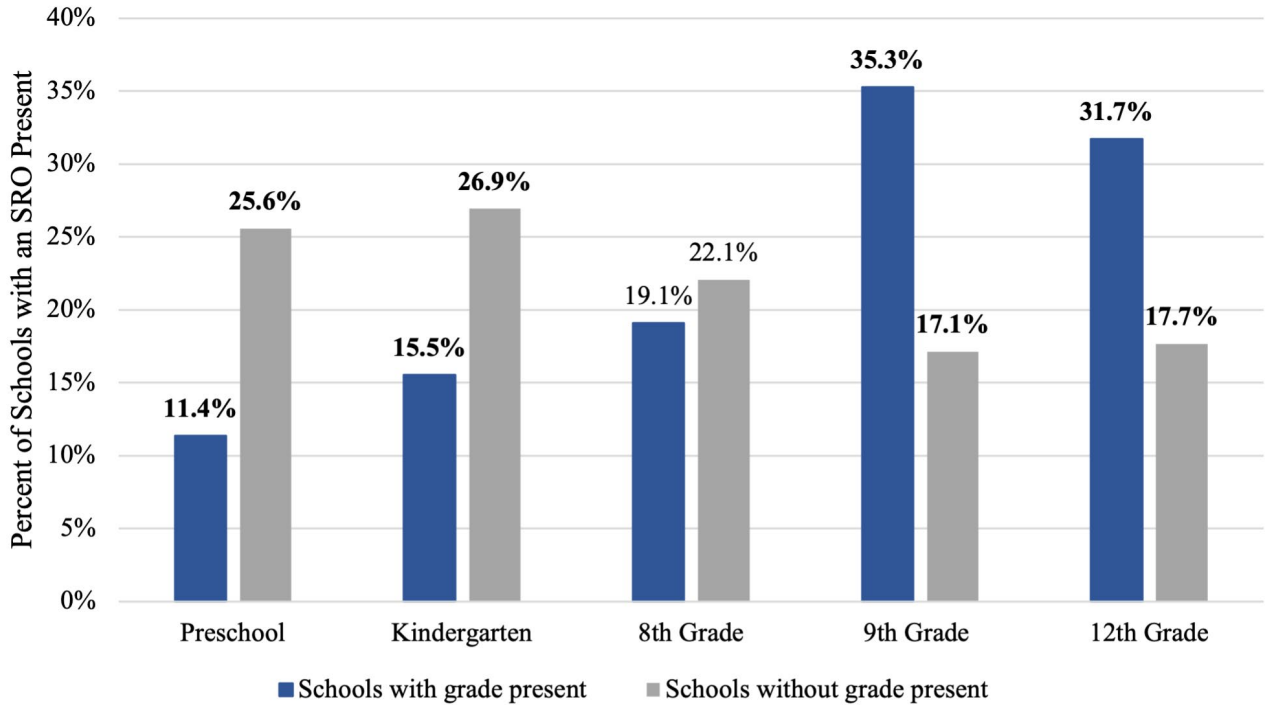
Question 2: Are there differences between the characteristics of schools that have SROs versus schools that do not have SROs?

Grades present

Schools with younger cohorts of students present were more likely not to have SROs present than to have SROs present. Our analysis, presented in **Figure 2**, showed that while we did not find significant results for the 8th grade, the 9th grade and 12th grade recorded significantly higher percentages of schools with an SRO presence. The presence of Pre-K and Kindergarten recorded a significantly lower prevalence of SROs.

Further analysis of our results that included a regression that controlled for the school size and DRG showed that those variables explained most of this association. The percentage of schools with an SRO was over twice as high in schools without a preschool than in schools with preschool students present. For schools with a 9th grade, the percentage of schools with an SRO was twice as high as schools without a 9th grade cohort. However, the presence of the 9th grade was still associated with a significant increase in the likelihood of SRO presence. In contrast, the presence of preschool remained significantly associated with a decreased likelihood of the presence of SRO. Thus, consistent with our findings in 2019, younger children in schools remained a significant predictor of not having SROs in schools, and older students in schools remained significantly associated with having SROs in schools.

Figure 2. Percentage of schools with an SRO present by presence of grade cohort at the school.

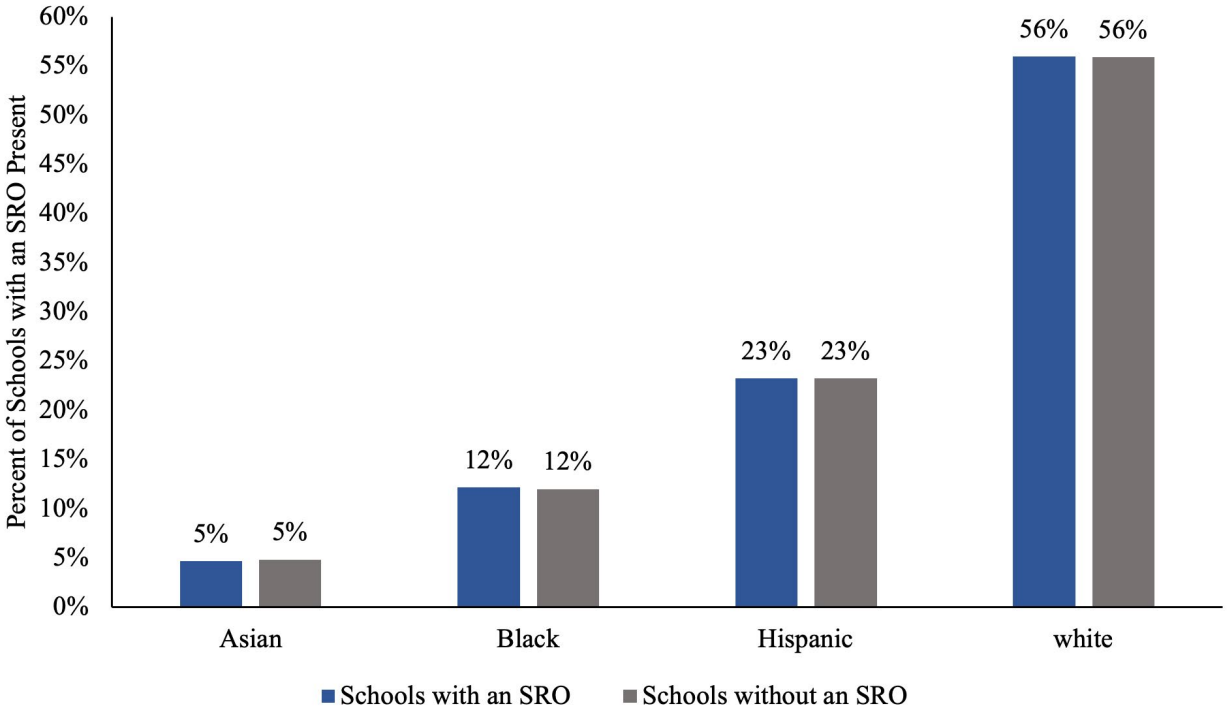


Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection
Note: Bolded numbers indicate statistical significance

Demographic characteristics

We found no significant relationship between the percentage of Black, white, Asian, and Latino/a/x students in schools with and without SROs. **Figure 3** shows that for all groups of students, there were negligible differences of one percent or less in their proportions in schools with and without SROs. The means reported are adjusted for the effects of the total student population (i.e., school size) and DRG classification. Though the analysis is presented differently, this relationship is similar to the results found in the 2019 report.

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

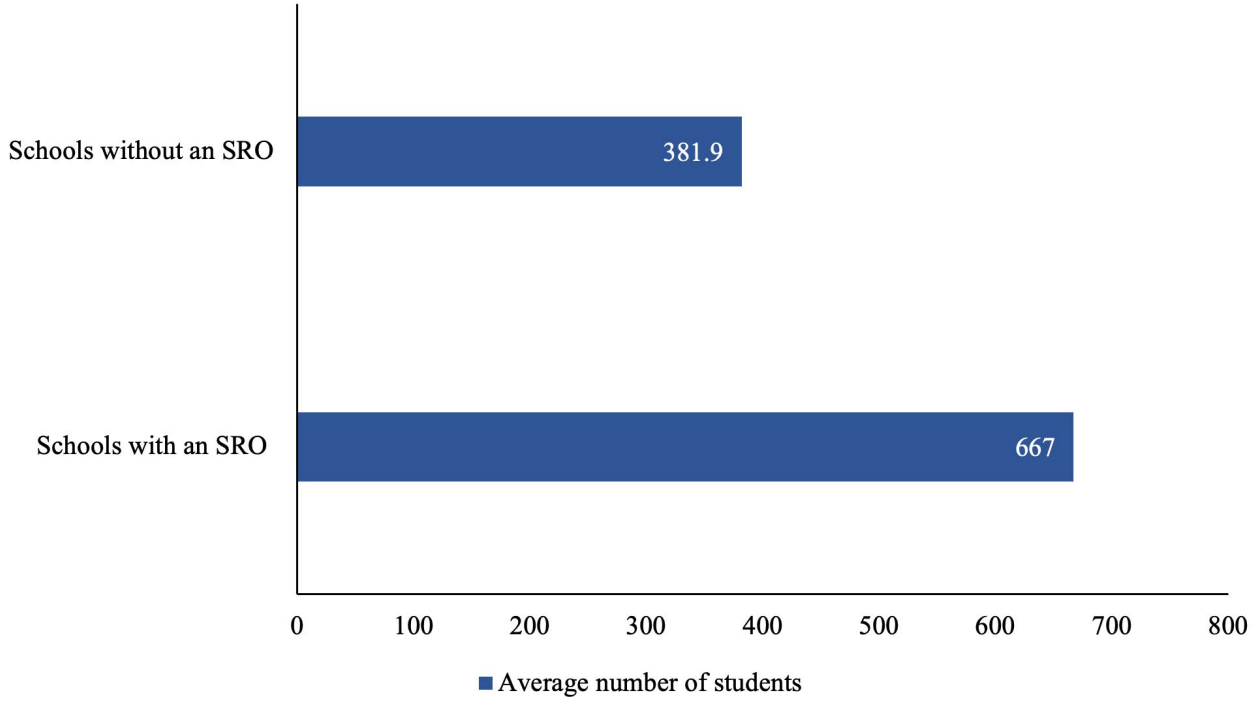


Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

Figure 4 shows that the effect of school size on the presence of SROs in schools is significant. The average number of students in schools with an SRO was significantly larger than those without an SRO.

In looking at the total count of students in the school, DRG was used as a covariate. The mean number of students in schools with an SRO is almost twice the mean total enrollment number in schools that did not report having SRO. The numbers are pretty close to numbers observed in the 2019 report, and much like that report, we find a statistically significant relationship.

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



Source: 2017-2018 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

We conducted relative risk analyses for our three indicators of exclusionary discipline. **Figure 5** shows that we found an association of the presence of SROs with an increased likelihood of facing exclusionary discipline. In some cases, we did not find statistically significant results. We indicate the statistically significant results by showing the bolded values of their risk ratio above the bars.

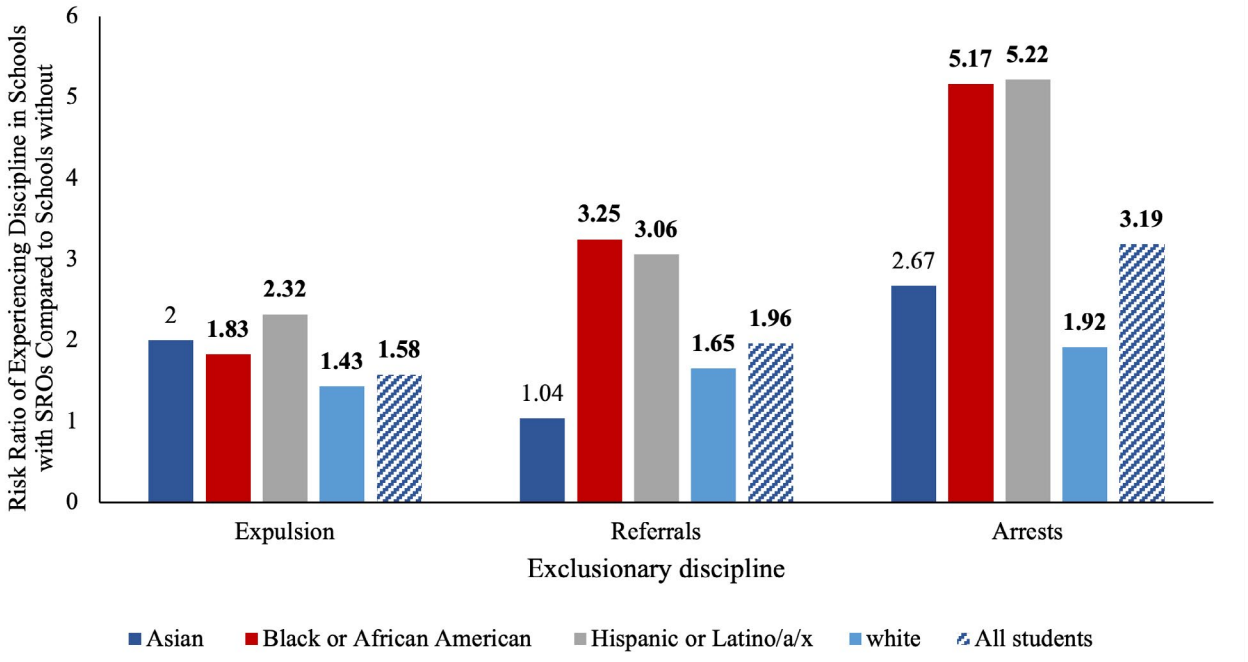
Risk ratio analyses on expulsions showed that SROs were associated with a significant impact on the risk of being expelled. In general, students in schools with SROs were 1.58 times as likely to be expelled as those without an SRO. We also found this to be the case for Black, white, and Latino/a/x students. Black or African American children attending schools with SROs were at 1.83 times greater risk of being expelled than Black or African American children attending schools without SROs. Hispanic or Latino/a/x children attending schools with SROs were at 2.32 times greater risk of being expelled than Hispanic or Latino/a/x children attending schools that do not have SROs.

We found significant differences in the risk of referral to law enforcement in schools with SROs for Black, Latino/a/x, and white students. In considering the risk of referral to law enforcement, the risk for students in schools with SRO was almost two times greater. For Black or African American children and Hispanic or Latino/a/x students, the relative risk was three times higher for students in schools with an SRO than for those in schools without an SRO.

We observed the most considerable differences in our relative risk analyses for arrests. Students in schools with SROs were over three times more likely to be arrested than those in schools without SROs. The risk was much higher for Black and Latino/a/x students, with both groups seeing a risk of arrest that was over five times higher than the risk for Black and Latino/a/x students in schools with no SRO presence.

The results of these analyses are similar to those observed in the 2019 report.[58] Though the actual values are slightly different, we observed the highest increased risk for Black and Latino/a/x students and the sizeable impact of SROs on arrests and referrals to law enforcement.

Figure 5. Black, Latino/a/x, and white students have a significantly higher risk of being arrested, expelled, or referred to law enforcement when an SRO is present than Black, white, and Latino/a/x students in schools without SROs.



Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection
Note: Bolded numbers indicate statistical significance

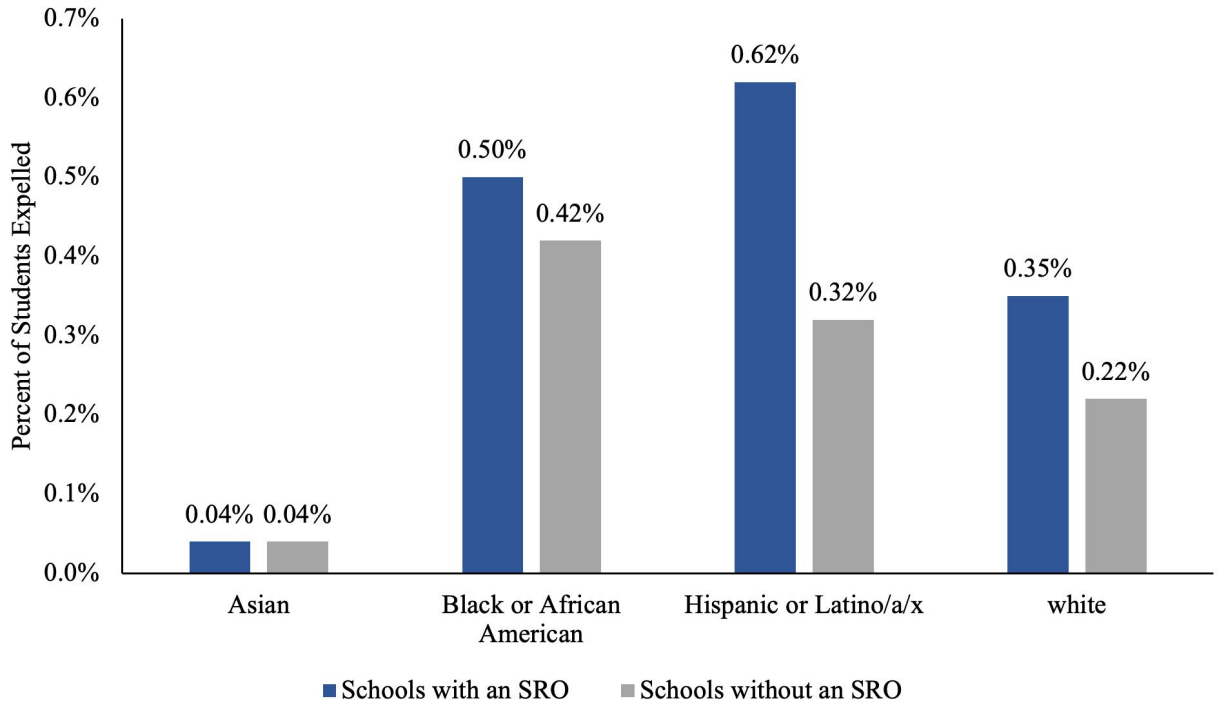
To ensure that other unaccounted factors didn't explain the results of our analysis, we ran a more thorough test of the relationship between the presence of SROs and the three forms of exclusionary discipline already analyzed. Beyond the associations we had already found in the risk ratio analysis, we examined how much the presence of SROs explains the differences in expulsion, referrals to law enforcement, and arrests. These relationships may also be explained by factors such as the size of the school or school resources. We thus used the student populations enrolled in schools and DRG as covariates in our subsequent analysis set.

To adequately capture the impact on racial groups, we used the percentages of the students within a racial group who are expelled. This way, we could capture the differences in the impact of SROs on exclusionary discipline for each of the racial groups analyzed. By using the percentage of students expelled in each racial group as our dependent variable, we were able to depict the impact of SROs over and above a school's general tendency to rely on exclusionary discipline.

We included school size and DRG as covariates in our analysis. Larger schools may have more discipline incidents due to their size; additionally, a greater number of students are likely to face disciplinary action in a bigger school. DRG classifications were made to group school districts based on socioeconomic status and need. The classification ranges for A-I, with I representing urban high-need districts with low socioeconomic status households and A representing the very affluent low-need suburban districts.[59] In numerical terms, they were rank-ordered from 1-9, with 1 representing better-resourced school districts and 9 representing school districts with higher levels of need. We ran an ANOVA analysis and reported the predicted mean reflecting the adjustments made for the covariates for a more straightforward interpretation. In other words, the reported means are estimates of the mean if the population and DRG were kept at the same level for all schools.

Figure 6 shows the impact of SRO presence on the average percentage of students expelled, broken up by students' racial and ethnic demographics. Our analysis found no statistically significant relationship for expulsion for any of the racial/ethnic groups analyzed. This would suggest that whatever results we found in the relative risk analysis could be explained by the socioeconomic factors (DRG) and the size of the schools. School Resource Officers are not *supposed* to enforce school rules and mete out exclusionary discipline, so these findings make sense. However, the fact that students in schools with SROs have a greater *risk* of being expelled, which is not significantly explained by the presence of police in schools, suggests that schools employing police may have a more punitive school climate or that staff can devote more of their time to enforcing school rules. This finding is in line with those in the 2019 report; when testing for causal inference, the presence of SROs showed no evidence of an impact of the presence of SROs on the percentage of students enrolled.

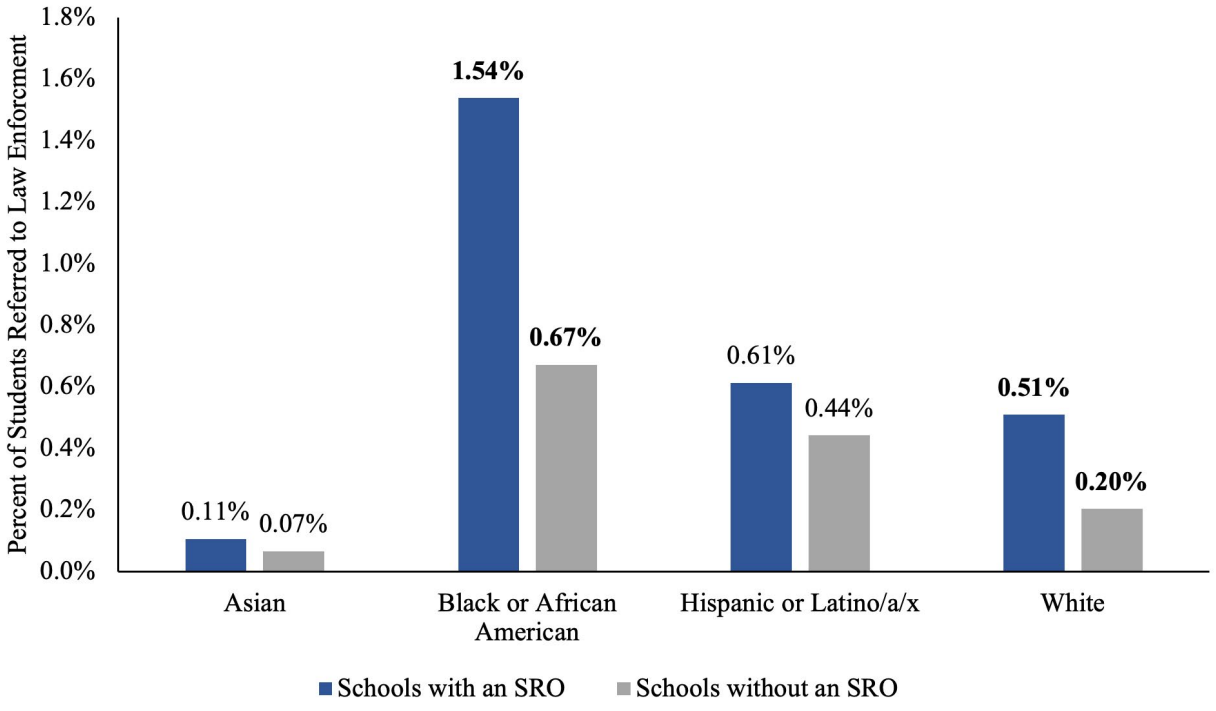
Figure 6. SROs in schools did not significantly impact the percentage of Black, Latino/a/x, white, and Asian students expelled.



Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015 CT DRG Designations

For referrals to law enforcement, displayed in **Figure 7**, we found statistically significant results for Black and white students even with our school size and DRG effects adjustments. The average percentage of Black or African American students referred to law enforcement was over twice as high in schools with an SRO than in schools with no SRO. While our 2019 report analysis of the percentage of students referred to law enforcement only found a statistically significant relationship for Latino/a/x students, in this report, we find results for Black and white students but not for but not for Hispanic or Latino/a/x students.

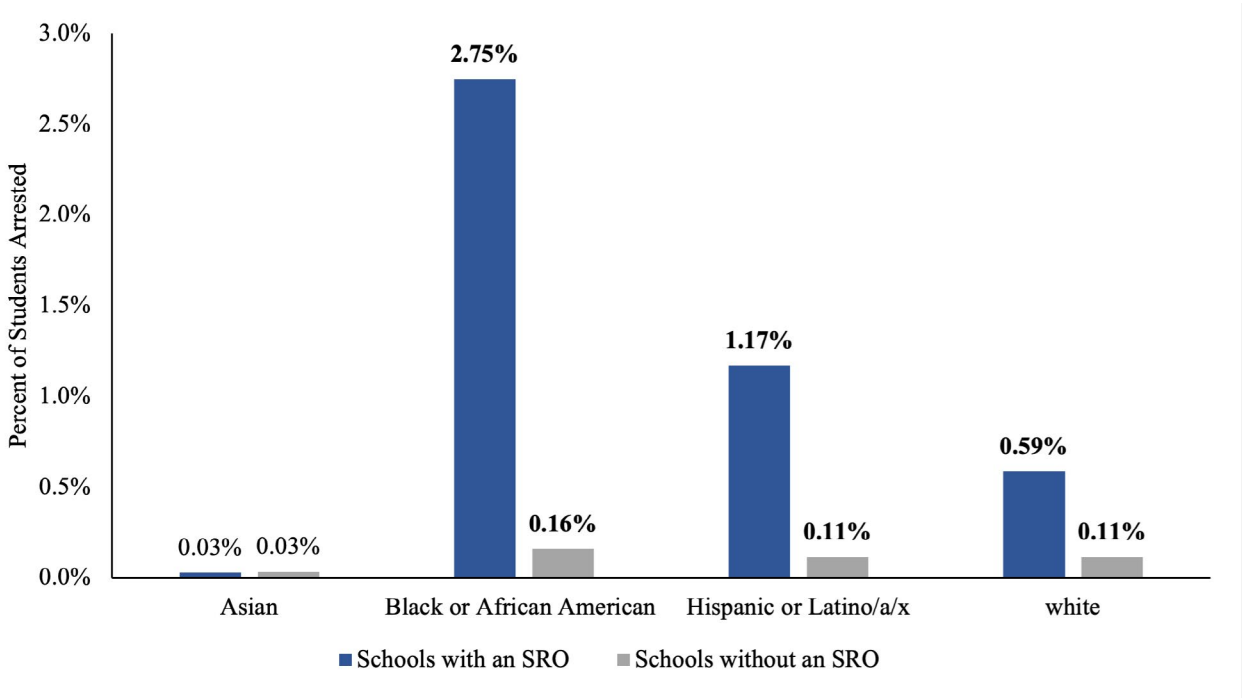
Figure 7. The average percent of Black and white students referred to law enforcement in schools with SROs was over twice as high as those without SROs.



Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015 CT DRG Designations
Note: Bolded numbers indicate statistical significance

We observed more substantial results for arrests, displayed in **Figure 8**. We found that SROs are linked to statistically significant differences in the percentage of Black, Latino/a/x, and white students arrested. The percentage of Black or African American students arrested is over 17 times higher in schools with an SRO. It is over 10 times higher for Latino/a/x or Hispanic students and 5 times higher for white students. Where we control the impact of resources and school population, SRO presence is associated with an increased percentage of students being arrested. This difference is significant and quite substantive, particularly for Black and Latino/a/x students. Again this is slightly different from our 2019 report, where an analysis of the percentage of students arrested only showed statistical significance for Hispanic/Latino/a/x children.[60] Here we find statistically significant results for Black, Latino/a/x, and white children in the expected direction.

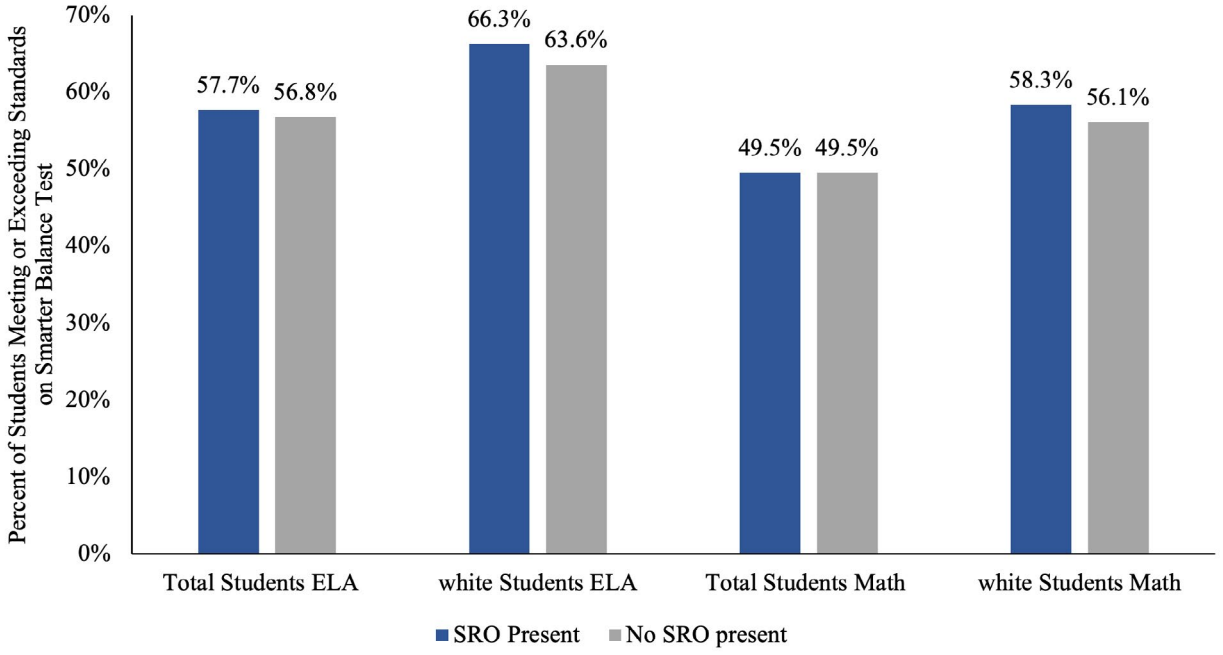
Figure 8. The average percent of Black students arrested in schools with SROs was over 17 times higher than those without SROs.



Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015 CT DRG Designations
Note: Bolded numbers indicate statistical significance

Our analysis of student achievement utilized the average percentage of students meeting or exceeding Smarter Balanced Test benchmarks. We used a linear regression model that included controls for total school enrollment count and DRG. Our model also included safeguards against the influence of outliers through clustering our standard errors, so despite some data availability issues, we are confident in our findings. There was no statistically significant effect of SROs on the percentage of white or all students who scored at or above the benchmark on the Smarter Balanced ELA and Math exams. **Figure 9** shows that the percentage of students who scored at or above each benchmark in schools with SROs was slightly higher but not statistically significantly higher. Due to the lack of statistical significance, we do not conclude finding evidence that school resource officers positively or negatively impact students' learning abilities. This is in line with the 2019 report where we did not find a statistically significant effect of SROs on Smarter Balanced scores.

Figure 9. The presence of SROs in schools does not significantly impact ELA and math Smarter Balanced test scores.

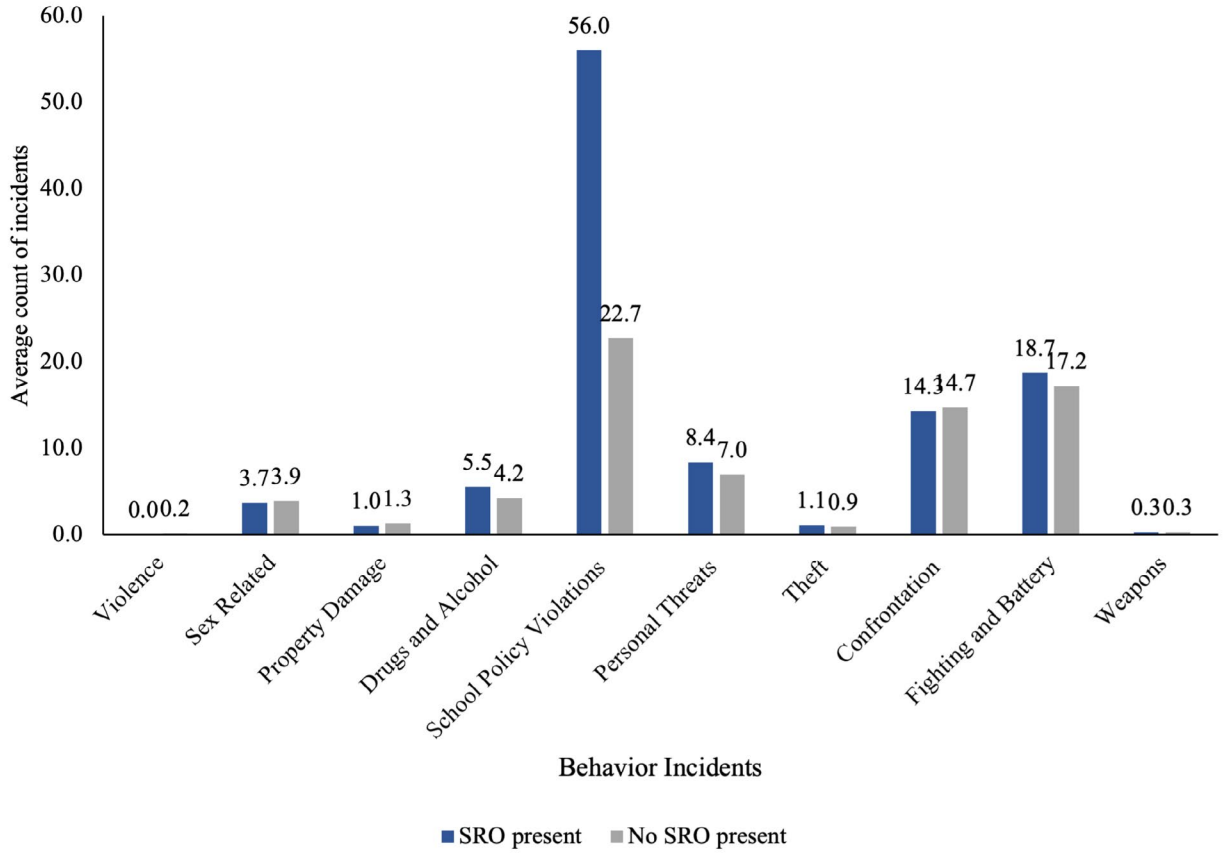


Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-2018 Smarter Balanced Test Scores as reported on Edsight.ct.gov

We also considered the number of recorded problematic incidents in schools and the relationship with SRO presence. These incidents included violence, sex-related behaviors, property damage, drugs and alcohol, school policy violations, personally threatening behavior, theft, confrontation, fighting and battery, and weapons. These represent the types of student actions or behaviors that require some form of sanction where data is collected and recorded.

We held the school size and DRG control variables at their averages for our analysis and used those to predict the average number of such incidents. We additionally use clustering of the standard error to remove the influence of outlier districts. We know from the regressions that these relationships were not statistically significant, even though we may observe sizable differences in some cases. **Figure 10** shows that while the average predicted number of incidents in some cases showed large differences, in others, they didn't. Particularly for school policy violations, we observed a difference in the average count of cases with schools that have SRO showing over twice as many of such incidents in schools with SRO presence. However, we must again point out that *the results do not show a statistically significant relationship.* Thus, we do not find evidence that SROs affected the number of incidents recorded in schools, suggesting that we have no evidence that SROs make schools more or less physically safe for students. This is slightly different from the findings in the 2019 report, where we found statistically significant differences for fighting and battery and school policy violations.[61] Like the previous report, we found higher average numbers of such cases where SROs were present, but the relationship was not statistically significant.

Figure 10. There were no statistically significant differences in the counts of any school incidents reported based on SROs.



Source: 2017-2018 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-2018 incidents reported on Edsight.ct.gov

SUMMARY OF RESULTS FROM DATA ANALYSES

Our work revealed several findings diverged from our 2019 analysis, starting with the prevalence of SROs in more affluent districts. The school districts with the highest prevalence of SRO presence are in the four most affluent DRG classifications. This is notably different from our previous report, where the pattern was more uneven. Further analysis showed that this trend was a consistent one. The four DRGs that represented school districts at higher socioeconomic levels also had a higher prevalence of SROs than any other DRG group. It would suggest that affluent districts are the ones that have managed to maintain funding for school resource officers.

Interestingly, while schools with younger student cohorts tend to be less likely to have SROs, a more complex model analysis points to the school size and DRG as significant explanations for this relationship. We still find that the presence of SROs is linked to high schools and less towards elementary schools with preschool programs. We also do not find that the school's racial makeup is linked to the likelihood of SRO presence. However, we find the sturdiest and most consistent results for the impact of SRO on exclusionary discipline by race. We were able to present two tests that dug

deeper into the relationship and were able to find that the presence of SROs is linked to the arrests of a more significant proportion of students, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students. We also found that it consistently increases the likelihood that students will be referred to law enforcement, mainly for Black students.

Looking at the school climate, we do not find support that the presence of SROs has an impact on our chosen indicators. Student academic performance and school incidents show no significant findings. The failure of our analysis to find that the presence of SRO impacts students' educational performance is a finding that conforms to our previous analysis. This reiterates the argument that SROs are not associated with an educational environment that promotes improved educational outcomes, presumably through the mechanism of students feeling safer at school. We were also unable to find statistically significant evidence that the presence of SROs resulted in a difference in the number of student behavioral incidents in a school. This is slightly different from our 2019 report, where we found an increase in school policy violations and fighting incidents. In the case of the 2017-2018 school year though sharing similar patterns, the results of our analysis fail to reach a level of confidence that the presence of SROs is driving the observed differences. Again, we do not find evidence that SROs in schools make schools physically safer or more conducive to student learning.

The stark difference that the presence of SROs makes for arrests of Black and Latino/a/x students is alarming, and this calls for further examination of the racialized consequences of SROs in schools. Though we find a significant impact for white students, a simple examination of the average number of students of color identifies a consistent pattern of disproportionate exclusionary discipline associated with the presence of SROs. This is not the whole story. Our data estimates that the percentage of Black and Hispanic or Latino/a/x students referred to law enforcement, arrested or expelled is higher than for other students, even in schools without SROs. This is consistent with national literature, and previous findings within CT Voices reports.[62, 63, 64] We did not subject this main effect to more analysis because our focus is on the impact of SROs. The existing disparities in school discipline for Black and Latino/a/x students prior to police involvement place the educational experience of these groups of students the most sensitive to the presence of SROs, and the impact remains most substantive.

DATA WALK TAKEAWAYS

We presented our findings to a group of young activists and discussed the results of our analyses. Our discussion with the young activists focused on discipline, school climate, and other vital concerns in the school-police partnership that could require more research. We were able to explore these matters in an environment informed by the personal experiences of this group and their communities. The data walk participants also presented questions that our findings raised. In this section, we discuss the key takeaways from that discussion.

- **Some data walk participants were surprised that the National School Resource Officers Association's official position and guidance state that SROs should not play any part in enforcing school rules or disciplinary actions that result from breaking school rules.** They felt that their experiences with SROs in schools showed that the opposite was often the case. They recalled that SROs were often part of discipline procedures in cases where no laws were

broken. In our previous report and other published research across the country, we have pointed out that parents and students are not fully aware of the role and responsibilities of sworn law enforcement on school campuses. For example, some participants in our data walk felt that it was ironic that one of the roles of SROs was in diversionary efforts, given that making arrests is a power unique to the police. Based on their experiences, it presented a contradiction.

- **Data walk participants had ambivalent reactions regarding the distribution of SROs across DRGs.** While some participants were surprised that SROs were more prevalent in better-resourced school districts, others were not and even shared personal observations of only having interactions with SROs when they moved to more affluent school districts. While we did not theorize why this might be the case in our report, we explained it was a change from the 2019 report where we had not found such a robust linear pattern.

- **Some data walk participants shared concerns about the impact of other police officers being around schools; our work does not capture this.** Though they may not be classified as SROs, the presence of police around schools increased the likelihood of their interaction with students on campus. This brought up a discussion on how the presence of SROs may not wholly capture the realities of police on school campuses. While our research only looks at SROs, questions were raised about how some school districts that claimed not to use SROs regularly have police officers on their campuses. From our research, we acknowledge that this is an issue that other researchers have raised.[65] There has been an acknowledgment of discretionary creativity in how some school districts classify their relationships with the police department. As a result, looking at SROs may only tell part of the story regarding the impact of policing on students.

- **Data walk participants were not surprised that the impact was worse for students of color**, as this reflected the observations of all the participants. A discussion that ensued from this pointed to the issue of nuanced and conditional usage of SROs. They reflected that from personal stories, SROs were often discretionary ways in which discipline was used in schools that were moderated by the race/ethnicity of the students. They expressed that administrators/teachers make racialized choices on when to involve law enforcement in student discipline in some schools. The point was that these young people felt that school staff were more likely to involve law enforcement in disciplinary proceedings where Black and Brown students were involved. This issue of racial bias in student discipline has ample research-backed support from other parts of the country.[66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71]

- **Some data walk participants reflected that special school programs tend to be better at dealing with students who may have disruptive behaviors or high emotional needs.** Based on experiences in such programs, participants discussed how the support staff in these programs were more equipped to deal with such students without involving the police. This was discussed as evidence supporting the argument that the police are not needed in dealing with student infractions.

- **Data walk participants raised a question about the experiences of English language**

learner students. Research has shown that school administrators tend to lean on SROs more to get involved in cases where they found it too difficult getting through to students involved in a behavioral incident. There were concerns that this pattern could affect students who faced language barriers, particularly Spanish-speaking students. While this is an important point, it isn't one we were able to analyze in this report.

- **Data walk participants expressed that it is past time to make changes to school policing.** While there was a lively and open discussion on the different facets of the impact of SROs on students' education experience, there was no way of masking the participants' disappointment. Participants expressed that it was unfortunate that despite a body of data-driven research showing the negative impact of SROs on students, there wasn't an equal level of political will or action to remove them from schools.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results from our research and the feedback from the data walks, we present the following recommendations.

REORGANIZE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES AWAY FROM A SYSTEM OF RELIANCE ON SROS AND FUNDING SROS IN SCHOOLS.

Our research has shown that SROs on campuses contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline and disproportionately impact Black and Latino/a/x students. Our research has searched for positive effects for student safety and educational performance and has not found evidence of positive effects. In light of the evidence we have found and countless cases across the country, we are confident that police are not well suited to be situated as a regular piece of the educational environment. Videos of police officers using excessive force or being called to intervene where they aren't needed further begs the question of how much their said roles reflect their often detrimental impact on school campuses. Even the said aims of having SROs in schools are questionable, as in the case of diversionary programs, their presence represents the opposite. More importantly, the school should not be the arena for improving police relations with the community. Children should not be forced to bear the burden of the strained relationship between police and Black and Latino/a/x communities. Police can turn to other community engagement initiatives as providing a standard level of education is the primary goal for students in school. The presence of SROs in schools, on the contrary, creates extra barriers to students' ability to thrive and succeed in school, meaning that their presence in schools contributes to educational inequities. A report by the NCES[72] shows that nationally in the 2017-2018 school year, 44.1 percent of public schools have SROs, and 13.2 percent have other law enforcement officers in their schools. For larger schools with over 1000 students, 77 percent are recorded as having SROs, and 17.1 percent have other sworn law enforcement officers in their schools. From the most recent CRDC data, we can estimate that 171,000 students are enrolled in schools with an SRO in Connecticut. Removing SROs from schools will help divert Connecticut's students from the criminal legal system, as it will encourage schools to solve problems related to non-criminal behavior in-school.

BUILD SCHOOL CAPACITY TO IDENTIFY AND OFFER SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION SERVICES AND PROMOTE NON-PUNITIVE APPROACHES TO STUDENT BEHAVIOR.

Schools should build capacity to intervene early to meet the needs of students who show disruptive behavior and divert them from more serious behavioral issues as they grow older. Schools must move away from more punitive cultures around disruptive behaviors to alternative means of preventing and responding to behavioral incidents. This will increase the opportunity for emotional and social learning among students, mitigating future disruptive behavior. Teachers and school staff should also be offered professional development regarding in-class interventions sensitive to the racial minorities currently overrepresented in school discipline. This could play a significant preventive role in proactive behavioral interventions that reduce the need for future exclusionary punishment.[73]

In response to research and evidence of the negative impact of punitive discipline strategies, restorative justice practices have been offered as effective systems that promote students' academic achievement and mitigate the impact of punitive discipline.[74] Restorative discipline techniques shift the focus from

exclusion to reconciliation and reintegration and may include restitution, peer mediation, community service, and student conferences.[75] These practices could either be preventative or responsive, but they can obstruct the school-to-prison pipeline. They have been shown to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline more generally, with a sensitivity to racial disparity.[76, 77]

Unfortunately, research has shown nationally that schools with more Black students are less likely to use such techniques when dealing with minority students.[78] Embracing these practices will improve school climate, student outcomes and reduce racially disparate school discipline and interactions with the justice system. Most importantly, a shift to restorative justice will keep more students in school, creating a foundation for them to thrive academically and beyond. Connecticut has a number of organizations offering programs and services to support districts in this endeavor including the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, which coordinates the School Based Diversion Initiative and offers a number of other evidence based behavioral health internvetions for schools; the Tow Youth Justice Institute at the University of New Haven, which offers the Restorative Justice Practices Project to help schools integrate restorative practices; the State Education Resource Center, which offers a plethora of services to implement multi-tiered systems of support for students; and others.

ALLOCATE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BY REDIRECTING FUNDING THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN SPENT ON SROS.

While our analysis focused on a pre-COVID-19 school year, the COVID-19 era has increased the salience of the need for mental health support for youth. There are already movements that have called attention to the inadequate infrastructure in public schools to serve students in need of mental health support for many years.[79, 80] Sizeable funds are used to maintain police in schools, which would go a long way in funding mental health services in Connecticut's schools. The ideal student-to-school counselor ratio should be 250:1, and the national average is 444:1. For social workers to students, the national average is 2106:1, way higher than the ideal ratio of 250:1.[81, 82, 83] For psychologists, the most current recommendation is 500:1, but an ACLU report placed the national average at 1526:1.[84, 85] In Connecticut, the student to counselor ratio is 392:1, the student to social worker ratio is 580:1, and the student to psychologist ratio is 548:1.[86] For school nurses, the ideal ratio is 750:1.[87] In Connecticut, the student-to-school nurse ratio is 435:1.[88] Though better than many other states, Connecticut is part of the national pattern of failure to meet the recommended standard for school-based mental health providers. On average, Connecticut schools still fall short of meeting the recommended standards for the student-to-counselor ratio, the school psychologist-to-student ratio, and the student-to-social worker ratio.[89]

Nationally, millions of students are in school with law enforcement but no support staff. According to an ACLU analysis of 2015-2016 CRDC data,[90] the US has an estimated 1.7 million students in schools with police but no counselors, three million students in schools with police but no nurses, six million students in schools with police but no school psychologists, and ten million students in schools with police but no social workers. There are 14 million students in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker. Though Connecticut fares better than the national average in most cases, it is clear that the national average presents a dangerously low bar.

Even as there has been some movement on legislation, funding has been a concern. Although SRO funding is provided through a variety of sources, from municipal governments to police departments to school districts, ultimately municipal policymakers should reduce money spent on SROs and increase money spent on staff trained to support students' mental health.

UPDATE CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-233M (2015) IN TWO WAYS: ENFORCE THE PROVISION THAT ALL CURRENTLY EXISTING MOUS ARE MADE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT WEBSITES AND POLICE DEPARTMENT WEBSITES AND EXPAND THE REQUIREMENT THAT POLICE DEPARTMENTS HAVE MOUS WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO ALL POLICE IN ALL DISTRICTS WHERE POLICE MAY INTERACT WITH CHILDREN ON SCHOOL GROUNDS.

Schools' agreements with the police force need to be more transparent and should be extended to include all police who will interact with students on school campuses. MOUs should be made publicly available online and include information outlining the expectations regarding police officers who are not SROs around schools and the expectations regarding when the administration can and cannot involve the police in student incidents. This information should be in-line with best practices such as limiting law enforcement involvement in student behavior incidents, including clear distinctions between disciplinary conduct and criminal offenses, and prohibiting police officers from involvement in school discipline violations. Additionally, it should also be based on integrating research-based practices in approaches to dealing with student behavior.[91, 92, 93, 94, 95]

There was a recent controversy around videos showing the police violently arresting students for fighting in Danbury.[96] The visual of the use of force is an example of how police officers are ill-equipped for participating in school discipline and often serve as catalysts for escalation. West Haven recently announced plans to increase police presence in its schools to deal with student fights.[97] Our findings show that increasing police presence in schools will not solve the problems in West Haven schools and may indeed exacerbate the problems.

THERE SHOULD BE MORE VIGOROUS ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS THAT ARE IN PLACE TO PROTECT STUDENT RIGHTS AS IT RELATES TO THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND SCHOOLS SHOULD BE MANDATED TO DOCUMENT AND INFORM STUDENTS AND PARENTS OF THESE RIGHTS.

Research has found that high levels of involvement of police in the school environment can lead to violations of students' rights.[98] There should be more vigorous enforcement of existing legal standards for questioning and searches by the police. Schools should also do their due diligence to secure parental consent for searches and questioning where students may be involved in potentially criminal investigations.

In the case of searches by school officials or police officers, the existing laws across the country are based on the *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* landmark Supreme Court case that set the standard for lawful searches of students by school authorities and police officers.[99] School officials may search students when they have reasonable grounds to suspect the search will turn up evidence that the student is violating either school policy or law and the search is not unreasonably intrusive. While some school districts have embraced more restrictive standards for administrative and police searches, the threshold for activities such as search and seizures is lower in schools than at the workplace or at

home.

The Supreme Court is less clear regarding the case of questioning by school officials or police officers. In a Washington appeals court case, *State v. D.R.,*[100] the court determined that police officers must read students their *Miranda* rights when interrogating students in the school setting. This question is less clear with SROs, who have full police powers but are assigned to work at a school. Although the National Association of School Resource Officers discourages schools from involving SROs in school disciplinary matters, this can happen. Thus, when an SRO is questioning a student, it may be impossible for a student to know whether they are "in custody" or not. Connecticut General Statute §46b-137 specifies that police are not supposed to question young people under age 16 without obtaining parental permission first. After obtaining permission, police may question young people under the age of 16 in the presence of the parent and after giving the young person and his or her parent full Miranda rights. Police must make reasonable efforts to contact the parents of a young person who is age 16 or 17 prior to questioning, and the police must give young people their full Miranda rights. We advocate that Connecticut lawmakers should ensure this law is enforced for SROs any time an SRO's conversation with a student could lead to self-incrimination.

We advocate that Connecticut schools need to make sure that students and their parents are aware of students' rights within the school setting and the lowered threshold for search and seizures in schools.[101] We further advocate that policymakers should mandate that schools include information regarding students' rights during questioning and search and seizures on district websites and within student handbooks and that policymakers should specify in law that SROs, as agents of the law, must extend Fifth Amendment rights and the protections given under Conn. Gen. Stat. §46b-137 to students any time a student is answering potentially self-incriminating questions in the presence of an SRO.

Because of the peculiarities of school-aged students and their sensitivity to law enforcement, we also urge schools to create internal policy where school officials secure parental consent before searching students or questioning them whenever possible. This is very important as even beyond the presence of SROs, as other police-school partnerships have led to schools becoming another arm of police surveillance of youth. For example, the Waterbury Police Department publicly acknowledges that schools collect intelligence on students to assist in juvenile-related crimes on its official website.[102] Students' rights should not be threatened as part of a pattern of over-policing and surveillance, an issue that is raising more concern even in an era of online learning.[103]

MANDATE THAT ALL POLICE OFFICERS, SHOULD THEY NEED TO INTERACT WITH STUDENTS, SHOULD DO SO ONLY AFTER HAVING BEEN CERTIFIED TO DO SO AS A RESULT OF ADEQUATE TRAINING.

All police officers allowed to engage with school students should be certified to do so after at least 40 hours of training. In doing this, Connecticut would be in the company of California, Indiana, Missouri, South Carolina, and Tennessee who have enforced this standard for police in schools.[104] Police officers should also be required to update their training to better suit the most current realities of students. This should include police engaging in racial bias training and learning critical race theory to ensure that they can better understand the systemic inequities Black and Latino/a/x students

must navigate and challenge their own implicit biases against students of color as well as the implicit biases of the school staff calling the police.

Furthermore, police officers called to deal with a student should also be bilingual or be accompanied by an interpreter when interacting with English learners. Communication skills should play a role in selecting police officers who are better equipped to interact with students. Where dealing with students who may not be proficient in English and no police officer can fluently speak the student's native language, interactions with students should be moderated by an interpreter.

In addition, based on the realities of the school environment and host community, school authorities should be able to use feedback from parents and students to require a higher level of training for police officers allowed on their campuses. Seeing that school districts may differ in the demographic makeup of their student population or the type of threats their schools may face, extra training may be required to equip them for school-specific characteristics. Prioritizing female police officers and police officers of color in interfacing with schools could also present another strategy that could be sensitive to the children most negatively impacted by police. Research has shown that these groups of officers were more effective at diversion as they are less likely to penalize incidents.[105]

PROHIBIT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES FROM CALLING THE POLICE TO DEAL WITH CASES INVOLVING CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 12.

The Office of the Child Advocate's report found that Waterburyschool districts called the police to intervene in behavioral incidents involving children. There are records of the police repeatedly being called to deal with children below 11 years, with a recorded case that involved a 4-year-old child.[106] These children were arrested in some cases. While the Child Advocate report concentrated on Waterbury, the problem is not exclusive to Waterbury. The police have often been called to deal with behavioral problems in children, which presents a bleak picture. Young children are exposed to negative interactions with law enforcement within the structures of what should be a citadel of social and educational development. Mandates that forbid such interactions for children under the age of 12 will ensure that school authorities use the resources that are sensitive to the developmental needs of children as opposed to leaning on the police.[107]

IN EDSIGHT, DATA SHOULD BE PUBLICLY PUBLISHED ANNUALLY FOR EACH SCHOOL REGARDING REFERRALS TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AND IN-SCHOOL ARRESTS.

While CSDE publishes publicly available data on school incidents, educational attainment, discipline, etc., data available on the website should also report on the presence of law enforcement in schools, the discipline of students, student offenses, and student demographical information. In doing this, we recommend that a few issues be addressed.

- These data should be disaggregated by student race, ethnicity, gender, special education status, English language learner status, and reported offense type. This data should be available at the school level where possible and a minimum at the district level. Connecticut schools already collect some of these data for the federal government, which is reported biennially by the CRDC., However, they should make this data available yearly and collect data on English Learner (EL) status and offense type.

- Data collected should include reports on both non-law enforcement and law enforcement activities of the police on school campuses. This will require the collection of new data.

- Data should include reported complaints against officers for using force, disrespectful conduct, escalating situations, and inappropriate relationships with students. This data should be collected by the Police department and relayed to CSDE to report as part of school data.

- Make reported data on averted violence and other safety threats handled by the officers accessible to the public. If school authorities are using this data to defend the presence of SROs in schools, it should be made publicly available in the name of transparency and accountability. While this data is already being collected, it isn't public. The police should relay anything reported in that dataset for CSDE to report/record publicly.

- Beyond SRO presence, schools should be mandated to report more fine-grained data on police activities and interactions with students. Data collected and analyzed by CSDE should include which teachers and administrators call law enforcement to campuses for which students and offenses. CSDE should analyze these data according to the race/ethnicity pairing of staff and students, the race/ethnicity pairing of police officers and students, the incidents that led to police involvement, the involvement of other forms of discipline first, and the involvement of any other school personnel. This data does not need to be publicly reported as it deals with teacher identity. Still, CSDE should keep and analyze this data so that if there is a problem, they can go back and investigate the issue using well-documented indicators.

Mandated standards for adequate data collection will encourage more insightful reporting at the district level by clarifying school-police partnerships and empowering researchers to find solutions to existing and emerging barriers to equitable educational opportunities.

CONCLUSION

SROs in schools are part of the more extensive debate on police interactions with youth and the youth criminal legal system. Our research on the state of Connecticut points to the detrimental impact of SRO presence in schools, particularly for students of color. We have now run these analyses on two different sets of data looking at two different school years. Our work confirms that this relationship is not based on cohort or period. While fewer schools in the 2017-2018 school year reported having SROs, the racially disparate impact on exclusionary discipline is again confirmed. Across both periods, we found no evidence that SROs improve educational attainment or school climate. The relationships we find or fail to find are thus over and beyond whatever impact cohort or time might have, we were able to look at the effects of SROs. Our results have tended to mirror each other on their impact on discipline, school climate, and academic achievement.

We know that SROs increase the risk of students—particularly Black and Latino/a/x students—being arrested in school. This relationship remains statistically significant even when we adjust for other factors that could influence exclusionary discipline in a school, such as the schools' sizes and their communities' wealth. Even with methodological changes for more conservative estimates, we have found two years of data showing that SROs have a significant impact that funnels young people into the school-to-prison pipeline, particularly for youth of color. Arrests are traumatic for students, and the child arrested has a greater risk of experiencing physical and mental health problems as an adult[108] and developing stress patterns that will make it harder for that child to focus in school[109] and hold down a job as an adult.[110] The presence of police officers in schools can also negatively impact school climate, even for children who aren't arrested. In a country where Black and Latino/a/x communities are policed at greater rates than white communities and where the risk of dying at the hands of a police officer is 3.6 times greater for Black residents than for white residents,[111] police officers in school may make Black and Latino/a/x feel that the school is being protected from them rather than for them, which can increase racial trauma and decrease school engagement.

Before social scientists began researching effective public safety interventions, the U.S. developed its public safety enforcement and policing system. In many states, formalized police forces were developed with the specific purpose of ensuring enslaved people did not run away or revolt.[112] The public safety enforcement system in the United States has a twofold problem of being deeply rooted in American racism and structured using human intuition rather than empirically-supported best practice. While many—if not most—police forces have updated their training methods and engaged in anti-bias training, these systemic issues are proving to be deeper than what an updated curriculum can solve. When talking about the impact of SROs, we commonly see these two problems mentioned arise: individual people's intuitions about whether the system works or not are given more weight than data and rigorous research, and many Americans are complicit in accepting the racism perpetuated when children are policed as long as it's not *their* child being put in handcuffs.

Furthermore, we shouldn't discount the importance of people's feelings of safety. Children need to feel safe attending school to learn, and parents need to feel that they can safely send their children to

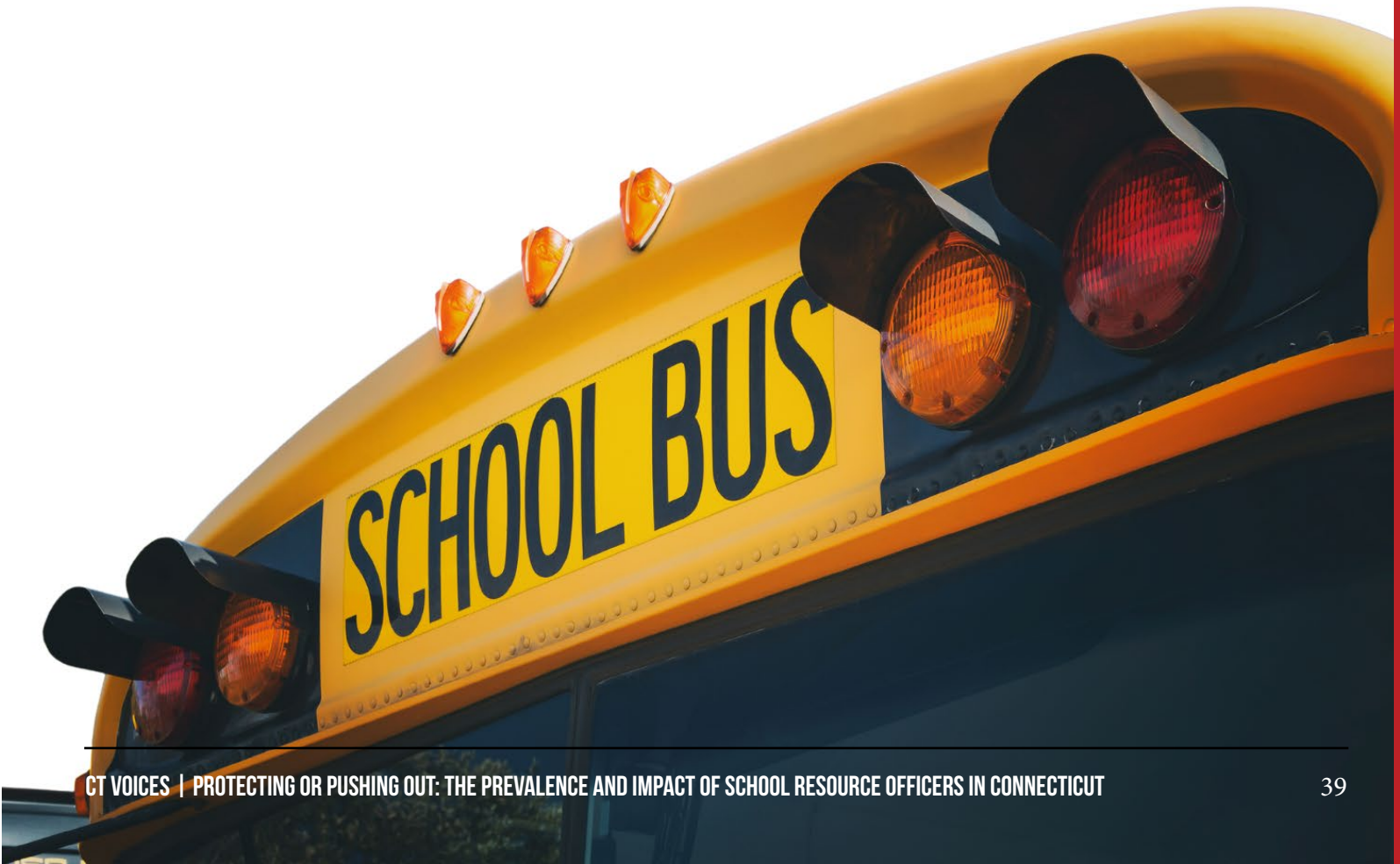
school. Without proposing best-practice solutions that are found to positively influence school climate and increase school safety—such as investing in mental health and community-based resources—we leave a void.

To advance real change that keeps students in school and improves school climate, more people will need to reconcile that their own positive experiences with specific police officers do not negate the very real fact that police in schools result in increased child arrests. Our data shows this finding is consistent across years, and the fact that police in schools result in increased arrests is shown nationwide. We recommend that municipalities eliminate positions in which police officers are specifically stationed in schools and work to ensure that all police interacting with young people are appropriately trained and equipped to respond to the cultural and developmental needs of young people. Furthermore, school administrators and education policymakers will need to work together to expand supports for students and families and restorative processes to ensure that students feel safe in schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For assistance on this report, CT Voices thanks Iliana Pujols, Policy Director at the Connecticut Justice Alliance; Jordyn Wilson, Community Connections Associate at the Connecticut Justice Alliance; Tenille Bonilla, Justice Advisor at the Connecticut Justice Alliance; Gemini Rorie, Justice Advisor at the Connecticut Justice Alliance; Fernecia Smith, Justice Advisor at the Connecticut Justice Alliance; Sage Grady, Justice Advisor at the Connecticut Justice Alliance; Selena, Melody, and Andrea from the Community First Coalition; Eric Cruz López, Program Coordinator at CT Students for a Dream; and Marisa Halm, Esq., Director of the Youth Justice Project at the Center for Children's Advocacy.

This report was funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Tow Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.



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