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Police in Schools: Public Perceptions

Brad A. Myr Stol

Over the past two decades the United States has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of sworn police officers assigned to schools. Prompted by several high-profile incidents of school violence in the 1990s in places like West Paducah, Kentucky (1997), Springfield, Oregon (1998), Jonesboro, Arkansas (1998), and perhaps most memorably in Littleton, Colorado (1999), school administrators have taken a number of steps in an effort to improve school safety. Leading the way have been technological solutions, particularly the use of metal detectors and surveillance cameras. While these sorts of technologies were used prior to the high profile incidents of school violence that occurred in the 1990s, their use was largely limited to the most crime-ridden, urban schools. Now these forms of enhanced surveillance have spread to suburban and even rural schools. In addition to these technological strategies, school administrators have also turned to policy innovations to control crime and delinquency. One example of this is the creation of policies and procedures for more tightly controlling access to school campuses and buildings, limiting weapons on campus, and developing crisis drills for faculty, staff, and students.

Another approach to dealing with increased concerns about school and student safety has been for school administrators to increase the number of security staff and police working in schools. The addition of School Resource Officers (SROs)—certified, sworn police officers who are employed by a local police agency but are assigned

to work in local schools—has been especially popular. Conceptually, in their role as SROs, police officers engage in three broad classes of activity: (1) law enforcement, (2) teaching, and (3) mentoring. As sworn officers, SROs are required to perform law enforcement activities like investigating crimes, apprehending criminal suspects, and acting as first responders in the event of emergencies and immediate threats to school safety. However, officers are also expected to educate students about the law and crime prevention, as well as the profession of policing. Finally, SROs are supposed to mentor students and serve as role models.

In practice SROs operate on a continuum, with a heavy emphasis on law enforcement at one end, and an emphasis on teaching and mentoring at the other. Observational data suggest that there is wide inter- and intra-departmental variation in the emphasis placed on each of these roles depending upon the type of school to which an SRO is assigned (i.e., a middle school vs. a high school), the personality and particular orientation of an SRO, and the level of crime and disorder in a school.

COPS in Schools

While there is a long history of police occasionally working in schools, the permanent assignment of sworn police officers to schools is a relatively recent development. Prior to the 1990s, the number of sworn police officers working in schools was small. But increasing fears about school violence, coupled with the surge of interest in community policing throughout the 1990s, produced rapid increases in the number of sworn officers working in public schools in the United States. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows a significant increase in the number of local police agencies employing full-time SROs. In the late 1990s approximately a third of local police and sheriffs' departments employed SROs. By 2003 an estimated 43 percent of local police departments and 47 percent of sheriffs' departments in the United States

employed full-time SROs. School resource officers are especially common in larger jurisdictions. Roughly 80 percent of police departments and 73 percent of sheriffs' offices serving jurisdictions of 100,000 or more residents maintain an SRO program; in cities with populations between 250,000 and 499,999 residents, more than 90 percent of departments employ full-time SROs. Altogether, local police and sheriffs' departments employ an estimated 20,000 SROs. (In all states except Alaska and Hawaii, sheriffs' departments are responsible for the provision of police services in unincorporated areas.)

Much of the growth of SROs can be directly traced to the efforts of the federal government. As part of its overall effort to advance community policing (which emphasizes police-community cooperation, community input, and frequent positive police-citizen interactions), in 1999 the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) initiated the COPS in Schools grant program to facilitate the hiring of SROs to engage in community policing in and around primary and secondary schools. The COPS in Schools effort has two primary objectives: (1) to improve student and school safety, and (2) to help police agencies build collaborative partnerships with local schools.

The COPS office provided the first round of funding for the COPS in Schools program in April of 1999. Between 1999 and 2005, more than \$750 million was awarded to more than 3,000 agencies for hiring SROs and approximately \$23 million more for the training of SROs and the administrators of participating schools. The COPS office has also awarded an additional \$11.5 million through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative and the Office of Justice Programs' Gang Reduction Project.

Prior Research on the Impact of SRO Programs

Despite the massive financial investments

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HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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- **The 9th Circuit vacates *Farrakhan v. Gregoire* opinion on felon disenfranchisement** (page 4).

Measuring and Fighting Meth Use in Alaska and the U.S.

Marny Rivera and Jenny Baker

Meth use in the U.S. spiked in the 1990s and early 2000s. The reported use of meth started to decline about 2002 following prevention efforts around the country and the passage of national legislation in 2006 that regulated the sale of pseudoephedrine (sold under the brand name *Sudafed*). Recent indicators, however, reflect overall growth in meth use over the past year. At this point, it is difficult to determine if this upsurge in use is a trend or a one-year increase.

National, as well as state and local efforts, have been focused on decreasing methamphetamine (meth) use and its attendant devastating and costly consequences. In 2006 the United States Senate approved \$99 million to help states fight meth use, which included funding for the statewide Alaska Meth Education (AME) Project. The AME Project, funded by both federal and state sources, works with local governments to keep Alaskans, especially youth, from ever trying meth, and focuses on creating awareness of the drug's dangers. In local communities throughout Alaska, collaborations like the Mat-Su Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and the Effective Prevention & Intervention of Substance Abuse Committee of Anchorage United for Youth have galvanized prevention efforts targeting meth and other substance abuse.

Meth Use Indicators Nationwide

Data from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reports on substance use among non-institutionalized Americans aged 12 years and older. The 2009 NSDUH shows that the number of Americans 12 years and older who reported past month use of meth increased 60 percent, from 314,000 current users in 2008 to 502,200 in 2009. This increase in current meth use is noteworthy because past month reports of meth use had declined from 2006 to 2008, and because among adults 26 years and older, the number of past month drug users did not change significantly from 2008 to 2009 for any drugs other than stimulants and meth. Similarly, the number of new users (those who tried the drug for the first time in the past year) 12 years and older increased from 95,000 new users in 2008 to 154,000 new users in 2009. (Forty-one percent of most past-year meth users reported that they were given the drug by a friend or relative.) The most current data available for Alaska is for the period 2002–2005 and show that 0.64 percent of Alaskans 12 years and older reported past year meth use, while

2.9 percent of 18 to 25-year-olds indicated they had used meth in the past year.

There are a few contributing factors thought to be behind increasing rates of meth use. The first is importation of large amounts of meth from Mexico. The second is *smurfing*, which refers to multiple people supplying clandestine meth labs with Sudafed purchased at different locations. The third factor is increased use of the *shake and bake* production method that allows users to manufacture meth in vehicles using fewer ingredients in smaller and easily transportable containers such as suitcases and backpacks. (The remnants are often discarded in local neighborhoods, as well as remote areas, creating environmental hazards.)

Youth Meth Use Data

Meth use by high school students both nationally and in Alaska showed declines in lifetime use (use of meth anytime during one's life) between 2007 and 2009 for most grade levels. According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a biennial nationwide survey, between 2007 and 2009 the number of high school students who reported lifetime use of meth declined overall from 4.6 percent in 2007 to 3.6 percent in 2009 in Alaska, and from 4.4 percent in 2007 to 4.1 percent in 2009 nationwide. In Alaska, reductions in reported lifetime meth use were noted among ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade high school students; however, lifetime use of meth increased from 3.2 percent in 2007 to 4.5 percent in 2009 among twelfth graders (Table 1).

Law Enforcement Data

The extent of and trends in the meth problem are also evident in law enforcement data. The Alaska Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Enforcement (ABADE) annually describes Alaska's drug and alcohol problem using drug seizure and drug arrest data. ABADE noted in 2009 that meth remains widely available in Alaska largely because importation of meth to Alaska has increased dramatically. ABADE reported over a 400 percent increase in grams of meth seized from 3,849.63 grams in 2008 to 20,728.4 grams of meth seized in 2009. Drug Enforcement

Table 1. Lifetime Use of Meth Among High School Students in Alaska and the U.S.

Grade level	2007		2009	
	Alaska	U.S.	Alaska	U.S.
9th grade	2.4 %	3.6 %	1.5 %	3.3 %
10th grade	6.1	4.1	3.9	3.7
11th grade	6.5	5.4	3.3	5.2
12th grade	3.2	3.2	4.5	4.1
Total	4.6 %	4.4 %	3.6 %	4.1 %

Source of data: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007; 2009

Administration (DEA) seizures of meth in Alaska also increased over 300 percent from 430.91 grams in 2008 to 1,814.36 grams of meth seized in 2009. Meth-related arrests and/or charges by ABADE also increased from 138 in 2008 to 163 in 2009. According to the ABADE 2009 report, meth remains a significant problem in Alaska despite a reduction in the number of meth labs seized (from 42 in 2005 to nine in 2009).

Medical Facility Data

Other indicators of meth use include hospital data on emergency department (E.D.) admissions involving meth, and admissions to substance abuse treatment facilities for meth abuse. Nationwide data collected on the number of admissions to treatment facilities by type of substance abused is reported in the Treatment Episodes Dataset (TEDS). TEDS data for the state of Alaska show a steady increase in treatment admissions related to meth abuse, from 118 admissions in 2007 to 128 admissions in 2008, and 143 admissions in 2009. Data from Providence Medical Center, located in Anchorage, indicate that E.D. admissions involving meth increased from 27 E.D. admissions in 2005 to 83 E.D. admissions in 2009; the most dramatic increase was from 42 E.D. admissions involving meth in 2008 to 83 in 2009. Notably, however, the data from Alaska Regional Hospital, also located in Anchorage, show a continuing decrease in E.D. admissions: from 13 E.D. meth-related admissions in 2005 to five E.D. admissions in 2009.

AME Project Survey Data

In 2009, the AME Project worked with the UAA Justice Center to conduct a survey of Alaska residents about their awareness of meth. A survey instrument of 109 questions was developed and sent to 10,000 randomly selected adult residents. A total of 2,115

responses to the survey were collected and analyzed. Relative risk was one of the areas the survey asked about. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the relative risk of infrequent (one or two uses) and frequent (three or more uses) substance use. Of the five drugs rated for risk (meth, heroin, marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol), infrequent meth use was rated as a great risk by 74 percent of survey participants, and was second only to heroin use which was rated a great risk by 79 percent (Table 2). Heroin and meth were both rated as a great risk by the largest percentage of survey respondents (95%).

Survey participants were also asked about the ease of accessing various drugs and the extent of the drug problem in their community. They rated the difficulty or ease of a young adult (18–25 years) obtaining each of the following types of drugs: meth, heroin, cocaine, and marijuana. Eighty-eight percent responded that it would be very easy or somewhat easy for young adults to obtain marijuana, while 72 percent of respondents indicated that it would be very easy or somewhat easy for young adults to obtain meth. In evaluating the extent of problems with alcohol and the above drugs in their community, alcohol was the substance most frequently rated by survey respondents as a “big problem” (62%). Meth was rated as a big problem by 52 percent, and more respondents rated meth as a “big problem” in their community than cocaine or heroin abuse.

Survey participants were also asked about exposure to anti-meth advertisements and other non-advertising meth information in newspapers, magazines, on television, and from “other” sources. The most frequently reported “other” source of non-advertising information about meth was word of mouth (41%), indicating that meth was a topic discussed in informal conversations with friends, family, meth users, and co-workers.

Alaska Meth Education Project

Surveying perceptions of Alaskans about meth was just one of the many efforts the statewide Alaska Meth Education Project has undertaken. Since 2006 the AME Project has remained focused on preventing youth from trying meth and on educating all Alaskans about the dangers of the drug. Overall, the AME Project seeks to reduce meth use and meth availability in Alaska. The AME Project coordinator collaborates with representatives from local governments (Municipality of Anchorage, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Fairbanks North Pole Borough, and Juneau Borough) that form the project’s statewide

Table 2. Perception of Relative Risk of Infrequent and Regular Substance Use

	Row percentages				
<i>Survey question: Please indicate how much risk, if any, you think there is involved in each of the following activities:</i>	Great risk (1)	Moderate risk (2)	Not sure (2.5)	Slight risk (3)	No risk (4)
Infrequent use					
Trying meth once or twice	73.5 %	14.9 %	4.8 %	5.0 %	1.9 %
Trying heroin once or twice	78.6	13.2	3.2	3.4	1.6
Trying marijuana once or twice	24.4	19.1	3.1	32.1	21.2
Trying cocaine once or twice	60.8	20.3	2.7	12.8	3.3
Trying alcohol once or twice	16.5	17.7	2.4	42.7	20.8
Regular use					
Using meth regularly	94.8 %	1.1 %	2.4 %	0.4 %	1.3 %
Using heroin regularly	95.0	1.1	2.1	0.3	1.6
Using marijuana regularly	42.9	28.8	2.5	19.2	6.6
Using cocaine regularly	89.2	5.5	1.9	1.9	1.6
Using alcohol regularly	43.9	36.9	1.7	15.0	2.5

Source of data: AME Project Mail Survey (2009)

advisory committee. The committee meets monthly to discuss the trends of meth and other drugs, address gaps in meth use prevention efforts, research meth and other drug related legislation and update their borough mayors on the status of the meth problem in the state of Alaska.

In addition to conducting the 2009 survey, the AME Project has also trained and supported community presenters who facilitated Meth360, a Partnership for a Drug Free America (PDFA) program, resulting in 218 presentations to 3,068 participants in Fairbanks, Kenai and the Mat-Su. The AME Project implemented a statewide “Got Plans? Stay Away From Meth” media campaign via paper, TV, and radio; convened two community summits; and contracted with the UAA Justice center to conduct an evaluation of AME Project efforts. (This report is available at <http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/research/2000/0904akmeth/0904.akmetheval.pdf>.) Ongoing AME Project efforts include training community presenters in the facilitation of the WreckEd program, a scenario-based substance abuse prevention program that teaches youth to think about the consequences of substance use. The largest number of meth users are 18 to 25 years old, and the AME Project’s goal with the WreckEd program is to reach 11 to 19-year-olds and prevent their using meth as they grow older. In 2010 to date, the AME Project has reached 438 young people throughout the state, and continues to engage new partners willing to incorporate the WreckEd program into their prevention efforts. A low to no cost media campaign that includes the project website and Facebook page continues to be one of the AME Project’s outreach/education tools. The project also tracks upcoming legislation

regarding substances, and works closely with local substance abuse prevention coalitions around the state.

Funding sources for the AME Project have included the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Formula Grant (JAG), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), and the Alaska Community Foundation (ACF). The AME Project, with this funding assistance, has continued the important work of reducing the number of young people who try meth and of educating all Alaskans on the dangers of the drug. Funding for the AME Project coordinator expires in December 2010.

The need for a substance abuse prevention effort in Alaska still remains. A statewide collaboration that tracks meth and other substance use trends is imperative in order to sustain awareness and promote local prevention efforts designed to reduce substance abuse.

Marny Rivera is an assistant professor with the Justice Center. Jenny Baker is the project coordinator for the Alaska Meth Education (AME) Project with the Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Health and Human Services.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS &

BEST WISHES FOR 2011

FROM THE JUSTICE CENTER.



9th Circuit Update: En Banc Order Vacates Felon Disenfranchisement Opinion

Deborah Periman

The Winter 2010 edition of the *Forum* highlighted the opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in *Farrakhan v. Gregoire*, a case involving challenges to Washington state's felon disenfranchisement statute. (See "Felon Disenfranchisement and the Voting Rights Act — *Farrakhan V. Gregoire*: 'A Crowd of One'" in the Winter 2010 issue of the *Alaska Justice Forum*.) The plaintiffs were minority citizens who had lost their voting rights as a consequence of felony convictions. *Farrakhan* was noteworthy for its holding that the plaintiffs established a violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by demonstrating that the discriminatory impact of the disenfranchisement statute was "attributable to racial discrimination in Washington's criminal justice system." *Farrakhan*, 590 F.3d 989, 1016 (9th Cir. January, 2010).

The opinion by Judge Tashima, for himself and Judge Reinhardt with Judge McKeown dissenting, was unique among the federal circuits in finding a Section 2 violation based on operation of a felon disenfranchisement statute. It placed the Ninth Circuit, as Judge McKeown pointed out, "in a crowd of one," charting "territory that none of [the other] circuits has dared to explore." *Id.* To probably no one's surprise, therefore, a majority of the nonrecused, active judges in the circuit voted to rehear the case en banc. The order for rehearing expressly vacated the opinion of the three-judge panel.

An en banc hearing is traditionally, and in all other federal circuits, a hearing by all of the judges of the court rather than by the three-judge panel that is standard in the federal circuit courts. As the largest circuit in the country, the Ninth Circuit uses a modified form of en banc court, consisting of the Chief Judge and 10 additional judges drawn by lot as noted in Ninth Circuit Rule 35-3. An en banc hearing is unusual; under federal appellate rule 35 such a hearing is appropriate only when necessary to achieve uniformity in the circuit or "the proceeding involves a question of exceptional importance."

In October, the en banc court issued its decision. Unlike the three-judge panel, all of the judges of the en banc panel agreed that the plaintiffs had failed to establish a Section 2 violation. But, the opinions of the court—an unsigned majority, a concurrence,

and a concurrence in the judgment—reveal a fundamental division among the judges of the Ninth Circuit over the relationship between the Voting Rights Act and felon disenfranchisement statutes.

The majority opinion, cataloging the extensive history and current prevalence of felon disenfranchisement in the United States, expressed skepticism that such laws can ever be challenged under Section 2. (It noted that the loss of rights occurs only after criminal conviction, a determination "made by the criminal justice system, which has its own unique safeguards and remedies against arbitrary, invidious or mistaken conviction.") The court declined, however, to decide this larger issue. Instead, it merely narrowed the availability of Section 2 challenges in the Ninth Circuit, holding that such challenges may only be considered where plaintiffs show that the criminal justice system at issue "is infected by intentional discrimination" or that the state's disenfranchisement statute was enacted with discriminatory intent. <http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/datas-tore/opinions/2010/10/14/06-35669.pdf> at 17073. Because the *Farrakhan* plaintiffs demonstrated only systemic discrimination, and not discriminatory intent, the majority concluded they failed to meet their burden of proof.

In marked contrast, four of the eleven judges understood the remedial purpose of the Voting Rights Act to dictate a flexible analysis that would encompass any measure that denies the vote to a class of citizens as a result of their race. Judge Thomas, concurring, wrote:

Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 for the broad remedial purpose of eliminating racial discrimination in voting. In enacting § 2, Congress noted that it was impossible to predict the variety of means that would be used to infringe on the right to vote and that the voting rights landscape was marked by innovation and discrimination.

... Section 2 provides, without limitation, that any voting qualification that denies citizens the right to vote in a discriminatory manner violates the Voting Rights Act.

Id. at 17076. Citing legislative history, he further observed that Congress amended

Section 2 in 1982 specifically "to make clear that proof of discriminatory intent is not required to establish a Section 2 violation." *Id.* at 17078. The U.S. Supreme Court, too, has made clear "states cannot use felon disenfranchisement as a tool to discriminate on the basis of race, even if the laws are facially race-neutral." *Id.*

On this basis, the concurring judges concluded that a categorical exclusion of felon disenfranchisement laws from Section 2 is wholly unsupported "either as a matter of judicial construct or statutory interpretation." *Id.* And they declined to join that part of the majority opinion which bars claims under Section 2 based on felon disenfranchisement absent proof of discriminatory intent. (Judge Graber concurred in no part of the majority opinion, concluding that the District Court's findings on remand were sufficient to support the judgment.)

Where does this leave potential plaintiffs in Alaska and the other states of the Ninth Circuit? As a practical matter, unless the U.S. Supreme Court agrees to review the case (which it declined to do in 2004 after the first time the Ninth Circuit looked at this case) and reverses, Section 2 claims based on felon disenfranchisement will be virtually impossible to establish. Although the en banc majority stopped short of categorically excluding such claims from the reach of the Voting Rights Act, the requirement that plaintiffs show discriminatory intent is likely to prove an insurmountable barrier. (In *Ruiz v. City of Santa Maria*, 160 F.3d 543, 557 (9th Cir. 1998), the court declared that an intent test "places an inordinately difficult burden of proof on plaintiffs." Thomas, concurring.)

Perhaps, however, the conversation that began with the publicity surrounding the three-judge panel's initial holding will continue. There is little dispute that in Alaska and across the country felon disenfranchisement statutes keep minority voters from the polls in disproportionate numbers. Increased public recognition of this problem, and of the social and economic consequences of the various barriers to offender reentry generally, may at some point lead legislators to effect the remedy the *Farrakhan* plaintiffs have thus far sought unsuccessfully in the Ninth Circuit.

Deb Periman, J.D., is a member of the Justice Center faculty.

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by the federal government to initiate SRO programs and train police officers, and the widespread adoption of programs across the country, relatively little is known about how SRO programs operate, and even less is known about their ability to achieve programmatic goals. The few studies that have examined SRO programs have concluded that very few conduct useful or valid assessments. One study that surveyed more than 1,100 police chiefs across the country revealed that only rarely do police departments or school districts develop means for assessing the effectiveness of SRO programs.

The bulk of research examining the impact of SRO programs has focused on their subjective impacts—how the introduction of SROs into local schools has affected attitudes and perceptions of students, faculty, and school administrators. In general, this research has shown that principals believe SRO programs are effective in reducing crime and delinquency within the confines of schools, and that the presence of SROs within schools can improve students' attitudes and perceptions of police, increase students' willingness to report incidents of crime/delinquency to police, and enhance students' feelings of safety while at school.

The Anchorage SRO Program: An Overview

The Anchorage SRO program utilizes a catchment system approach whereby officers are assigned to a specific high school, but are also responsible for all of the schools that feed their assigned high school. The Anchorage Police Department (APD) and the Anchorage School District (ASD) initiated the city's School Resource Officer program in May 2003. SROs entered Anchorage schools for the first time in the fall of the 2003–04 school year. A total of 18 officers (16 SROs, 1 sergeant, 1 lieutenant) are assigned to the initiative, a total that matches the national average for police agencies serving populations between 250,000 and 499,999 residents. The manpower APD commits to the SRO program, while modest in overall magnitude, is considerable given the department's limited pool of officers.

APD maintains a ratio of 4.8 SROs for every 100 non-SRO sworn officers (see Table 1). This ratio evidences the department's commitment to its SRO program. This dedication is notable because, unlike some urban school districts in the U.S., crime and violence are not frequent occurrences in Anchorage schools, although there have been a limited number of high-profile incidents.

Table 1. Number of Sworn Police Officers and School Resource Officers

Anchorage, Alaska vs. select cities in the United States.

City and state	City population	Sworn officers	Sworn officer to population ratio ^a	SROs	SRO to other sworn officer ratio ^b
Anchorage, Alaska	278,000	390	1.4	18	4.8
Cities of similar size					
Stockton, California	243,771	374	1.5	24	6.8
Lexington, Kentucky	260,512	493	1.9	7	1.4
St. Paul, Minnesota	287,151	576	2.0	20	3.6
Newark, New Jersey	273,546	1,466	5.3	7	0.5
Plano, Texas	222,030	292	2.3	19	7.0
Western cities					
Tucson, Arizona	486,699	928	1.9	25	2.8
Boulder, Colorado	94,673	165	1.7	2	1.2
Denver, Colorado	554,636	1,489	2.7	17	1.1
Boise, Idaho	205,000	325	1.6	10	3.2
Billings, Montana	89,847	121	1.4	3	2.5
Portland, Oregon	529,121	1,007	1.9	3	0.3
Albuquerque, New Mexico	448,607	859	1.9	26	3.1
Salt Lake City, Utah	181,743	409	2.2	6	1.5
Seattle, Washington	563,374	1,261	2.2	10	0.8
Largest American cities					
Phoenix, Arizona	1,321,045	2,626	2.0	82	3.2
Los Angeles, California	3,694,820	9,341	2.5	104	1.1
San Diego, California	1,223,400	2,022	1.6	32	1.8
Chicago, Illinois	2,896,016	13,466	4.6	222	1.7
Detroit, Michigan	951,000	4,154	4.4	52	1.3
New York, New York	8,008,278	40,435	5.0	316	0.8
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1,517,550	7,024	4.6	75	1.1
Dallas, Texas	1,188,580	2,862	2.4	29	1.0
San Antonio, Texas	1,144,646	1,882	1.6	19	1.0
Houston, Texas	1,953,631	5,343	2.7	0	0.0

a. Ratio is computed as number of sworn officers per 1,000 residents.

b. Ratio is computed as number of School Resource Officers per 100 non-SRO sworn officers in department.

Source: Reaves, B.A. & Hickman, M.J. (2004). Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics, 2000: Data for Individual State and Local Agencies with 100 or More Officers. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The intent of the Anchorage SRO program is to adopt a different model of engagement with the community: permanently assigning officers to schools provides students with structured opportunities to experience positive interactions with police officers. Instead of only coming into contact with officers within the context of some sort of incident, students get the opportunity to see officers as something other than merely "enforcers."

APD retains supervisory control over officers and, up until now, has covered all of the program's personnel costs. Recently, however, ASD has taken on the responsibility of covering half of the personnel costs of the program's SROs due to budgetary constraints at APD. In addition, the ASD provides officers with office space and supplies. Under the current program, the role of SROs is quite distinct from that of the security officers employed by the school district.

According to APD, the aim of the Anchorage SRO program is to "provide a positive law enforcement influence that concentrates on safety and security, encourages relationships between officers, administrators, teachers and students, and fosters education." The program's motto is *Ensuring the Safety of Your School*. APD identifies six specific goals for the program:

1. To enhance safety in and around schools;
2. To reduce juvenile delinquency and crime in the community;
3. To build trust and positive relationships with students;
4. To increase school attendance;
5. To enhance the learning environment, specifically through anti-bullying efforts; and

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6. To provide a high level of police service to the Anchorage School District.

The Current Study: Public Perceptions of the Anchorage SRO Program

This study presents results for a series of 29 questions exploring public perceptions of the Anchorage SRO program that were included in the most recent Anchorage Community Survey. Respondents were first asked three questions about school resource officer programs, in general. Each participant was asked about: (1) their familiarity with school resource officer programs, (2) whether or not the ASD should participate in a school resource officer program, and, (3) whether or not the ASD currently participates in a school resource officer program. Each respondent was then asked to register their level of agreement or disagreement with 26 statements about the efficacy of school resource officer initiatives.

The data presented in Tables 2 and 3 have been weighted using census information to provide population estimates for each survey item. For this study, the population of interest is persons 18 years of age and older who reside in Anchorage households. Each table also presents the margin of error for each survey item.

Table 2 presents the results for the first three survey items. A large majority of Anchorage adults—in excess of 71 percent—reported at least some familiarity with the foundational precept of school resource officer programs—that is, the permanent assignment of police officers to schools as a means to provide for the safety and welfare of students, faculty, and staff. Slightly fewer, 68 percent, indicated that the ASD should participate in an SRO program. Notably, although the ASD and APD have partnered to administer the municipality’s SRO program for seven years, only half of Anchorage adults are aware of the initiative.

Table 3 presents the results for the remaining 26 items designed to assess public perceptions about the efficacy of SRO programs, grouped into seven categories: Crime/Delinquency, School Environment, Community Quality of Life, Police-Community Relations, Student Education, Police Outcomes, and Unintended Consequences. With respect to the ability of SRO programs to impact the prevalence of crime/delinquency, Anchorage adults expressed a great deal of confidence in the ability of SRO programs to reduce the occurrence of delinquent behavior, particularly delinquency that occurs within schools. An estimated 81.5 percent reported that SRO programs are a good way to reduce violent crime in schools, and more than 75 percent stated that SROs are a good way to reduce property crimes in schools and vandalism of school property. Smaller majorities (ranging between 56.8% and 61.7%) expressed confidence in the ability of SROs to deter children from committing acts of delinquency, reduce rates of juvenile crime more generally, reduce drug use by children, and instill the ideal of “respect for law.” In sum, most Anchorage adults believe that an SRO program is an effective way to not simply control, but reduce, juvenile crime/delinquency.

Given these results, it was not surprising to find that nearly all (87.7%) Anchorage adults view an SRO program as an effective means to improve the safety of schools. Importantly, however, slightly less than two-thirds (65.2%) thought that placing police in schools would assist with establishing order in schools. (Although a definitive answer is difficult to discern with these data, the sizeable difference in public perceptions about the ability of SROs to enhance “safety,” on the one hand, and establish “order” on the other, may provide some clues as to the public’s conception of the role of police in schools.) A majority of Anchorage adults also expressed the view that SROs can help curtail bullying in schools. People were much less optimistic about the ability of SROs to impact truancy, however. Only a fifth of Anchorage adults (20.8%) agreed that an SRO program is a good way to improve student attendance.

Anchorage adults expressed optimism with respect to the potential spill-over effects of an SRO program. An estimated 67.1 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that placing police in schools was a good way to enhance overall neighborhood safety, 67.5 percent agreed or strongly agreed that an SRO program could help control drug dealing around schools, and 52.9

Table 2. Familiarity, Perceived Need, and Current Participation: SRO Program

Anchorage adults.

Question: Have you ever heard of a School Resource Officer program, whereby police officers are permanently assigned to work in a school in an effort to provide a safe working and learning environment for students, teachers, staff, and administrators?

	Valid sample size	Anchorage adults	Margin of error
Yes	1,419	71.7 %	± 3.3 %
No	531	28.3	± 3.1
Total	1,950	100.0 %	

Question: In your opinion, should the Anchorage School District participate in a School Resource Officer program?

	Valid sample size	Anchorage adults	Margin of error
Yes	1,404	68.0 %	± 3.2 %
No	225	12.2	± 2.4
Don't know	421	19.8	± 2.4
Total	2,050	100.0 %	

Question: To your knowledge, does the Anchorage School District currently participate in a School Resource Officer program?

	Valid sample size	Anchorage adults	Margin of error
Yes	1,017	50.0 %	± 3.4 %
No	77	5.1	± 1.7
Don't know	956	44.9	± 3.3
Total	2,050	100.0 %	



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percent agreed or strongly agreed that SROs can assist with the control of vandalism in surrounding neighborhoods. Overall, a majority (56.9%) of Anchorage adults agreed or strongly agreed that an SRO program can improve community quality of life. Thus, these data suggest that Anchorage adults are confident that an SRO program can benefit not only schools, but also the communities in which they are embedded.

Results also revealed that Anchorage adults have a great deal of confidence in the ability of an SRO program to positively impact the nature of the relationship between the APD and the municipality's residents. An estimated 61.6 percent reported that permanently assigning police to schools is a good way to improve students' attitudes toward police, and 70.4 percent indicated that an SRO program could be an effective

means to build a relationship of trust between students and police officers. Nearly 75 percent stated that an SRO program would be a good way to build police-community relations, not only within the context of schools but more broadly as well. Finally, more than 80 percent of Anchorage adults felt that an SRO program would be an effective mechanism for establishing a partnership between the APD and the ASD.

A majority of Anchorage adults also recognized the potential educational benefits of an SRO program. More than half (58.2%) felt an SRO program would contribute to students' understanding of the law and legal system, and nearly two-thirds (62.6%) stated exposure to police officers in a school environment would help students learn about law enforcement careers. In addition, the survey also showed that many people think SRO

programs provide an educational benefit to police officers, not just students. Nearly 70 percent (68.5%) thought that being assigned to work in a school would help to broaden officers' perspectives. More practically, slightly less than a majority of Anchorage adults (48.1%) felt an SRO program would help police conduct investigations.

In addition to asking respondents to provide their views on the ability of an SRO program to positively affect a number of areas such as reducing crime/delinquency, improving the environment within schools, etc., the survey presented three questions relating to potential "unintended consequences" of SRO programs. Notably, although Anchorage adults did express some reservations about assigning police to

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Table 3. Attitudes and Perceptions of School Resource Officer Programs

Anchorage adults.

Attitudinal measure	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither disagree nor agree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	Percent	Margin of error	Percent	Margin of error	Percent	Margin of error	Percent	Margin of error	Percent	Margin of error
<i>Permanently assigning police to schools is a good way to:</i>										
Crime/delinquency										
Reduce violent crimes in schools	2.4 %	± 0.9 %	5.7 %	± 1.3 %	10.4 %	± 1.7 %	60.2 %	± 3.4 %	21.3 %	± 2.5 %
Reduce property crimes in schools	1.9	0.7	6.6	1.5	13.3	2.2	60.6	3.5	17.6	2.7
Reduce vandalism of school property	2.0	0.7	7.8	1.7	12.2	2.0	62.4	3.3	15.6	2.2
Instill the ideal of "respect for law"	3.7	1.1	14.3	2.2	25.3	2.8	45.1	3.4	11.7	2.5
Deter children from crime/delinquency	2.9	1.0	14.0	2.1	21.7	3.0	49.4	3.6	11.9	1.9
Reduce drug use by kids	5.8	1.6	12.8	1.9	19.8	2.7	45.2	3.5	16.5	2.3
Reduce rates of juvenile crime	3.1	1.0	11.2	1.9	25.7	2.9	49.2	3.5	10.8	1.7
School environment										
Enhance safety in schools	1.9 %	± 0.7 %	3.5 %	± 1.0 %	7.0 %	± 1.5 %	61.2 %	± 3.4 %	26.5 %	± 3.0 %
Establish order in schools	2.7	0.9	9.8	0.8	22.3	2.9	50.0	3.5	15.2	2.1
Control bullying	3.9	1.1	16.1	2.8	23.5	2.9	45.5	3.5	10.9	1.8
Increase school attendance	7.4	1.6	35.0	3.2	36.8	3.6	15.7	2.4	5.1	1.2
Community quality of life										
Enhance safety of neighborhoods	2.3 %	± 0.8 %	10.3 %	± 1.9 %	20.3 %	± 2.6 %	51.2 %	± 3.5 %	15.9 %	± 2.8 %
Improve community quality of life	3.3	1.0	10.9	2.2	29.0	3.0	45.4	3.5	11.5	1.8
Limit vandalism of neighborhood property	3.3	0.9	17.3	2.2	26.6	2.9	42.7	3.6	10.2	1.8
Prevent drug dealing near schools	3.0	0.9	11.9	1.8	17.5	2.4	51.6	3.5	15.9	2.3
Police-community relations										
Improve students' attitudes: police	3.7 %	± 1.2 %	10.2 %	± 2.0 %	24.5 %	± 3.1 %	47.7 %	± 3.5 %	13.9 %	± 2.6 %
Build trust between students and police	2.7	0.9	7.9	1.6	19.0	2.5	53.6	3.5	16.8	2.8
Improve police-community relations	2.2	0.8	5.3	1.3	17.7	2.7	52.2	3.5	22.6	2.9
Build partnership: police and schools	1.7	0.7	5.2	1.6	12.8	1.9	61.4	3.5	18.9	2.8
Student education: Law/legal system										
Educate students: law/legal system	3.3 %	± 1.0 %	14.5 %	± 2.5 %	23.7 %	± 2.9 %	47.4 %	± 3.5 %	11.1 %	± 1.9 %
Learn about law enforcement careers	2.1	0.8	8.7	1.8	26.7	2.9	48.8	3.5	13.8	2.8
Police outcomes										
Broaden perspective of police officers	2.2 %	± 0.8 %	7.0 %	± 1.6 %	22.2 %	± 3.1 %	53.3 %	± 3.6 %	15.2 %	± 2.7 %
Help police conduct investigations	3.8	1.1	13.3	2.2	34.9	3.4	40.2	3.5	7.9	1.6
Unintended consequences										
Create barriers between students and police	12.6 %	± 1.8 %	46.2 %	± 3.5 %	24.2 %	± 2.9 %	13.5 %	± 2.6 %	3.5 %	± 1.0 %
Students/faculty/staff more fearful	18.6	2.5	48.0	3.4	18.9	2.9	10.8	1.9	3.8	1.1
Undermine authority: school officials	20.3	3.0	47.6	3.5	17.9	2.8	11.0	2.0	3.2	0.9



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Police in schools

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schools, most were dubious about possible negative effects of such an initiative. More than half (58.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the notion that an SRO program would create additional barriers between students and police. An even larger percentage of Anchorage adults (66.6%) doubted that the introduction of police into schools would have the paradoxical effect of increasing, rather than decreasing, fear among students, faculty, and staff. Finally, 67.9 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that the presence of SROs would serve to undermine the authority of school officials.

Summary

The aim of this study was not to evaluate the effectiveness of the Anchorage SRO program. Rather, the intent was to examine the extent to which Anchorage adults are aware of the foundational principles of an SRO program, to gauge public opinion with

respect to the need for an SRO program in Anchorage, to measure public awareness of the municipality's current SRO initiative, and to assess public perceptions of the ability of SROs to achieve a variety of programmatic objectives.

The results of the study are striking. While only half of all Anchorage adults are aware that the ASD and the APD have administered a district-wide SRO program for nearly seven years, large majorities are at least familiar with the concept of an SRO program (71.1%) and believe the school district and police department should partner to provide an SRO program to Anchorage schools (68%). Furthermore, Anchorage adults expressed a great deal of confidence in the ability of an SRO program to achieve its programmatic objectives. Residents believe that the permanent assignment of police in schools is a good way to reduce crime/delinquency; enhance the overall climate of schools; improve community quality of life; strengthen the bonds between police and the community; educate students about law, the

legal system and law enforcement careers; and have a positive impact on the police department as well. Finally, Anchorage adults expressed little concern that an SRO program would produce negative unintended consequences—creating additional barriers between police and students, increasing the level of fear in schools, and undermining the authority of school officials.

Questions Remaining to be Explored

This article outlines the contours of public perceptions about school resource officer programs. It does not attempt to explain any of the patterns presented. Consequently, it is possible—perhaps even likely—that it presents more questions than it does answers. For the purposes of creating engaged public policy debate, this is, on the whole, a desirable outcome. So what sorts of additional questions might be asked with respect to the public opinion data presented here? What are the factors that you think might shape people's perceptions of, and attitudes toward, SRO programs? Here are some potential candidates: demographic characteristics, parental/guardianship status, fear of crime, criminal victimization, prior experience with the criminal justice system (especially police), and attitudes toward the police, in general. It is hoped this article will elicit a response from readers to these questions, and we look forward to continuing the dialog about this topic.

Brad Myrston is an assistant professor with the Justice Center.

What do you think about School Resource Officers?

Are there other important factors that should be considered when attempting to explain public perceptions and attitudes toward SROs and SRO programs? Please share your thoughts. Send comments and/or suggestions for future avenues of investigation on this topic to the author at bmyrston@uaa.alaska.edu.