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School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools

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Summary

Some policymakers have expressed renewed interest in school resource officers (SROs) as a result of the December 2012 mass shooting that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT. SROs are sworn law enforcement officers who are assigned to work in schools.

For FY2014, the Administration requested \$150 million in funding for a Comprehensive Schools Safety Program under the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program. Congress appropriated \$75 million for a Comprehensive School Safety Initiative. Congress required the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to collaborate with key partners from law enforcement, mental health, and education disciplines to develop and publish a comprehensive strategy and model for school safety. Within the amount provided, \$50 million is for pilot programs to improve school safety consistent with the school safety model published by the NIJ. The remaining \$25 million is for research and evaluation into potential root causes of school violence.

Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that the number of full-time law enforcement officers employed by local police departments or sheriff's offices who were assigned to work as SROs increased between 1997 and 2003 before decreasing slightly in 2007 (the most recent year for which data are available). Data show that a greater proportion of high schools, schools in cities, and schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more report having SROs.

Two federal grant programs promoted SRO programs: the COPS in Schools (CIS) program, which was funded until FY2005, and State Formula Grants under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA), which was funded until FY2009. The CIS program provided grants for hiring new, additional school resource officers to conduct community policing services in and around primary and secondary schools. Local educational agencies could use funds they received under the SDFSCA State Formula Grant program for, among other things, hiring and training school security personnel.

The body of research on the effectiveness of SRO programs is limited, both in terms of the number of studies published and the methodological rigor of the studies conducted. The research that is available draws conflicting conclusions about whether SRO programs are effective at reducing school violence. Also, the research does not address whether SRO programs deter school shootings, one of the key reasons for renewed congressional interest in these programs.

There are several questions Congress might consider in the context of grant funding specifically for SRO programs.

- **Does the current level of school violence warrant congressional efforts to expand the number of SROs in schools across the country?** Data suggest that schools are, generally speaking, safe places for children. During the 2010-2011 school year there were 11 reported homicides of children at school. The number of youth homicides that occurred at school remained less than 2% of the total number of homicides of school aged children for each school year going back to the 1992-1993 school year. In 2010, fewer children reported being the victim of a serious violent crime or a simple assault while at school compared to 1994. However, data also show that some schools—namely middle schools, city schools, and schools with a higher proportion of low-income students—have higher rates of reported violent incidents, and schools with a higher proportion of low-income students had higher rates of reported serious violent incidents.

- **Is funding for a wide-scale expansion of SRO programs financially sustainable?** If Congress expanded the number of SROs through additional federal funding, it is likely that many of those officers would go to law enforcement agencies serving jurisdictions of fewer than 25,000 people (data show that nearly 88% of police departments and almost half of sheriff's offices serve jurisdictions of fewer than 25,000 people). Traditionally, COPS grants have provided "seed" money for local law enforcement agencies to hire new officers, but it is the responsibility of the recipient agency to retain the officer(s) after the grant expires. Since smaller law enforcement agencies tend to have smaller operating budgets and smaller sworn forces, retaining even one or two additional officers after a grant expired might pose a significant financial burden.
- **Would additional SROs result in more children being placed in the criminal justice system?** Research in this area is limited to a small number of studies, but these suggest that children in schools with SROs might be more likely to be arrested for low-level offenses. On the other hand, some studies indicate that SROs can deter students from committing assaults on campus as well as bringing weapons to school. Schools with SROs may also be more likely to report non-serious violent crimes (i.e., physical attack or fights without a weapon and threat of physical attack without a weapon) to the police than schools lacking SROs.

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Introduction

Schools have a mission of great importance to our nation—they are responsible for keeping our children safe while educating them and helping prepare them to be responsible and productive citizens. The December 14, 2012, shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, that claimed the lives of 20 children and 6 adults, has heightened congressional interest in school security. Policymakers have begun debating whether school security can be further enhanced, and if so, how best to accomplish that goal. A wide variety of proposals have been offered at the federal level, such as funding for expanded mental health services for students, funding for training on mental health awareness for school staff, funding to assist schools in improving school climate, funding for more school counselors, and funding for more school resource officers (SROs) or other armed security personnel.

Wayne LaPierre, Executive Vice President and CEO of the National Rifle Association, has proposed putting an armed police officer in every school in the country as a way to prevent mass shootings.¹ President Obama has proposed creating incentives for Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants to be used to hire more SROs in the current year.² In addition, he has requested \$150 million in funding for a new Comprehensive School Safety Program. This new grant program would provide school districts and law enforcement agencies with funding to hire new SROs and school psychologists, among other things.

This report focuses on one of these proposals—the renewed focus on providing federal funding for more SROs as a means to preventing school shootings. It examines the distribution of and current number of SROs, the potential sustainability of any increase in the number of SROs, and the effect that SROs may have on students and the academic setting. It also examines what available research studies suggest about the extent to which SROs may reduce school violence. These are issues Congress may consider while contemplating an expansion of SRO programs.

Background on School Resource Officers

Many people probably have a basic understanding of what an SRO is: a law enforcement officer who works in a school. However, some policymakers, before considering legislation to increase the number of SROs in schools across the country, are likely to have questions beyond “what are SROs?” Some of these questions might include the following:

- What role do SROs play in the school environment?
- Why have schools and law enforcement agencies started SRO programs?
- How many SROs are there around the country?

¹ David Nakamura and Tom Hamburger, “Put Armed Police in Every School, NRA Urges,” *Washington Post*, December 21, 2012, this article is on file with the author.

² The COPS Office announced that applicants for hiring grants under the COPS Hiring Program (CHP) who request funding for hiring and deploying SROs will receive additional consideration for FY2013 CHP funding. U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *2013 COPS Hiring Program*, Fact Sheet, p. 2.

Each of these questions is addressed in this section of the report. Subsequent sections discuss: the federal role in promoting SROs; research on the effectiveness of SROs; the Administration's proposals; and select issues for Congress.

The Role of School Resource Officers

Police agencies have traditionally provided services to schools, but it has only been over the past 20 years where the practice of assigning police officers to schools on a full-time basis has become more wide-spread.³ Criminal justice and education officials sought to expand school safety efforts—which included assigning law enforcement officers to patrol schools—in the wake of a series of high-profile school shootings in the 1990s.⁴ Expanding the presence of SROs in schools was also partly a response to rising juvenile crime rates during the 1980s and early 1990s.⁵

It has been argued that SROs are a new type of public servant; a hybrid educational, correctional, and law enforcement officer.⁶ While the duties of SROs can vary from one community to another, which makes it difficult to develop a single list of SRO responsibilities, their activities can be placed into three general categories: (1) safety expert and law enforcer, (2) problem solver and liaison to community resources, and (3) educator.⁷ SROs can act as safety experts and law enforcers by, assuming primary responsibility for handling calls for service from the school, making arrests, issuing citations on campus, taking actions against unauthorized persons on school property, and responding to off-campus criminal activities that involve students.⁸ SROs also serve as first responders in the event of critical incidents at the school. SROs can help to solve problems that are not necessarily crimes (e.g., bullying or disorderly behavior) but that can contribute to criminal incidents.⁹ Problem-solving activities conducted by SROs can include developing and expanding crime prevention efforts and community justice initiatives for students. SROs can also present courses on topics related to policing or responsible citizenship for students, faculty, and parents.¹⁰

There are two definitions of “school resource officer” in federal law and both definitions include some of the responsibilities outlined in the previous paragraph. Under the authorizing legislation for the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program (42 U.S.C. §3796dd-8), a “school resource officer” is defined as

³ Barbara Raymond, *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, Problem-oriented Guides for Police Response Guides Series No. 10, Washington, DC, April 2010, p. 1, hereinafter “*Assigning Police Officers to Schools*.”

⁴ Ben Brown, “Understanding and Assessing School Police Officers: A Conceptual and Methodological Comment,” *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 34, no. 6 (November-December 2006), p. 591, hereinafter “Understanding and Assessing School Police Officers.”

⁵ Chongmin Na and Denise C. Gottfredson, “Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors,” *Justice Quarterly*, online publication, 2011, p. 3, hereinafter “Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors.”

⁶ Understanding and Assessing School Police Officers, p. 593.

⁷ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations—(A) to address crime and disorder problems, gangs, and drug activities affecting or occurring in or around an elementary or secondary school; (B) to develop or expand crime prevention efforts for students; (C) to educate likely school-age victims in crime prevention and safety; (D) to develop or expand community justice initiatives for students; (E) to train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime awareness; (F) to assist in the identification of physical changes in the environment that may reduce crime in or around the school; and (G) to assist in developing school policy that addresses crime and to recommend procedural changes.

Under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (20 U.S.C. §7161), a “school resource officer” is defined as

a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department to a local educational agency to work in collaboration with schools and community based organizations to—(A) educate students in crime and illegal drug use prevention and safety; (B) develop or expand community justice initiatives for students; and (C) train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime and illegal drug use awareness.

The two definitions of an SRO share some similarities. Both define SROs as law enforcement officers who engage in community-oriented policing activities and who are assigned to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations. Both definitions also focus on developing community justice initiatives for students and training students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime awareness. The definition of an SRO under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act includes a focus on educating students in crime and illegal drug use prevention and safety, which is consistent with the purposes of the act. The definition of an SRO under the authorizing legislation for the COPS program focuses more on how SROs could address a school’s crime problems through a more traditional law enforcement/security approach. As such, SROs under the COPS definition concentrate on addressing crime and disorder problems, gangs, and drug activities occurring in and around the school; assist in the identification of changes to the physical structure of the school or the area around the school that could help reduce crime; and assist in developing school policy that addresses crime.

Reasons for Establishing SRO Programs

A national survey of schools, and the law enforcement agencies that provided services to the schools that responded to the survey, found that school principals and law enforcement officials have different views about why schools do or do not have SROs. The results of the survey indicate that in very few cases was the level of violence in the school the key reason for starting an SRO program (approximately 4% of both school and law enforcement agencies cited this as the reason for starting the SRO program).¹¹ About one-quarter of schools reported that national media attention about school violence was the primary reason for starting the SRO program, while about one-quarter of law enforcement agencies cited school disorder problems (e.g.,

¹¹ Lawrence F. Travis III and Julie K. Coon, *The Role of Law Enforcement in Public School Safety: A National Survey*, July 10, 2005, p. 85, hereinafter “*The Role of Law Enforcement in Public School Safety*.”

rowdiness or vandalism) as the primary reason an SRO was assigned to a school.¹² However, the most common response for both groups was “other.” Respondents who marked “other” as their answer were asked to describe the reason why they started an SRO program. There were a variety of responses from both groups, including “received a grant to start the program,” “part of community policing efforts,” “part of a drug awareness program,” or “improve school safety.”¹³

Approximately 22% of schools reported that the primary reason they *did not* have an SRO was because they did not have adequate funds, while 43% of law enforcement agencies reported that inadequate funding was the primary reason why the schools they served did not have an SRO.¹⁴ On the other hand, two-thirds of schools reported that the primary reason they did not have an SRO was because there was no need for one.¹⁵ In comparison, 28% of law enforcement agencies reported that schools did not have an SRO because there was not a need for one.¹⁶ There was also disagreement over whether the school would benefit from having an SRO. A majority of schools (55%) reported that they did not think the school would benefit from having an SRO, while 71% of law enforcement agencies reported that schools would benefit from having an SRO.¹⁷

The survey data show a divide between educators and law enforcement officers regarding the potential benefits of SRO programs. The results of the survey might reflect the different philosophies of educators and law enforcement officers. Schools focus on educating children, and teachers and education administrators might be opposed to an SRO program if they believe that the presence of an SRO will disrupt the learning environment, portray the school as being unsafe, or upset students. On the other hand, law enforcement personnel are philosophically oriented towards public safety. Their initial response to a crime problem in schools might focus on increasing law enforcement’s presence at the school as a means of deterring criminal behavior.

How Many School Resource Officers are There Nationwide?

Police have traditionally provided services to schools, but it has only been in the past 20 years that assigning officers to work in schools full-time has become widespread.¹⁸ Data available from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the National Center for Education Statistic (NCES) provide some insight into the total number of SROs and the type of schools that they serve, but the data are not collected and reported regularly. The BJS’s Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey is conducted periodically every three or four years. The survey collects data on the number of SROs employed by various law enforcement agencies, but it does not collect data on the type of schools SROs serve. The most recent LEMAS data available are from the 2007 survey. The NCES’s School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSCS) collects data on the locale, enrollment size, and level of schools that have SROs. The SSCS is administered every other school year, but the most recent SSCS data available on the distribution of SROs are from the 2007-2008 school year survey.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 86.

¹⁵ Ibid.

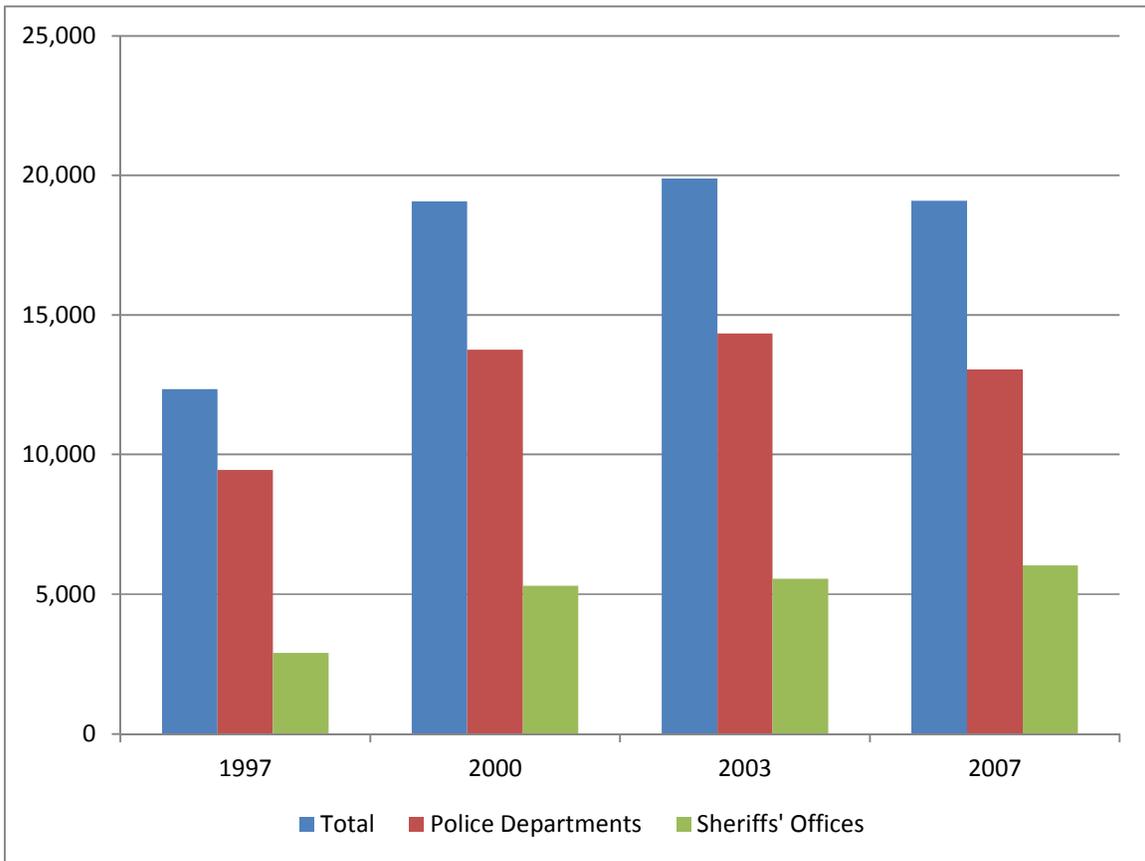
¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 1.

LEMAS survey data show that the number of full-time law enforcement officers employed by local police departments or sheriff’s offices who were assigned to work as SROs increased between 1997 (the first year data were collected) and 2003 before decreasing slightly in 2007.¹⁹ As shown in **Figure 1**, there were approximately 6,700 more police officers or sheriff’s deputies assigned to work as SROs in 2007 compared to 1997, but there were approximately 800 fewer SROs in 2007 compared to the peak in 2003. The data show that the number of sheriff’s deputies assigned to work as SROs increased between 1997 and 2007, while the number of police officers working as SROs decreased between 2003 and 2007 after increasing in 2000 and 2003.

Figure 1. Full-Time School Resource Officers Employed by Local Law Enforcement Agencies



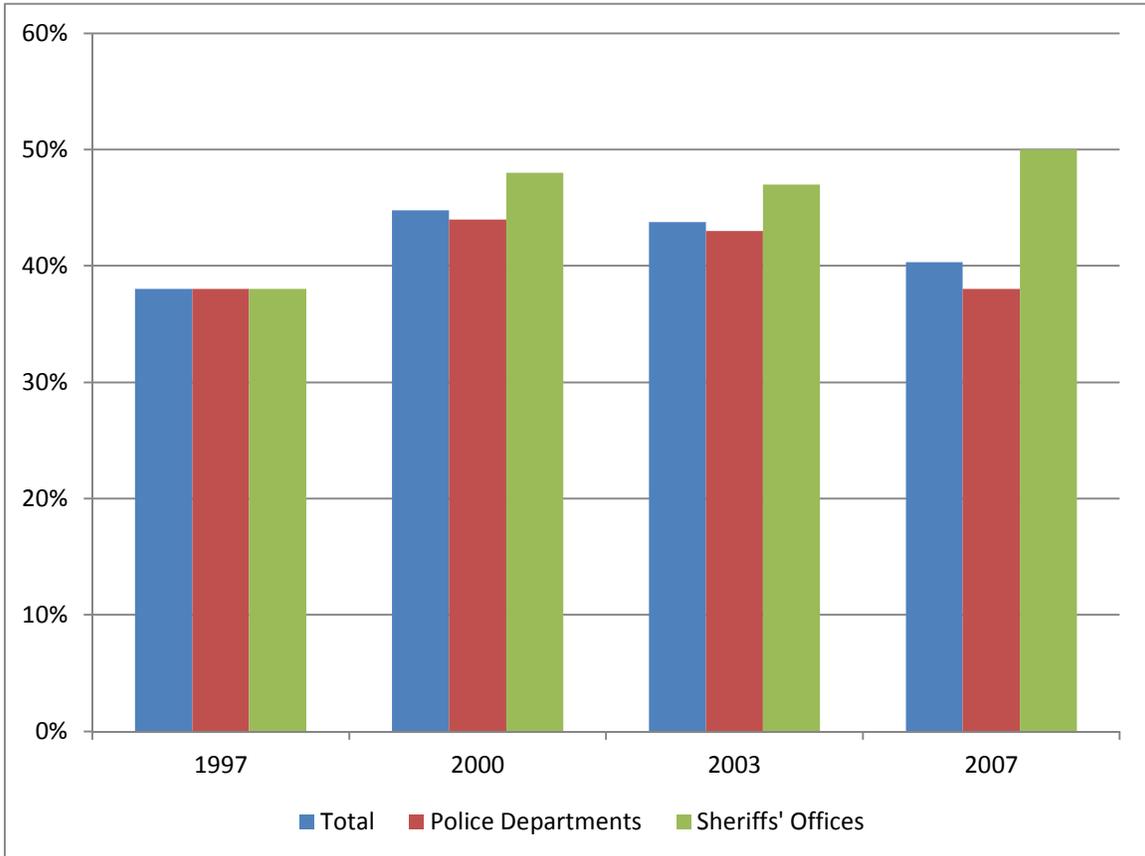
Source: CRS presentation of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Local Police Departments for 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007 and Sheriff's Offices for 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007*.

Data from the LEMAS survey also show that the overall proportion of police departments and sheriff’s offices that reported assigning officers or deputies to work as SROs decreased between

¹⁹ The LEMAS survey collects data from over 3,000 state and local law enforcement agencies, including all those that employ 100 or more sworn officers and a nationally representative sample of smaller agencies. Data are obtained on the organization and administration of police and sheriff’s departments, including agency responsibilities, operating expenditures, job functions of sworn and civilian employees, officer salaries and special pay, demographic characteristics of officers, weapons and armor policies, education and training requirements, computers and information systems, vehicles, special units, and community policing activities.

2000 and 2007, but trends in police departments’ and sheriff’s offices’ use of SROs went in different directions. In 2007, as shown in **Figure 2**, 38% of local law enforcement agencies reported using SROs, which was down from the peak of 44% in 2000. However, the proportion of sheriff’s offices that reported using SROs was slightly higher in 2007 compared to 2000 (50% of sheriff’s offices reported using SROs in 2007 compared to 48% in 2000).

Figure 2. Percent of Local Law Enforcement Agencies Using School Resource Officers



Source: CRS presentation of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Local Police Departments for 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007 and Sheriff's Offices for 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007*.

Data from the SCS for the 2007-2008 school year show that a greater proportion of high schools, schools in cities, and schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more report the presence of SROs. NCES reports that 37% of high schools *did not* have an SRO present at least once a week during the 2007-2008 school year, compared to 45% of middle schools and 76% of elementary schools.²⁰ Also, 59% of city schools *did not* have an SRO present at least once a week, compared to 65% of suburban schools, 57% of town schools, and 72% of rural schools.²¹ Finally, 26% of schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students *did not* have an SRO present at least one day

²⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *2007-08 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS)*, Table 34.

²¹ *Ibid.*

a week while 57% of schools with enrollments of 999-500 students, 73% of schools with enrollments of 499-300 students, and 84% of schools with enrollments of less than 300 students did not have an SRO present at least once a week.²² One limitation of the data is that they might not account for schools that had a less-frequent SRO presence. The SSCS principal questionnaire for the 2007-2008 school year asked “[d]uring the 2007–08 school year, did you have any security guards, security personnel, or sworn law enforcement officers present at your school at least once a week? [emphasis original]”²³ Therefore, if the SRO was at the school every-other-week, that officer’s presence would not be captured by the data.

Federal Funding for School Resource Officers

SRO programs have been encouraged by the federal government through grants provided to local jurisdictions.²⁴ Two federal grant programs provided funding for the hiring and placement of law enforcement officers in schools across the country: the COPS in Schools (CIS) program and the State Formula Grants program through the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act. Funding for these programs ended, respectively, in FY2005 and FY2009.

The COPS in Schools (CIS) Program

The CIS program provided grants for hiring new, additional school resource officers to conduct community policing services in and around primary and secondary schools.²⁵ Congress first provided funding for the COPS in Schools program in 1999 after the Columbine school shooting.²⁶ Funding for the CIS program was set aside from appropriations for the COPS Hiring Program (CHP). Congress provided funding for this program from FY1999-FY2005.²⁷ Appropriations for CIS peaked between FY2000 and FY2002, when Congress appropriated approximately \$180 million each fiscal year for the program. The COPS Office reports that nearly 7,200 SRO positions were funded through CIS grants.²⁸ Even though there has not been funding for the CIS program for several fiscal years, law enforcement agencies can use grants they receive under the CHP to hire SROs.²⁹

²² Ibid.

²³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *School Survey on Crime and Safety, Principal Questionnaire, 2007-08 School Year*, p. 8.

²⁴ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 1.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *COPS in Schools (CIS)*, this document is on file with the author.

²⁶ *Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors*, pp. 2-3.

²⁷ Annual appropriations for the CIS program are as follows: \$167.5 million (FY1999), \$180.0 million (FY2000), \$179.6 million (FY2001), \$180.0 million (FY2002), \$39.7 million (FY2003), \$59.4 million (FY2004), \$4.9 million (FY2005).

²⁸ Email correspondence with the U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, March 11, 2013.

²⁹ Starting in FY2011, the COPS Office asked law enforcement agencies applying for grants under the CHP to identify a public safety problem area that their grants funds would be used to address. According to the COPS Office, 11.5% of the FY2011 applicants and 22.9% of the FY2012 applicants identified “school based policing” as their problem area. In addition, 10.4% of funded applications for the FY2011 CHP and 22.3% of applications for FY2012 CHP were for school based policing. Email correspondence with the U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, April 1, 2013.

Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA)

The SDFSCA is the federal government's major initiative to prevent drug abuse and violence in and around elementary and secondary schools.³⁰ The SDFSCA was initially enacted in 1994 (P.L. 103-382) in response to concerns about increased school violence and drug use among school-aged youth.³¹ The SDFSCA was most recently reauthorized as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in P.L. 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The SDFSCA program as authorized supports two major grant programs—one for State Formula Grants and one for National Programs.³²

However, FY2009 was the last year that funding was provided for the State Formula Grant Program. Since FY2010, funding has only been provided for National Programs. The State Formula Grant Program distributed formula grants to states, and from states to all local educational agencies (LEAs), as required by law. LEAs could use their grants for a wide variety of authorized activities, including for the hiring and training of school resource officers.³³

Research on the Effectiveness of School Resource Officers

SROs engage in many activities that could contribute to school safety. A national survey of schools found that schools with SROs had significantly greater levels of law enforcement involvement compared to schools without assigned officers.³⁴ Schools with SROs were more likely to report that

- school facilities and grounds were patrolled,
- safety and security inspections were conducted,
- student leads about crimes were investigated,
- arrests were made, and

³⁰ As part of its proposal to reauthorize the ESEA, which is under consideration in the 113th Congress, the Obama Administration has proposed significant changes to the SDFSCA. The reauthorization proposal would consolidate several smaller programs into a new broader program titled "Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students." For more information on the SDFSCA see CRS Report RL33980, *School and Campus Safety Programs and Requirements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Higher Education Act*, by Gail McCallion and Rebecca R. Skinner.

³¹ On October 20, 1994, President William J. Clinton signed into law the Improving America's School Act (P.L. 103-382), which reauthorized the ESEA, and created the SDFSCA as Title IV. The 1994 legislation extended, amended, and renamed the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1988 (DFSCA; P.L. 100-297). Violence prevention was added to DFSCA's original drug abuse-prevention purpose by incorporating the Safe Schools Act. The Safe Schools Act was originally created by Title VII of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-227).

³² Although funding is no longer provided for SDFSCA State Formula Grants, funding continues to be provided for several National Programs. The authorization of appropriations for the SDFSCA expired at the end of FY2008; funding has continued to be provided for National Programs through appropriations legislation.

³³ The SDFSCA includes an extensive list of activities that are allowable uses of funds by LEAs, including the activities that are part of the President's proposed Comprehensive School Safety Plan, discussed later in this report.

³⁴ *The Role of Law Enforcement in Public School Safety*, p. 47.

- there were responses to crime reports from staff and students.³⁵

In addition, schools with SROs were more likely to work with law enforcement to create an emergency plan agreement; develop a written plan to deal with shootings, large scale fights, hostages, and bomb threats; and conduct risk assessments of the security of school buildings or grounds.³⁶ Schools with SROs were also more likely to have police officers involved in mentoring students and advising school staff.³⁷ However, while the results of the survey show that SROs are undertaking actions that might contribute to safer schools, they do not indicate whether these actions reduce school violence.

Despite the popularity of SRO programs, there are few available studies that have reliably evaluated their effectiveness.³⁸ A more specific critique of the literature on SRO programs notes that to properly assess the effect of SRO programs it is necessary to collect data on reliable and objective outcome measures during a treatment period (i.e., a period in which SROs worked in schools) and a control period (i.e., a period in which no SROs were present).³⁹ Data on the control period could be collected from comparable schools without SROs or from the same school before the SRO was assigned to the school.⁴⁰ Data from both the treatment and control conditions should be collected over a long enough period of time that they generate a stable estimate of the outcome measures, and the outcome measure should not be influenced by the placement of the SRO in the school (e.g., using the SRO's incident reports).⁴¹ At the time this review of the literature was published (2011), no evaluations of SRO programs met this standard.⁴²

One summary of the body of literature on the effectiveness of SRO programs notes that

[s]tudies of SRO effectiveness that have measured actual safety outcomes have mixed results, some show an improvement in safety and a reduction in crime;⁴³ others show no change.⁴⁴ Typically, studies that report positive results from SRO programs rely on participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the program rather than on objective evidence. Other studies fail to isolate incidents of crime and violence, so it is impossible to know whether the positive results stem from the presence of SROs or are the results of other factors.⁴⁵

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

³⁸ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 7.

³⁹ *Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See for example Ida M. Johnson, "School Violence: The Effectiveness of a School Resource Officer Program in a Southern City," *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1999), pp. 173-192.

⁴⁴ See for example Arrick Jackson, "Police-school Resource Officers' and Students' Perception of the Police and Offending," *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2002), pp. 631-650.

⁴⁵ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 8.

A study of 19 SRO programs sponsored by the National Institute of Justice did not draw any conclusions about their effectiveness because very few of the programs included in their study “conducted useful and valid assessments of their programs.”⁴⁶

More recent research has attempted to address some of the shortcomings of previous studies on the topic by using broader datasets and statistical techniques that control for possible confounding variables, but they still suffer from some limitations. For example, a study by Tillyer, Fisher, and Wilcox found that students in schools where police were present and/or involved in the school’s daily decision making were no less likely than students in schools where the police were not present and/or involved in decision making to report that they were the victims of a serious violent offense, believe they were at risk for being victimized, or were afraid of being victimized.⁴⁷ However, this study used data collected mostly from children in rural schools in Kentucky, which could raise questions about whether the results are generalizable to other locales. Another study by Jennings et al. found that the number of SROs in a school had a statistically significant negative effect on the number of reported serious violent crimes, but not on the number of reported violent crimes.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, this study only used one year of data, which means that it is not possible to determine if reported crimes in high schools decreased after the school started an SRO program.

A third study by Na and Gottfredson used a dataset that allowed the researchers to evaluate whether the reported number of offenses decreased after schools started SRO programs.⁴⁹ The results of the analysis show that schools that added SROs did not have a lower number of reported serious violent,⁵⁰ non-serious violent,⁵¹ or property crimes.⁵² However, schools that added SROs had a higher number of reported weapon and drug offenses.⁵³ There are some limitations to this study, namely (1) the reported number of crimes might be influenced by the presence of an SRO; (2) the sample of schools included in the study is not representative of all schools in the United States (it over-represents secondary schools, large schools, and non-rural schools); and (3) the effects of adding SROs may be confounded with the installation of other security devices (e.g., metal detectors) or other security-related policies.

The body of research on the effectiveness of SRO programs is noticeably limited, both in terms of the number of studies published and the methodological rigor of the studies conducted. The research that is available draws conflicting conclusions about whether SRO programs are

⁴⁶ Peter Finn and Jack McDevitt, *National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs: Final Project Report*, Washington, DC, February 28, 2005, p. 47, hereinafter “*National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs*.”

⁴⁷ Marie Skubak Tillyer, Bonnie S. Fisher, and Pamela Wilcox, “The Effects of School Crime Prevention on Students’ Violent Victimization, Risk Perception, and Fear of Crime: A Multilevel Opportunity Perspective,” *Justice Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2 (April 2011), pp. 249-277.

⁴⁸ Wesley G. Jennings, David N. Khey, and Jon Maskaly, et al., “Evaluating the Relationship Between Law Enforcement and School Security Measures and Violent Crime in Schools,” *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2011), pp. 109-124.

⁴⁹ Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors.

⁵⁰ “Serious violent” crimes included rape, sexual battery other than rape, robbery with or without a weapon, physical attack or fight with a weapon, and threat of physical attack with a weapon.

⁵¹ “Non-serious violent” crimes included physical attack or fight without a weapon and threat of physical attack without a weapon.

⁵² “Property” crimes included theft and vandalism.

⁵³ “Weapons and drug” offenses included possession of a firearm or explosive device; possession of a knife or sharp object; and distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs or alcohol.

effective at reducing school violence. In addition, the research does not address whether SRO programs deter school shootings, one of the key reasons for renewed congressional interest in these programs. There are logical reasons to believe that SROs might help prevent school shootings; to wit, that someone might not attack a school if he or she knows that there is an officer on-site, or SROs developing a relationship with the student body might facilitate reporting of threats made by other students. In addition, placing an officer in a school might facilitate a quicker response time by law enforcement if a school shooting occurs. However, none of the research on the effectiveness of SRO programs addresses this issue.

Promising Practices for Successful SRO Programs

A report published by the COPS Office notes that there is a lack of research on SRO programs, so it is not possible to identify a “one-size-fits-all” series of recommendations for implementing a maximally successful SRO program.⁵⁴ The report, however, identifies several promising practices for a successful SRO program. First, it emphasizes that all schools should develop a comprehensive school safety plan based on a thorough analysis of the problem(s) the school is facing and resources should be deployed accordingly. The report also notes that while SROs might be an important component of an overall safety plan, they should not be the only component. In some instances, school safety plans might not require the deployment of an SRO. If the school decides to use an SRO, there should be clear goals for the program, SROs should engage in activities that directly relate to school safety goals and address identified needs, and data should be collected to determine whether the program is achieving its goals. Finally, the report notes that effective SROs engage in problem-solving policing rather than simply responding to incidents as they occur.⁵⁵

The report notes that there are operational obstacles that can threaten the success of an SRO program, including a lack of resources for the officer such as time constraints or lack of training, or turnover and reassignment.⁵⁶ These challenges can be addressed with a proper framework, but it can require in-depth discussion and negotiations between school administrators and the law enforcement agency.

The report also stresses that schools and law enforcement agencies should be aware of any pitfalls before agreeing to establish an SRO program.⁵⁷ There may be philosophical differences between school administrators and law enforcement agencies about the role of the SRO. Law enforcement agencies focus on public safety while schools focus on educating students. Establishing an operating protocol or memorandum of understanding (MOU), according to the report, is a critical element of an effective school-police partnership.⁵⁸ The MOU should clearly state the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved in the program.⁵⁹ Researchers who conducted an evaluation of 19 SRO programs note that “[w]hen SRO programs fail to define the SROs’ roles and

⁵⁴ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ Problem-solving policing involves changing the conditions that give rise to recurring crime problems. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

responsibilities in detail before—or even after—the officers take up the posts in the schools, problems are often rampant—and may last for months and even years.”⁶⁰

According to the report, selecting officers who are likely to succeed in a school environment—such as officers who can effectively work with students, parents, and school administrators, have an understanding of child development and psychology, and who have public speaking and teaching skills—and properly training those officers are identified as two important components of a successful SRO program.⁶¹ While it is possible to recruit officers with some of the skills necessary to be an effective SRO, it is nonetheless important to provide training so officers can hone skills they already have or develop new skills that can make them more effective SROs.⁶² It might also be important for SROs to receive training before or shortly after starting their assignment. The study of 19 SRO programs mentioned previously concluded that “*any delay in training can be a serious problem* [emphasis original] because SROs then have to learn their jobs by ‘sinking or swimming.’”⁶³

The Comprehensive School Safety Initiative

The Administration requested \$150 million in funding for a Comprehensive Schools Safety Program as a part of its FY2014 budget request for the COPS program. Congress appropriated \$75 million for a Comprehensive School Safety Initiative under the State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance account in the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2014 (Division B, P.L. 113-76). Congress tasked the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) with developing and implementing the initiative.⁶⁴ Congress required the NIJ to collaborate with key partners from law enforcement, mental health, and education disciplines to develop and publish a comprehensive strategy and model for school safety. Within the amount provided, \$50 million is for pilot programs to improve school safety consistent with the school safety model published by the NIJ. Pilot program grants can be used to

- test and evaluate technologies and strategies to improve school safety;
- develop and update school safety assessments and plans;
- provide technical assistance or training; and
- support and assess other programs and technologies that are intended to enhance overall school safety efforts.

Congress emphasized that funding for pilot programs should conform with each school’s safety assessment and plans, and should “advance the goal of developing, testing and discerning best practices for school safety.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs*, p. 43.

⁶¹ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶³ *National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs*, p. 44.

⁶⁴ “Explanatory Statement Regarding the House Amendment to the Senate Amendment on H.R. 3547, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 160, no. 9—Book II, (January 15, 2014), p. H514.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The remaining \$25 million is for research and evaluation into potential root causes of school violence. Funding under this portion of the initiative can also be used to “examine promising new approaches and technologies to determine the most effective measures for the improvement of school safety, such as the development of comprehensive school safety assessments; the development and implementation of appropriate training modules; effectiveness of surveillance cameras; or new ways of designing schools to improve survivability in the event of a mass shooting incident.”⁶⁶

While funding under the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative cannot be used for hiring SROs, Congress did appropriate \$151 million under the Community Oriented Policing Services account for the COPS hiring program, under which, as mentioned previously, grant recipients can use their funding to hire SROs.

Select Issues for Congress

There are several issues Congress could consider should policymakers choose to debate whether to provide funding for SRO programs. Some of these issues might include the following:

- Do current trends in school violence warrant congressional efforts to expand SRO programs?
- Is it possible to sustain a significant expansion in SRO programs?
- What effect might an expansion of SRO programs have on the educational setting?

Trends in School Violence

An overarching issue is whether the current level of school violence warrants congressional efforts to expand the number of SROs in schools across the country. The recent shooting in Newtown, CT, has heightened the nation’s focus on school shootings, but it has been reported that schools are generally safe places for both students and staff.⁶⁷ Twelve out of a total of 78 public mass shootings between 1983 and 2012 that have been identified by CRS occurred in academic settings. Eight of these happened at primary or secondary education facilities.⁶⁸ Four of the 12 public mass shootings in education settings involved high school or middle school students as assailants.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Public mass shootings, as defined by CRS, are “incidents occurring in relatively public places, involving four or more deaths—not including the shooter(s)—and gunmen who select victims somewhat indiscriminately. The violence in these cases is not a means to an end such as robbery or terrorism.” CRS Report R43004, *Public Mass Shootings in the United States: Selected Implications for Federal Public Health and Safety Policy*, coordinated by Jerome P. Bjelopera.

⁶⁹ Of the eight remaining shootings: a) three involved non-students targeting elementary schools, b) one involved a gunman targeting people at the high school he formerly attended, c) four occurred on college campuses and involved either active or former students. CRS did not identify a public mass shooting involving a student attending elementary school who acted as an assailant in an incident at his or her own school. Ibid.

Data show that homicides of children while at school, in general, are rare events. For the 2010-2011 school year, the most recent school year for which data are available, there were 31 school-associated violent deaths,⁷⁰ of which 11 were homicides of children ages 5-18 while at school (see **Figure 3**).⁷¹ The number of school-associated violent deaths and homicides of children ages 5-18 while at school for the 2010-2011 school year was below the average number of school-associated violent deaths (45) and homicides of children at school (23) since the 1992-1993 school year. To put the number of reported at-school youth homicides in context, the number of youth homicides that occurred at school remained less than 2% of the total number of homicides of school aged children for each school year going back to the 1992-1993 school year.⁷² For example, there were a total of 1,595 homicides of children ages 5-18 during the 2008-2009 school year; of those, 17 (1.1%) occurred while the child was at school.⁷³

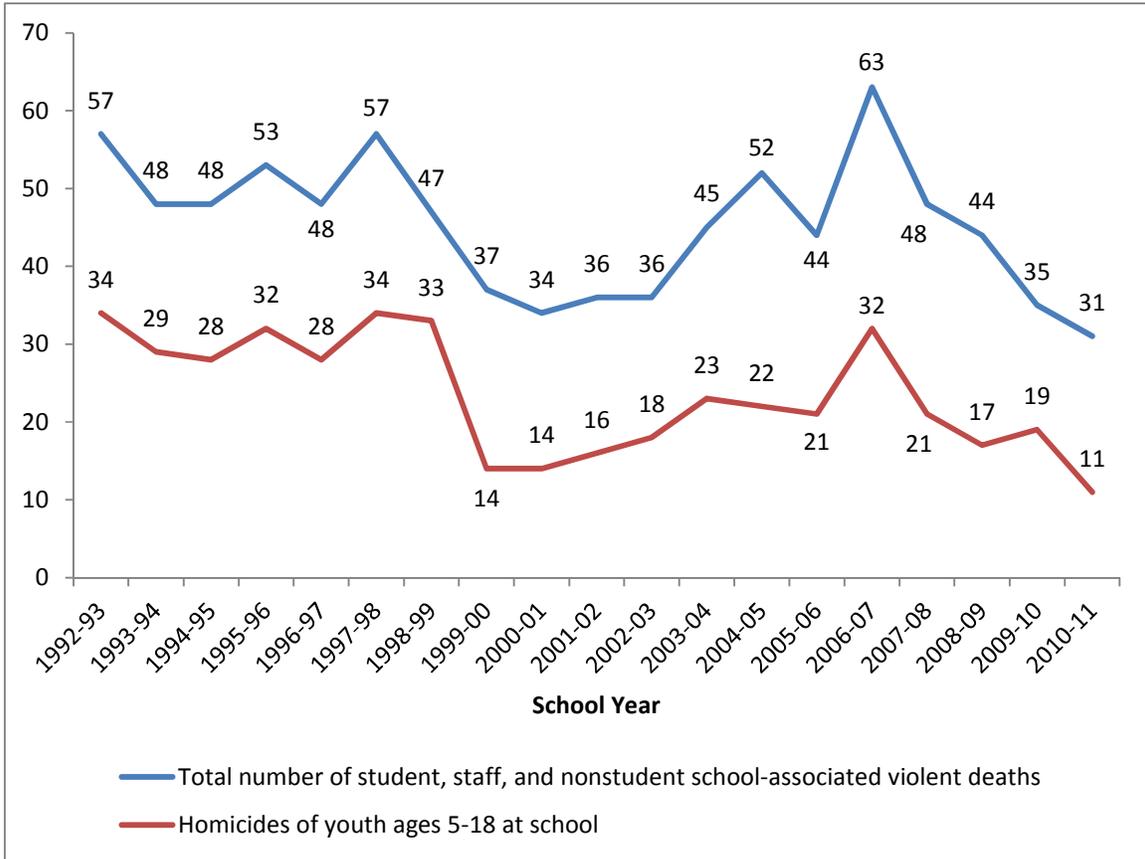
⁷⁰ A “school-associated violent death” is defined as a homicide, suicide, or legal intervention (involving a law enforcement officer), in which the fatal injury occurred on the campus of a functioning elementary or secondary school in the United States. Victims of school-associated violent deaths include not only students and staff, but also others who are not students or staff, such as parents. School-associated violent deaths include those that occurred while the victim was attending or traveling to or from an official school-sponsored event. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012*, Table 1.1, hereinafter “*Indicators of School Crime and Safety*.”

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Figure 3. Number of School-Associated Violent Deaths and Homicides of Youth Ages 5-18 at School



Source: Taken from Table I.1 in *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2012*.

Notes: Data from the 1999-2000 school year onward are subject to change as additional information about confirmed cases is received and assessed.

School violence, however, goes beyond just school shootings. School violence can include sexual assaults, robberies, assaults, and threats of violence against children while they are at school. In a December 2012 report on violent crime against youth, the BJS reported that the rate of serious violent crime⁷⁴ against youth ages 12 to 17 on school grounds decreased 62% between 1994 (17.4 per 1,000) and 2010 (6.6 per 1,000).⁷⁵ Trends in simple assault victimizations for children ages 12-17 were similar to victimizations for serious violent crimes. Reported victimizations for simple assaults on school grounds decreased 81% between 1994 (70.3 per 1,000) and 2010 (13.2 per 1,000).

Data published in the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* report, show that schools are generally safe, but there are some schools with higher levels of violence and disorder than others. Approximately 74% of public schools reported one or more violent incidents and 16% reported

⁷⁴ “Serious violent crime” includes rape or sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault.

⁷⁵ Nicole White and Janet L. Lauritsen, *Violent Crime Against Youth, 1994-2010*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 240106, Washington, DC, December 2012, p. 9, hereinafter “*Violent Crime Against Youth*.”

one or more serious violent incidents during the 2009-2010 school year (see **Table 1**). It is estimated that there were 1.2 million violent incidents and 52,500 serious violent incidents during that school year. The rate of violent incidents was 25.0 per 1,000 students while the rate of serious violent incidents was 1.1 per 1,000 students. However, data also show that some schools—namely middle schools, city schools, and schools with a higher proportion of low-income students (defined as the proportion of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch)—have higher rates of reported violent and serious violent incidents.

Table 1. Percentage of Public Schools Recording Violent and Serious Violent Incidents at School, Number of Incidents, and the Rate of Crimes Per 1,000 Students, by School Characteristics, School Year 2009-2010

School Characteristic	Total Number of Schools	Violent Incidents ^a			Serious Violent Incidents ^b		
		Percent of Schools	Number of Incidents	Rate per 1,000 Students	Percent of Schools	Number of Incidents	Rate per 1,000 Students
Total	82,800	73.8%	1,183,700	25.0	16.4%	52,500	1.1
School Level ^c							
Primary	48,900	64.4%	482,100	21.3	13.0%	21,900	1.0
Middle	15,300	90.5%	375,200	40.0	18.9%	13,600	1.5
High School	12,200	90.9%	264,400	21.4	27.6%	13,500	1.1
Combined	6,400	73.7%	62,000	20.8	15.5%	— ^d	— ^d
Enrollment size							
Less than 300	18,900	62.8%	111,300	27.2	10.4%	6,100 ^e	1.5 ^e
300-499	25,200	71.3%	274,400	26.5	15.7%	14,200	1.4
500-999	29,800	76.4%	487,900	25.0	15.9%	16,400	0.8
1,000 or more	8,900	95.4%	310,100	23.2	32.8%	15,700	1.2
Locale							
City	21,500	74.9%	396,300	28.8	21.7%	17,400	1.3
Suburban	23,800	73.5%	371,000	22.4	15.5%	16,200	1.0
Town	12,100	80.3%	166,300	28.2	15.6%	6,300	1.1
Rural	25,300	70.2%	250,100	22.5	13.2%	12,600	1.1
Percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch							
0-25%	17,100	62.6%	141,700	11.9	10.5%	6,700	0.6
26-50%	22,700	76.0%	290,500	22.1	16.2%	12,500	1.0
51-75%	23,800	73.8%	334,400	27.3	15.8%	13,100	1.1
76-100%	19,100	81.4%	417,200	41.3	22.9%	20,100	2.0

Source: Taken from Table 6.2, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012*.

- a. “Violent incidents” include rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attack or fight with or without a weapon, threat of physical attack with or without a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.

- b. “Serious violent incidents” include rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attack or fight with a weapon, threat of physical attack with a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.
- c. Primary schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not higher than grade 3 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 8. Middle schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 4 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 9. High schools are defined as schools in which the lowest grade is not lower than grade 9 and the highest grade is not higher than grade 12. Combined schools include all other combinations of grades, including K-12 schools.
- d. Reporting standards not met.
- e. Interpret data with caution because the margin of error for the estimated statistic is relatively large.

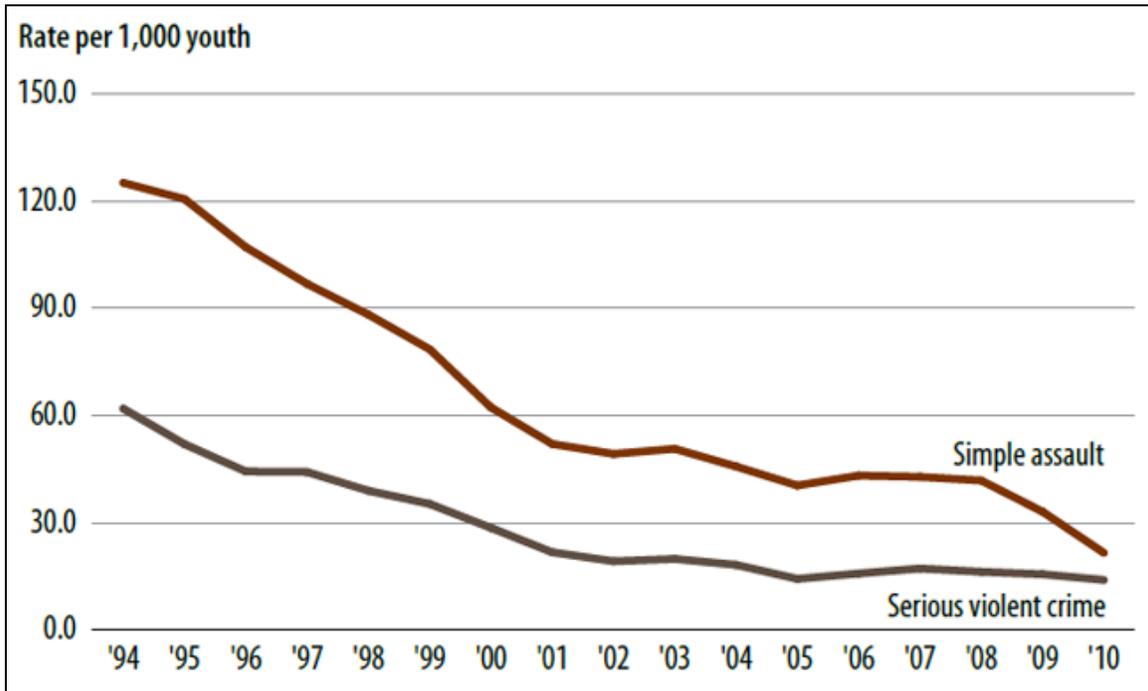
The above data suggest a key question: have SROs contributed to the reduction in school violence? The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) draws a link between decreasing school violence and the presence of SROs:

Over the past two decades, America’s public schools have become safer and safer. All indicators of school crime continue on the downward trend first reported when data collection began around 1992. In 2011, incidences of school-associated deaths, violence, nonfatal victimizations, and theft all continued their downward trend. This trend mirrors that of juvenile arrests in general, which fell nearly 50% between 1994 and 2009—17% between 2000 and 2009 alone. This period of time coincides with the expansion of School Resource Officer programs as part of a comprehensive, community-oriented strategy to address the range of real and perceived challenges to campus safety.⁷⁶

Data suggest that the decline in violent victimizations experienced by children at school might, in part, be the result of an overall decline in crime against juveniles and not the result of more SROs working in schools. Data from the BJS show that between 1994 and 2010 there was a 77% decrease in the number of serious violent victimizations and an 83% decrease in simple assaults against youth ages 12 to 17 (see **Figure 4**).

⁷⁶ National Association of School Resource Officers, *To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools*, October 2012, p. 9.

**Figure 4. Serious Violent Crime and Simple Assault Against Youth Ages 12 to 17
1994-2010**

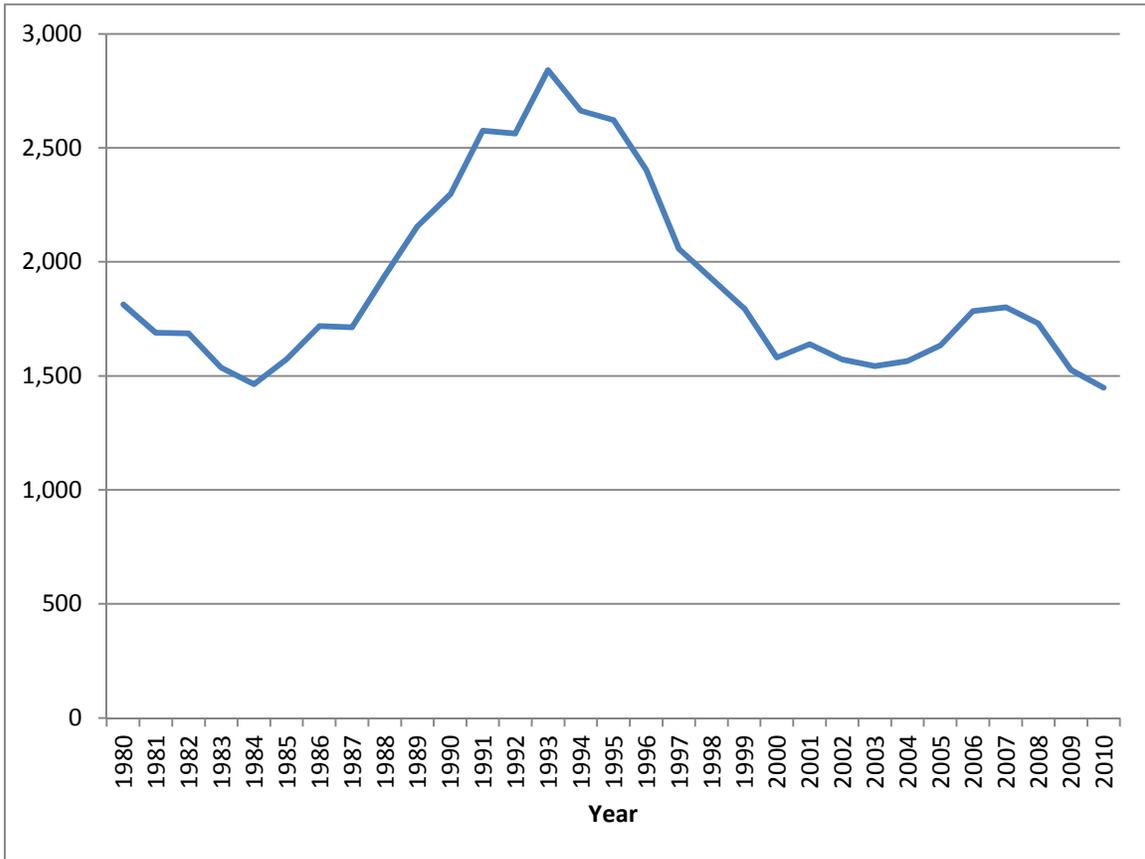


Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Violent Crime Against Youth, 1994-2010*.

Notes: Data based on two-year rolling averages beginning in 1993.

Data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) also show that the number of juvenile homicides is lower than the previous nadir in 1984. There were a reported 1,448 homicides of juveniles in 2010, down from the peak of 2,841 juvenile homicides in 1993 (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Reported Number of Juvenile Homicides, 1980-2010



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book*.

Sustainability of a School Resource Officer Expansion

As previously noted, there have been proposals to increase the number of SROs as a way of preventing school shootings. Some policymakers might view a program that provides grants for hiring SROs, like the CIS program, as a way to expand the number of police officers assigned to schools across the country. Federal funding provided through the CIS program has been cited as contributing to the expansion of SRO programs.⁷⁷ As previously discussed, in 2003 there were approximately 19,900 reported SROs, up from approximately 12,300 SROs in 1997. Between FY1999 and FY2002, the COPS Office, through the CIS program, had funded nearly 6,300 SRO positions. The LEMAS data do not indicate how each SRO position is funded, but a survey conducted by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) of attendees at their 2004 national conference found that 45% of respondents indicated that their SRO positions were currently or formerly supported by a CIS grant.⁷⁸ The NASRO survey does not represent an

⁷⁷ *Assigning Police Officers to Schools*, p. 1; *Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors*, p. 2

⁷⁸ National Association of School Resource Officers, *School Safety Left Behind? School Safety Threat Grows as Preparedness Stalls & Funding Decreases*, Final Report on the 4th Annual National Survey of School-based Police Officers, February 2005, p. 20.

unbiased national sample of SRO programs, and any results should therefore be interpreted with caution, but it is one of the few indicators of how many SRO positions were funded by CIS grants. The available data suggest that CIS funding probably supported a significant expansion of SRO programs across the country. The data also suggest that local law enforcement agencies have funded a majority of SRO positions, and they have continued to do so even after grants through the CIS program expired.

Even a conservative estimate of the cost of placing an SRO in each school in the country shows that it could cost billions of dollars to accomplish that goal. This estimate is partly founded on assumptions based on 2007 data (the most recent available). Data from the NCES show that in the 2009-2010 school year there were 98,817 public schools in the United States.⁷⁹ Data from the BJS show that there were a total of 19,088 SROs in 2007 (see **Table A-1** and **Table A-2**). If it is assumed that the number of SROs did not decrease in subsequent years and it is further assumed that each SRO is assigned to work in only one school, it would mean that there would need to be an additional 79,729 SROs hired to place an SRO in each school in the United States. Data from the BJS show that in 2007 the average minimum salary for an entry-level police officer was \$32,900⁸⁰ and for an entry-level sheriff's deputy it was \$31,100,⁸¹ and the weighted average minimum salary for an entry-level law enforcement officer in 2007 was \$32,412.⁸² Assuming that the average minimum salary for entry-level police officers and sheriff's deputies has not changed, it would cost about \$2.6 billion to hire the additional 79,729 SROs needed to place an SRO in each school. However, this cost could be higher because, as previously discussed, the number of SROs declined between 2003 and 2007. In recent years, many law enforcement agencies faced significant budget constraints due to the recent recession, so it is possible that the number of SROs continued to decline as they were reassigned or laid-off. Also, it is possible that the salaries for entry-level police officers and sheriff's deputies have increased since 2007. On the other hand, the estimated cost could be lower if SROs were assigned to patrol more than one school in some school districts.

If Congress acted to expand the number of SROs, it is likely that many of those officers would go to law enforcement agencies serving jurisdictions of fewer than 25,000 people. Data from the BJS show that nearly 88% of police departments and almost half of sheriff's offices serve jurisdictions of fewer than 25,000 people.⁸³ However, a smaller proportion of police departments and sheriff's offices that serve populations of less than 25,000 reported using SROs in 2007 (see **Table A-3** and **Table A-4**).

Not surprisingly, data from the LEMAS show that law enforcement agencies serving smaller jurisdictions have smaller operating budgets. Concomitantly, smaller law enforcement agencies have, on average, fewer sworn officers. Policymakers might consider whether it would be financially sensible to provide federal funding to place an SRO in every school across the

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011*, Table 5.

⁸⁰ Brian A. Reaves, *Local Police Departments, 2007*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 231174, Washington, DC, December 2010, p. 12, hereinafter "*Local Police Departments, 2007*."

⁸¹ Andrea M. Burch, *Sheriff's Offices, 2007—Statistical Tables*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 238558, Washington, DC, December 2012, p. 7, hereinafter "*Sheriff's Offices, 2007*."

⁸² There were a reported 463,147 sworn police officers and 172,241 sworn sheriff's deputies in 2007 for a total of 635,388 sworn law enforcement officers. Therefore the weighted average salary for law enforcement officers was calculated as $((\$32,900 * 463,147) + (\$31,100 * 172,241)) / 635,388$.

⁸³ *Local Police Departments, 2007*, p. 9; *Sheriff's Offices, 2007*, p. 6.

country, or to even substantially expand the number of SROs. Traditionally, COPS grants have provided “seed” money for local law enforcement agencies to hire new officers, but it is the responsibility of the recipient agency to retain the officer(s) after the grant expires. Since smaller law enforcement agencies tend to have smaller operating budgets and smaller sworn forces, retaining even one or two additional officers after a grant expires might pose a significant financial burden. If the law enforcement agency cannot retain the new SROs after the grant period ends, then the federal government has only supported a temporary expansion of SRO programs. The COPS Office has required law enforcement agencies that receive hiring grants to retain any officers hired with federal funds for at least one year after the grant period ends. While this might help promote the retention of federally-funded law enforcement officers, this requirement, if applied to any potential funding Congress might provide for hiring SROs, might limit who decides to apply for grants.

The Effect of School Resource Officers on the Educational Setting

An August 21, 2011, story in the *Washington Post* highlighted several incidents of students in public schools in Texas being ticketed and required to appear in court for behavior that was traditionally dealt with by teachers and principals.⁸⁴ This and similar stories⁸⁵ might raise some concern among policymakers that a wide-scale expansion of SRO programs could contribute to what has been referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” One review of the literature on SROs asserts that the increased use of police officers in schools facilitates the formal processing of minor offenses and harsh responses to minor disciplinary situations.⁸⁶

On December 12, 2012, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, held a hearing titled “Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline.” In his opening statement Chairman Richard Durbin stated that

For many young people, our schools are increasingly a gateway to the criminal justice system. This phenomenon is a consequence of a culture of zero tolerance that is widespread in our schools and is depriving many children of their fundamental right to an education.⁸⁷

While recent interest in SROs programs has stemmed from proposals to use SROs as a way to prevent school shootings, it should be noted that SROs are more than armed sentries whose sole purpose is to stand guard and wait for an attack. SROs are sworn law enforcement officers who, among other things, patrol the school, investigate criminal complaints, and handle law violators. Therefore, while assigning an SRO to a school might serve as a deterrent to a potential school shooter, or provide a quicker law enforcement response in cases where a school shooting occurs, it will also establish a regular law enforcement presence in the school. There might be some concern that any potential deterrent effect generated by placing SROs in schools could be offset by either the monetary cost associated with a wide-scale expansion of SRO programs or the social

⁸⁴ Donna St. George, “Texas Students Sent From Classroom to Courtroom,” *The Washington Post*, August 21, 2011.

⁸⁵ Leslie Postal and Lauren Roth, “Thousands of Student Arrests Alarm Florida Justice Leaders,” *The Orlando Sentinel*, February 10, 2013; Greg Toppo, “Students, Civil Rights Groups Say ‘No’ to School Cops,” *USA Today*, April 6, 2013; Donna Lieberman, “Schoolhouse to Courthouse,” *The New York Times*, December 8, 2012.

⁸⁶ Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Office of Senator Richard Durbin, “Durbin Holds Hearing on Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” press release, December 12, 2012.

costs that might arise by potentially having more children enter the criminal justice system for relatively minor offenses.

Research on SROs and School Arrests

A study conducted by Theriot used data from a school district in the southeastern United States to test the criminalization of student misconduct theory.⁸⁸ Theriot's analysis produced mixed results. Middle and high schools with SROs had more arrests per 100 students than schools without SROs, but this relationship was no longer significant when the analysis controlled for school-level poverty. The results of the study indicated that students in schools with SROs were more likely than students in schools without SROs to be arrested for disorderly conduct, which lends credence to the idea that student misbehavior is being criminalized. The researcher also found that schools with SROs had lower arrest rates for assault and possessing a weapon on school grounds. The researcher opined that this suggests that SROs might serve as a deterrent. For example, students might be less likely to bring a weapon to school if an SRO is present because they fear they might be caught. Students might also be less likely to fight if they believe they will be arrested for assault. A critique of Theriot's study notes that the analysis did not collect data for a long enough period before SROs were assigned to some schools and the control group (i.e., the non-SRO schools) still had some contact with law enforcement.⁸⁹

The study conducted by Na and Gottfredson, discussed previously, also included an analysis of whether schools that added SROs had a greater percentage of crimes reported to law enforcement and whether a greater proportion of students were subject to "harsh discipline" (i.e., the student was removed, transferred, or suspended for five or more days).⁹⁰ The researchers found that schools that added SROs were more likely to report non-serious violent crimes (i.e., physical attack or fights without a weapon and threat of physical attack without a weapon) to the police than schools that did not add SROs. The reporting of other crime types and the reporting of crime overall, were not affected by the addition of SROs. The results of Na and Gottfredson's analysis mirror the finding of Theriot's study. Na and Gottfredson conclude that their findings are "consistent with our prediction that increased use of SROs facilitates the formal processing of minor offenses."⁹¹ However, their analysis also found that students at schools that added SROs were not any more likely than students at schools that did not add SROs to be subject to harsh discipline for committing any offense that was reported to the police.

⁸⁸ The analysis compared arrests at middle and high schools with SROs (SRO schools) to middle and high schools without SROs (non-SRO schools). The researcher took advantage of a natural experiment in the school district whereby the metropolitan city's police department placed an SRO in each middle and high school in the city while middle and high schools in the district that were outside the city limits did not have a SRO assigned to them. SROs were assigned based only on geography, not on a school's need, history of violence, or demographics. Schools outside of the city were patrolled by sheriff's deputies, who focused solely on law enforcement activities, were assigned to patrol more than one school, and received less training in school-based training than their SRO counterparts in the city. Matthew T. Theriot, "School Resource Officers and the Criminalization of Student Behavior," *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 37, no. 3 (May-June 2009), pp. 280-287.

⁸⁹ Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors, p. 7.

⁹⁰ Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offender Behaviors.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

School Security Measures and School Disciplinary Policies

The use of SROs in schools occurred in the context of increasing concern about security in schools and the concomitant adoption of more security measures in schools and the strengthening of school discipline policies. Although research on the efficacy of security measures in reducing school violence is limited, schools have been adopting more security measures over time. Between school year 1999-2000 and 2009-2010 there was an increase in the percentage of schools adopting the following security measures: restricting access to buildings during school hours (from 75% to 92%); using one or more security cameras to monitor the school (from 19% to 61%); and requiring faculty to wear badges or picture IDs (from 25% to 63%).⁹² During the same time period the percentage of students reporting the presence of security guards and/or assigned police officers at school increased from 54% to 68%.⁹³

Following the adoption of the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) in 1994,⁹⁴ some schools expanded on the GFSA's prohibition against guns in schools by adopting school-wide policies with strict disciplinary consequences for other rule violations. These so called "zero tolerance" policies vary from school to school, but are generally characterized by the application of specified, mandatory discipline procedures in response to rule violations. Like the hiring of SROs, these policies were intended to improve school security. The theory behind zero tolerance policies is that certain, severe punishments would deter violent behavior by students. However, data on the rising number of out-of-school suspensions that disproportionately impact minority students, as well as data indicating the potential negative effects of suspensions on students, have increased attention on these policies.

Disparities in School Discipline

The most recent U.S. Department of Education biennial Civil Rights Data Collection survey (CRDC) includes data indicating that some school disciplinary measures disproportionately affect minority students and students with disabilities.⁹⁵ The CRDC data indicate that African American students were over 3½ times more likely to be suspended or expelled than white students.

⁹² These data are based on responses from the school principal or the person most knowledgeable about crime and safety issues at the school. The three examples included here experienced the greatest percentage increase; for a complete list see Roberts, S., Zhang, J., and Truman, J. (2012). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2011* (NCES 2012-002/NCJ 236021). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC.

⁹³ This information is based on the percentage of students ages 12-18 who reported selected security measures at school. Roberts, S., Zhang, J., and Truman, J. (2012). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2011* (NCES 2012-002/NCJ 236021). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC.

⁹⁴ The Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) was included in the 1994 (P.L. 103-382) reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). GFSA requires states to enact a law that obligates schools to impose a one year expulsion on any student who brings a weapon to school. However, the law permits the chief administering officer of a local educational agency (LEA) to modify the expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis.

⁹⁵ These data are based on a sample of 7,000 school districts and 72,000 students. Data on suspensions are broken down by race, sex and disability. The Office for Civil Rights indicates that 85% of the nation's public school students are covered by this survey, however it is not intended to be viewed as an estimation of national data. See <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2012-data-summary.pdf>.

Additionally, students with disabilities were more than twice as likely as non-disabled students to receive one or more suspensions.⁹⁶

Although African American students represented 18% of the students in the CRDC survey, 46% of these students were suspended more than once. In zero tolerance school districts that reported expulsions under that policy, Hispanic and African Americans comprised 56% of those expelled, although they comprised 45% of the total student population in these schools. Furthermore, the CRDC survey found that over 70% of students arrested at school or referred to law enforcement were African American or Hispanic.⁹⁷

Efficacy of School Disciplinary Measures

One of the main purposes of zero tolerance discipline policies was to serve as a deterrent to further school violence; however, existing empirical research has been too limited to validate the effectiveness of these disciplinary measures. A task force convened by the American Psychological Association to examine the evidence on the effectiveness of zero tolerance in schools found that

it is problematic that despite 20 years of school implementation of zero tolerance policies, and nearly 15 years as federal policy, the research base on zero tolerance is in no way sufficient to evaluate the impact of zero tolerance policy and practices on student behavior or school climate.⁹⁸

Concern about the effectiveness of school suspensions and their impact on students has led to a growing body of research on potentially more effective alternatives, particularly efforts to improve school climate.⁹⁹ The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines a positive school climate as one that is “characterized by caring and supportive interpersonal relationships; opportunities to participate in school activities and decision-making; and shared positive norms, goals, and values.”¹⁰⁰ Available research suggests that one of the most important elements in a positive school climate is for students to have a feeling of school connectedness. School connectedness is defined as “the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ The survey defines students with a disability as those served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

⁹⁷ <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2012-data-summary.pdf>.

⁹⁸ American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, “Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations,” *American Psychologist*, vol. 63, no. 9 (December 2008), pp. 852-862.

⁹⁹ The Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs funds a Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The Center provides capacity-building information and technical assistance to schools, districts, and states who are implementing a school climate protocol called *School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (SWPBIS). SWPBIS is a three-tiered prevention-based approach to improving schoolwide disciplinary practices. According to the Center, SWPBIS is used in more than 9,000 schools across 40 states.

¹⁰⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protection Factors Among Youth*, Atlanta, GA, Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, p.7.

¹⁰¹ See <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/adolescenthealth/pdf/connectedness.pdf>.

The National School Climate Center (the Center) has published numerous reports on school climate.¹⁰² A 2012 report from the Center cites research indicating that a positive school climate influences student motivation to learn, mitigates the effect of socioeconomic factors on academic success, and contributes to less aggression and violence, among other positive outcomes.¹⁰³ Both social emotional learning¹⁰⁴ and positive behavior management strategies have been identified by researchers as positive approaches to improving school climate.¹⁰⁵ A program to improve school climate called *School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (SWPBIS) is currently supported by the U.S. Department of Education through capacity-building information and technical assistance to schools, districts, and states who are implementing SWPBIS. SWPBIS is a three-tiered prevention-based approach to improving schoolwide disciplinary practices. According to the Center, SWPBIS is used in more than 9,000 schools across 40 states.¹⁰⁶ SWPBIS has been linked to reductions in student suspensions and office discipline referrals.¹⁰⁷

In addition, an interagency initiative titled “Safe Schools/Healthy Students” (SS/HS) focuses on a comprehensive approach to school violence.¹⁰⁸ SS/HS is funded jointly by ED and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The program is administered by ED, SAMHSA, and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The SS/HS initiative is a discretionary grant program that provides schools and communities with federal funding, via LEAs, to implement an enhanced, coordinated, comprehensive plan of activities, programs, and services that focus on healthy childhood development and the prevention of violence and alcohol and drug abuse. Grantees are required to establish partnerships with local law enforcement, public mental health, and juvenile justice agencies/entities.

¹⁰² The National School Climate Center and the Education Commission of the States have developed a definition of school climate: “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes (1) Norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe. (2) People are engaged and respected. (3) Students, families and educators work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision. (4) Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning. (5) Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment. See <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate>.

¹⁰³ Available at <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/policy/sc-brief-v3.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social emotional learning as: “... the processes through which adults and children develop social and emotional competencies in five areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.” Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, *The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools*, May 2013, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Bradshaw, et al., “Examining the Effects of Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Student Outcomes,” *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, vol. 12, no. 3 (July 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Assistance is provided through a U.S. Department of Education funded Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

¹⁰⁷ Catherine Bradshaw, et al., “Examining the Effects of Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Student Outcomes,” *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, vol. 12, no. 3 (July 2010).

¹⁰⁸ For more information on this program see <http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/>.

Concluding Thoughts

The practice of placing SROs in schools has become more popular over the past two decades. As of 2007, there were more SROs working in schools across the country than there were in 1997, though the number of SROs was down from its peak in 2003. Data show that police departments and sheriff's offices have, by-and-large, sustained their SRO programs over the years, even as federal grants for hiring SROs have waned.

The expansion of SRO programs coincided with a decrease in reported serious violent victimizations of students while at school and generally lower numbers of violent deaths and homicides at schools. The extent to which SRO programs contributed to the decrease is not known. Indeed, trends in at-school violence mirror a downward trend in overall violence against children and juvenile homicides. Yet schools are not free of violence and crime, and some schools—such as city schools, middle schools, and schools with a higher proportion of low income students—have higher rates of violent incidents.

Policymakers might contemplate increasing the number of SRO programs across the country as a way to address the threat of mass shootings at or violence in schools. However, the body of research on the effectiveness of SRO programs is noticeably limited, and the research that is available draws conflicting conclusions about whether SRO programs are effective at reducing school violence. In addition, the body of research on the effectiveness of SROs does not address whether their presence in schools has deterred mass shootings.

While a law enforcement presence at a school might facilitate actions, such as security planning or threat assessments, that might promote school safety, and the presence of an SRO might serve as a deterrent to a potential school shooter or provide for a quick response if a shooting occurs, some might be concerned that a regular law enforcement presence might have some unintended consequences for students. Research suggests that the presence of SROs might result in more children being involved in the criminal justice system for relatively minor offenses, and this, in turn, can result in other negative consequences, such as higher rates of suspension or a greater likelihood of dropping-out of school.

The school shooting in Newtown, CT, might lead some policymakers to consider ways to provide funding to law enforcement agencies or school districts to establish or expand SRO programs. However, even a conservative estimate of the cost of placing an SRO in every school across the country shows that this proposal might be too expensive to be feasible. Also, these grants typically have been meant to provide “seed” money for the recipient agencies, and at some point local governments would be required to absorb the cost of a wide-scale expansion of SRO programs.

The analysis presented in this report raises several even more specific issues policymakers might contemplate should Congress consider measures to promote placing more SROs in schools.

- Should the federal government provide grants for school safety that can only be used for hiring SROs, like the CIS program, or should grants be for a more comprehensive approach to school safety, like the Administration's proposed Comprehensive School Safety Program?
- Should the federal government collect annual data on the number of SROs, the type of schools they serve, and their roles in schools?

- If funding is available for hiring SROs, should there be a requirement that the officer(s) attend SRO training before being assigned to a school? Also, should applicants for potential SRO grants be required to submit a signed memorandum of understanding that outlines the responsibilities of the SRO?
- If there are concerns about the presence of SROs resulting in more children being arrested for minor offenses, should there be a limitation on what SROs can do while working at a school? If limitations are placed on the role of SROs, would placing an officer at a school represent the most effective use of the officer's time?
- Should funding for school safety programs be awarded to schools that have higher rates of reported violent incidents or should funding be distributed to law enforcement agencies or LEAs based upon a formula?
- If Congress adopts the Administration's proposal and provides funding for the Comprehensive School Safety Program, would requiring local jurisdictions to submit a comprehensive school safety plan prove to be too onerous a task for some jurisdictions, thereby limiting who would be able to apply for funding? On the other hand, might it provide an indication of which jurisdictions are the best suited for implementing comprehensive school safety programs?
- Should applicants for any potential funding for school safety programs be required to submit a plan for how they will continue funding the program after federal funding ends? Should priority be given to applicants who can continue to operate programs after the grant expires?
- If grants are awarded for hiring SROs, should grant recipients be required to submit data that could be used to analyze the effectiveness of SRO programs and their effect on the educational environment? For example, should grant recipients be required to submit data on reported crimes and arrests of students both before and after an SRO is assigned to the school? If so, what if the school district already has a working relationship with the local law enforcement agency and wants to use a grant to permanently assign an officer or officers to one or more schools? Would such a school district be prohibited from receiving a grant for hiring an SRO since it could not provide unbiased baseline data? Would school districts that could not provide baseline data be prohibited from applying for grants?

Appendix. Data on Police Departments and Sheriff’s Offices Referenced in the Report

This appendix provides tables for some of the data referenced in the body of the report. **Table A-1** and **Table A-2** provide data on the percent of police departments and sheriff’s offices using SROs, the total number of officers and deputies who were assigned to work as SROs, and the average number of SROs by the size of the jurisdiction served.

Table A-1. School Resources Officers Employed by Police Departments

	Percent of Agencies Using				Total Number of Officers				Average Number of Officers			
	1997	2000	2003	2007	1997	2000	2003	2007	1997	2000	2003	2007
All sizes	38%	44%	43%	38%	9,446	13,760	14,337	13,056	3	2	3	3
1 million or more	75%	73%	69%	77%	874	942	855	913	93	85	75	87
500,000-999,999	67%	67%	73%	71%	306	603	760	788	40	26	27	34
250,000-499,999	65%	85%	93%	89%	462	497	715	664	49	15	18	15
100,000-249,999	80%	85%	87%	85%	807	1,193	1,468	1,480	17	8	10	9
50,000-99,999	77%	86%	83%	88%	901	1,380	1,893	1,678	8	4	5	4
25,000-49,999	70%	82%	84%	88%	1,060	1,757	1,734	1,950	5	3	3	3
10,000-24,999	62%	66%	70%	68%	1,493	2,127	2,441	1,992	2	2	2	2
2,500-9,999	42%	45%	44%	34%	2,009	3,095	2,861	2,142	1	2	2	2
Under 2,500	21%	25%	20%	16%	1,533	2,167	1,611	1,447	1	2	2	2

Source: CRS presentation of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Local Police Departments* for 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007.

Notes: Average number of officers excludes agencies that did not employ any full-time SROs.

Table A-2. School Resource Officers Employed by Sheriff's Offices

	Percent of Agencies Using				Total Number of Deputies				Average Number of Deputies			
	1997	2000	2003	2007	1997	2000	2003	2007	1997	2000	2003	2007
All sizes	38%	48%	47%	50%	2,897	5,311	5,554	6,032	2	4	4	4
1 million or more	64%	59%	89%	85%	223	872	351	589	11	44	14	23
500,000-999,999	46%	66%	71%	71%	195	418	488	429	7	9	10	10
250,000-499,999	54%	70%	67%	69%	304	607	748	873	5	8	9	10
100,000-249,999	60%	63%	66%	73%	689	951	1,306	1,231	4	5	6	5
50,000-99,999	44%	62%	54%	60%	360	712	749	1,137	2	3	4	4
25,000-49,999	46%	52%	51%	56%	538	805	898	672	2	2	3	2
10,000-24,999	35%	40%	45%	43%	419	603	694	700	1	2	2	2
Under 10,000	16%	33%	26%	27%	169	344	320	402	1	2	2	2

Source: CRS presentation of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sheriff's Offices* for 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007.

Notes: Average number of deputies excludes offices that did not employ any full-time SROs.

Table A-3. Per Department Operating Budget and Average Number of Sworn Officers, Police Departments, 2007

	Per Department Operating Budget	Average Number of Sworn Officers
1 million or more	\$848,799,000	6,790
500,000-999,999	211,991,000	1,575
250,000-499,999	93,414,000	713
100,000-249,999	38,844,000	289
50,000-99,999	16,068,000	122
25,000-49,999	7,474,000	63
10,000-24,999	3,260,000	31
2,500-9,999	1,127,000	12
Under 2,500	263,000	3

Source: CRS presentation of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Local Police Departments*, 2007.

Table A-4. Per Department Operating Budget and Average Number of Sworn Deputies, Sheriff's Offices, 2007

	Per Department Operating Budget	Average Number of Sworn Deputies
1 million or more	\$336,753,000	1,396
500,000-999,999	68,447,000	331
250,000-499,999	34,897,000	194
100,000-249,999	15,139,000	102
50,000-99,999	7,095,000	52
25,000-49,999	3,194,000	28
10,000-24,999	1,659,000	14
Under 10,000	657,000	6

Source: CRS presentation of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sheriff's Offices, 2007*.

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