



EDUCATION WEEK
RESEARCH CENTER

School Policing

Results of a National Survey of School Resource Officers



Editorial Projects In Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education publishes *Education Week*, America's newspaper of record for precollegiate education, the online *Teacher*, *EdWeek Market Brief*, and the TopSchoolJobs employment resource. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The Education Week Research Center conducts surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in *Education Week* and special reports such as *Quality Counts*, and *Technology Counts*. The center also conducts independent research studies for external clients and maintains the Education Counts online data resource. For more information on custom or contract research, please contact us at RCInfo@epe.org.

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Executive Summary

In March and April of 2018, the Education Week Research Center conducted an online survey of nearly 400 school resource officers (SROs).

The average officer is a 48-year-old white male who has worked in law enforcement for 19 years and has been a school police officer for 9 years. He works for a local police or sheriff's department and has experience working with youth prior to becoming an SRO. He is assigned to a single school as opposed to multiple campuses. He views his primary role as enforcing laws.

Most SROs (81 percent) say they have sufficient training on working in schools. The most common type of training they have received relates to responding to active shooters.

The majority of SROs carry handcuffs, a gun, mace, and a taser. In addition, 30 percent wear body cameras. On a typical day, SROs are most likely to be found in school hallways. Just under half of SROs (48 percent) monitor the social media use of the students in the schools they serve.

Morale is relatively strong among SROs. Most SROs (58 percent) say morale is excellent or very good. Just 3 percent say morale is poor. Younger and female officers have somewhat poorer morale.

Top work-related challenges for SROs include resources and a lack of cooperation or support from administrators and staff.

Most SROs (79 percent) say their schools are prepared to handle an active shooter. Most officers say that having an armed officer on campus deters school shootings and minimizes harm in the event of a school shooting.

Only a minority of officers (33 percent) say that training and arming a select group of teachers would make schools safer.

So what could schools do to prevent future shootings? In responding to that open-ended question, officers were most likely to suggest improvements to student and staff training on school security and threat awareness.

Introduction

In recent decades, the number of school resource officers has exploded. In 2013, about 30 percent of schools had one, as compared to 1 percent in 1975, The New York Times reported in 2018.

These officers have increasingly received attention in the wake of high-profile school shootings. Yet relatively little is known about them. Who are they? How do they see their roles in schools? What kind of training have they received?

In the spring of 2018, the Education Week Research Center set out to answer these and other questions by surveying this relatively unknown group. The results are detailed in this report.

| SURVEY AREAS

SROs AND THEIR EMPLOYERS

ROLES AND DUTIES

CHALLENGES AND MORALE

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Methodology

The school policing survey was administered online in March and April of 2018 to 399 school-based officers.

The margin of error was plus or minus five percent.

The respondents were identified as school resource officers based upon their answers to the following question:

Are you a school resource or school-based police officer or sheriff's deputy?

Survey Details

Survey Administered: March and April 2018

Sample: School resource officers, school-based police officers or sheriff's deputies

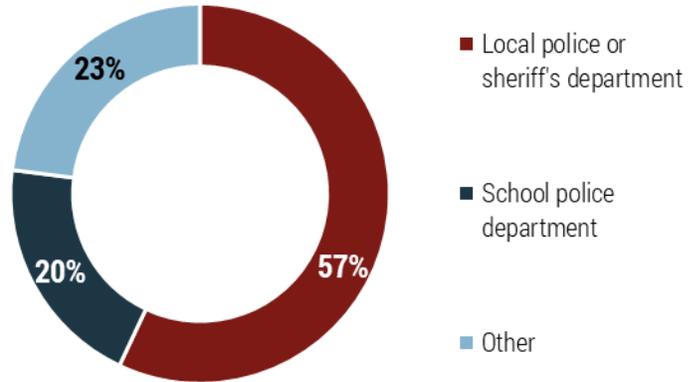
Total Respondents: 399

SROs and Their Employers

Local and School Police Departments

More than half of school police officers (SROs) work for local police or sheriff's departments. Twenty percent work for school police departments. Responses from those who selected the "other" option included working for a school district, an individual school, for generic school security employers, for private companies, and for fire departments.

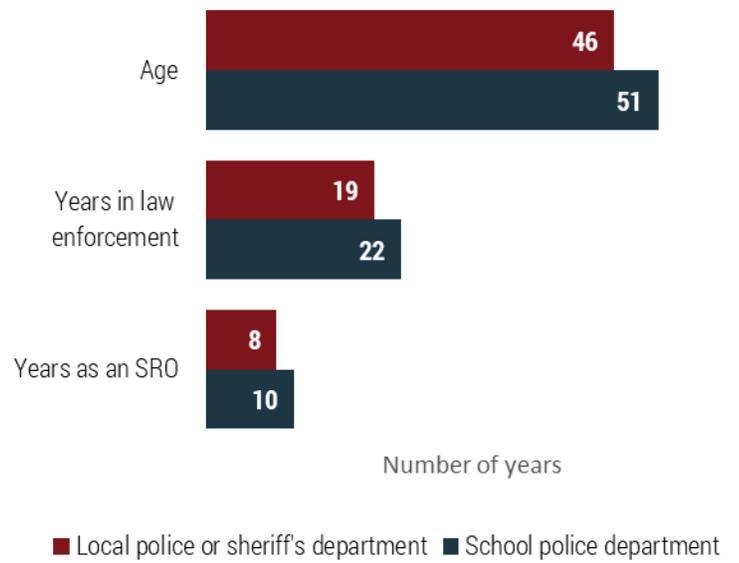
Who is your employer?



Demographics By Employer

The SROs in local sheriff's and police departments are slightly younger and less experienced than their peers in school police departments.

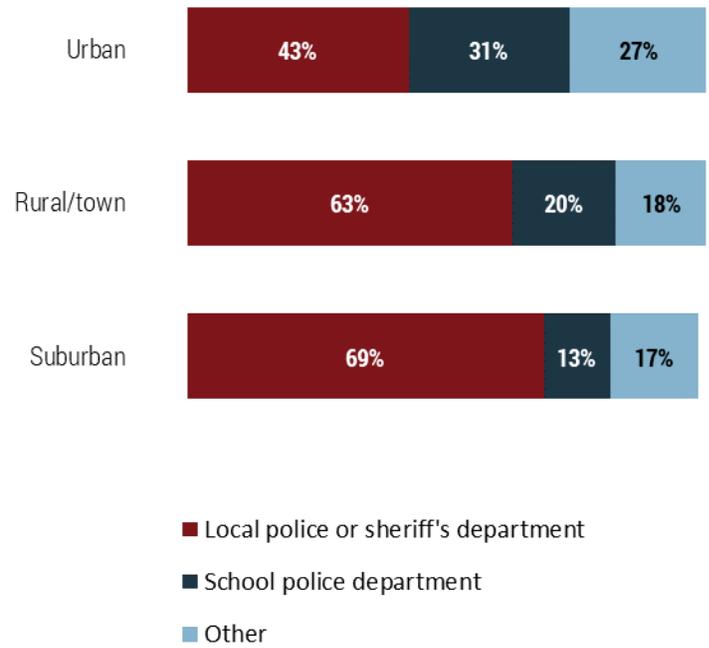
Who is your employer?



Employer By Locale

SROs in urban areas are more likely than their peers to work for a school police department as opposed to a local police or sheriff's department.

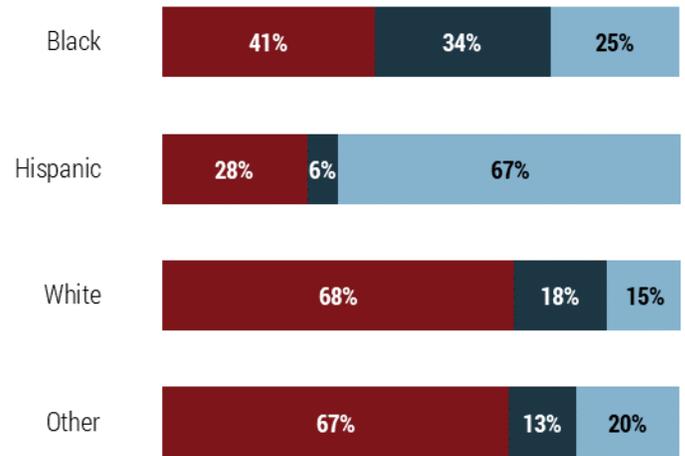
Who is your employer?



Employer By Race/Ethnicity

Black officers are more likely than officers of other races to work for school police departments.

Who is your employer?

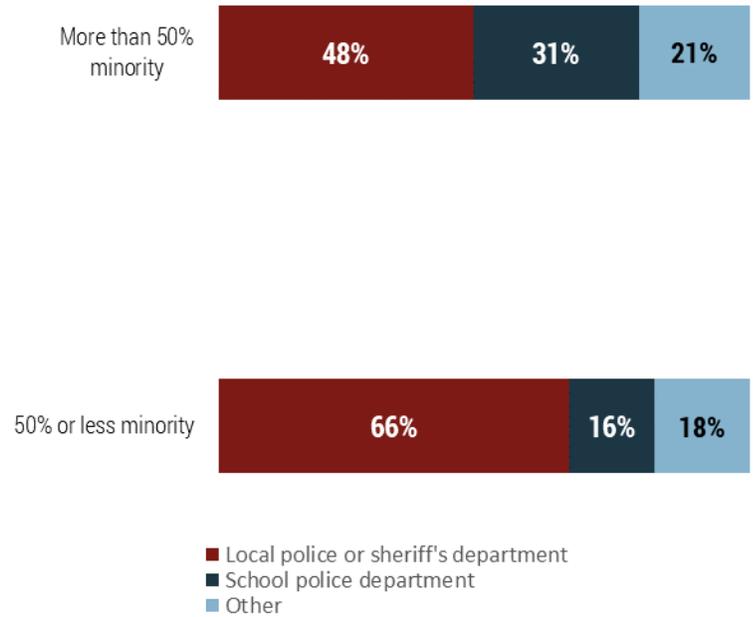


- Local police or sheriff's department
- School police department
- Other

Employer By Minority Population

SROs in urban and higher-minority districts are more likely than their peers to work for a school police department as opposed to a local police or sheriff's department. This suggests that large, urban, high-minority districts are more likely to have their own police departments.

Who is your employer?

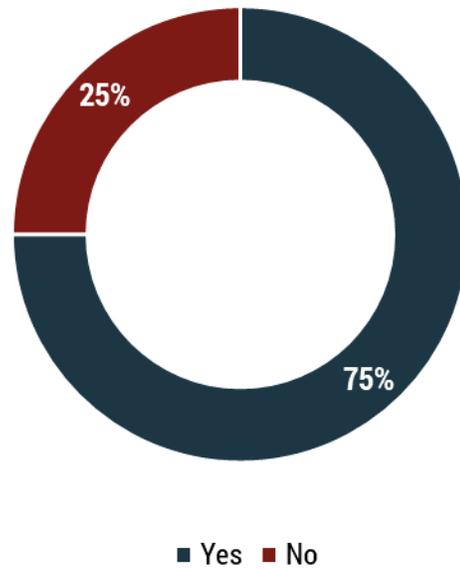


Roles and Duties

Experience Working With Youth

Three-quarters of survey respondents had experience working with youth prior to becoming school resource officers.

Before you became a school police officer, did you have experience working with youth?

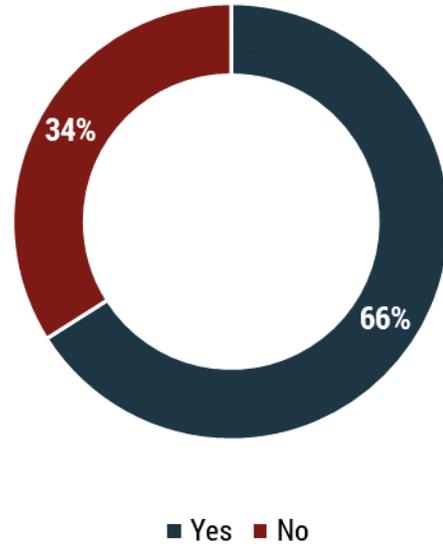


Intervening in Disciplinary Issues

Roughly two-thirds of officers say their school specifies what types of student disciplinary issues they can intervene in. SROs in school police departments are more likely than their counterparts in local police or sheriff's departments to say their schools specify the types of student disciplinary issues SROs can intervene in.

Seventy-three percent of SROs in school police departments say their schools specify the types of issues SROs can intervene in as compared to 56 percent of those in local police/sheriff's offices.

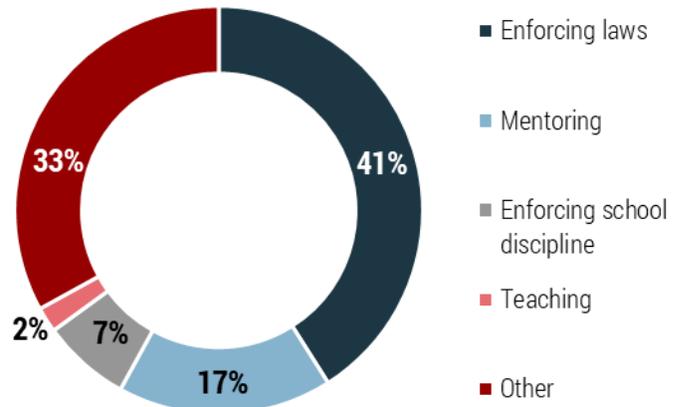
Does your school specify what types of student disciplinary issues you can intervene in (e.g., tardiness, defiance)?



Primary Roles

Forty-one percent of SROs report that enforcing laws is their primary role. A smaller percent of officers say their main role is mentoring (17 percent), enforcing school discipline (7 percent) or teaching (2 percent). About a third of officers say their primary role is one other than what was mentioned on the survey. More than half of these officers (59 percent) say their primary role is ensuring safety and security.

What is your primary role?



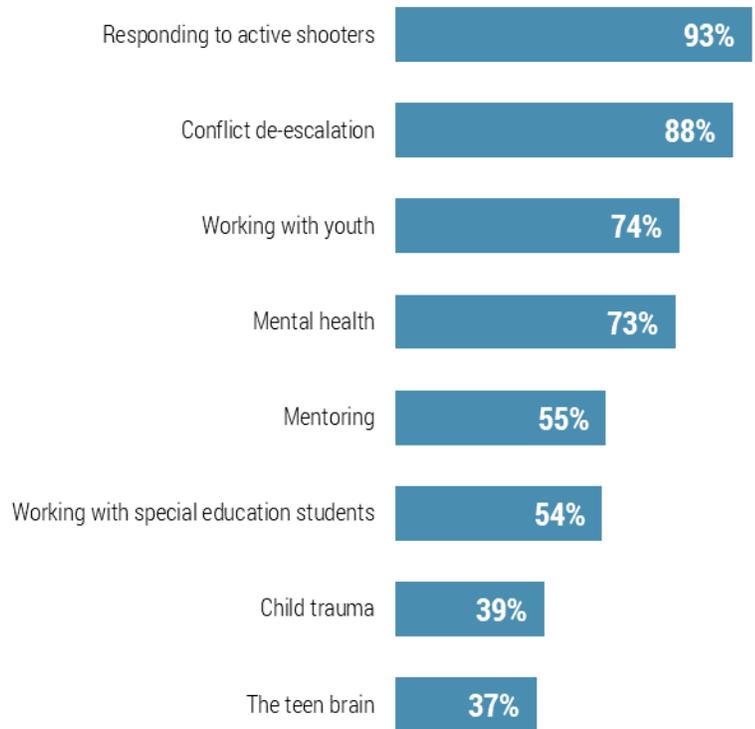
Training

Most SROs (81 percent) say they have received a sufficient amount of training in working in a school environment.

The vast majority (93 percent) have received training in responding to active shooters. By contrast, fewer than half have received training in child trauma (39 percent) or the teen brain (37 percent). Compared to their peers from school police departments, SROs from local police or sheriff's departments are more likely to have received training in each of the eight areas we asked about.

More female officers (54 percent) than male officers (38 percent) have received training in child trauma. While 79 percent of urban and suburban SROs have received training on mental health, just 66 percent of their rural counterparts have undergone this kind of professional development.

Have you received training in any of the following areas? Select all that apply.

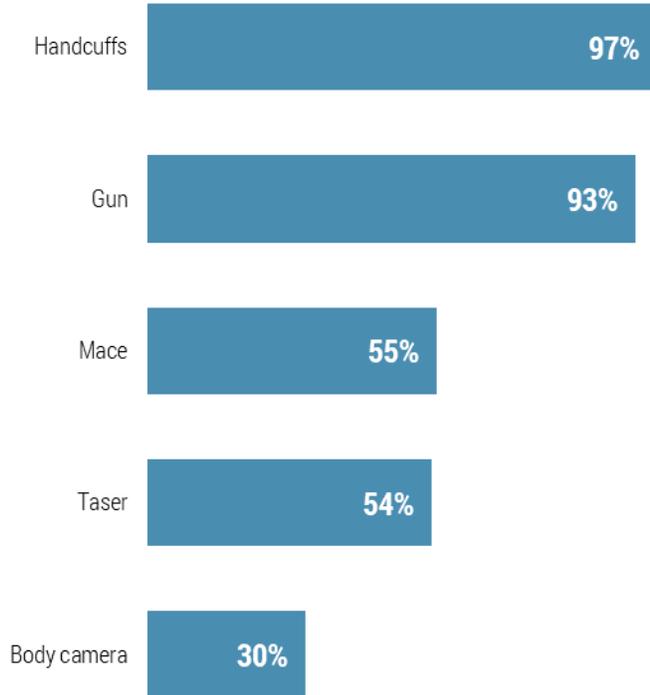


Note: Respondents were asked to select all answers that apply. Individual items do not sum to 100 percent.

Tools of the Trade

The majority of SROs carry handcuffs, a gun, mace, and a taser during a typical day at school. In addition, 30 percent wear body cameras. Younger officers are more likely to carry guns. The average age of an officer who carries a gun is 47 as compared to 54 for officers who do not carry guns.

Which of the following do you carry with you during the typical school day? Select all that apply.

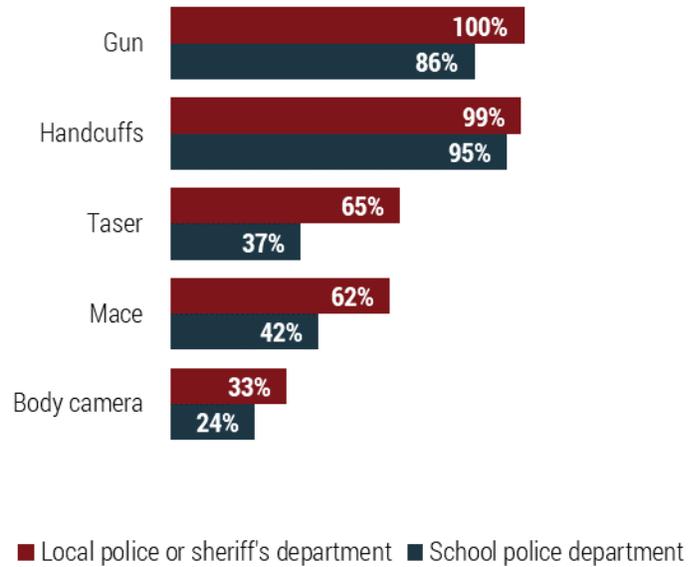


Note: Respondents were asked to select all answers that apply. Individual items do not sum to 100 percent.

Tools of the Trade By Type of Employer

Officers with school police departments are less likely to use every type of gear included on the survey.

Which of the following do you carry with you during the typical school day? Select all that apply.



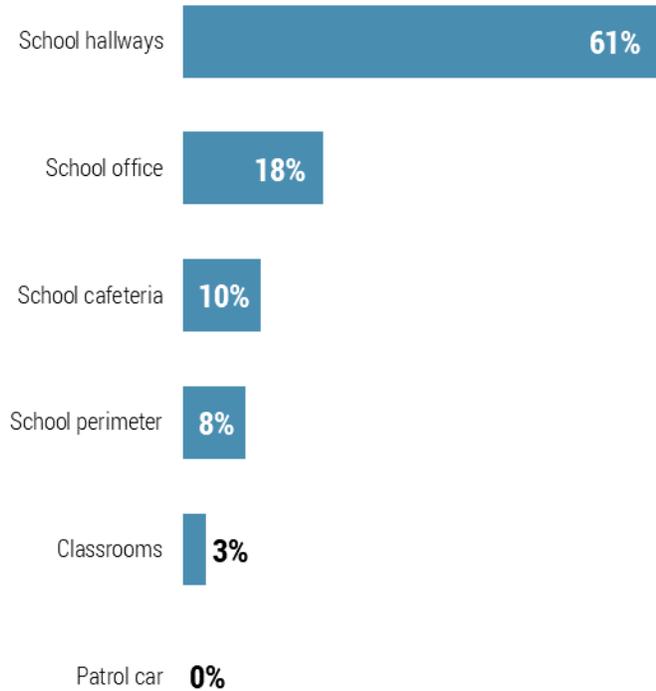
Note: Respondents were asked to select all answers that apply. Individual items do not sum to 100 percent.

Locations During the School Day

Most officers (60 percent) are assigned to a single school. The remainder (40 percent) work in multiple schools.

On a typical day, officers are most likely to be found in school hallways. They are unlikely to be found in patrol cars or classrooms.

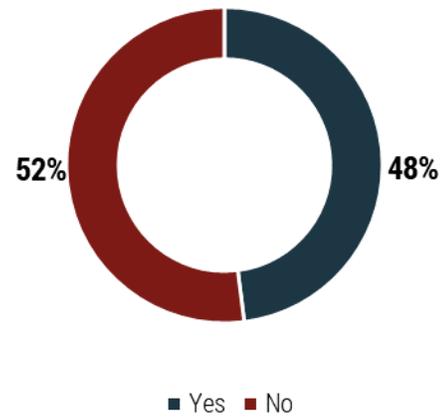
Where do you spend the most time during the typical school day?



Monitoring Social Media

Just under half of SROs (48 percent) monitor the social media use of the students in the schools they serve.

Do you monitor students in the school or schools that you serve on social media?

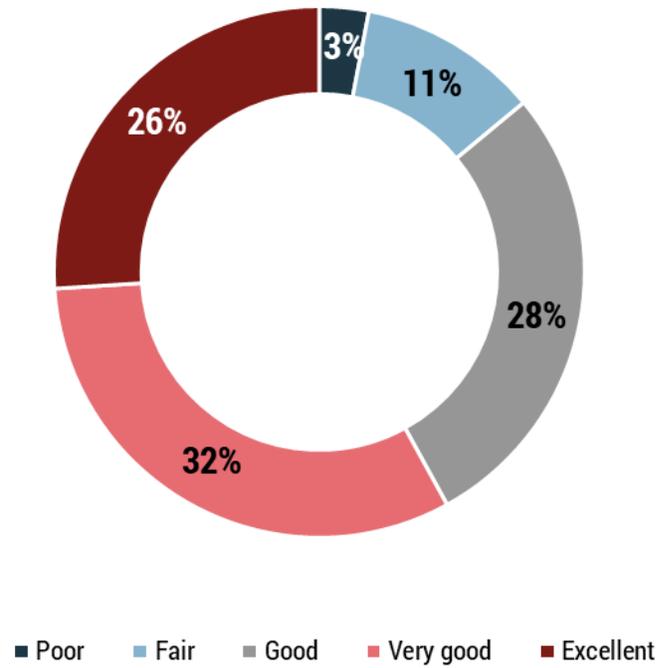


Challenges and Morale

Morale on the Job

Morale is relatively strong for school police officers. Most SROs (58 percent) say morale is excellent or very good. Just 3 percent say morale is poor.

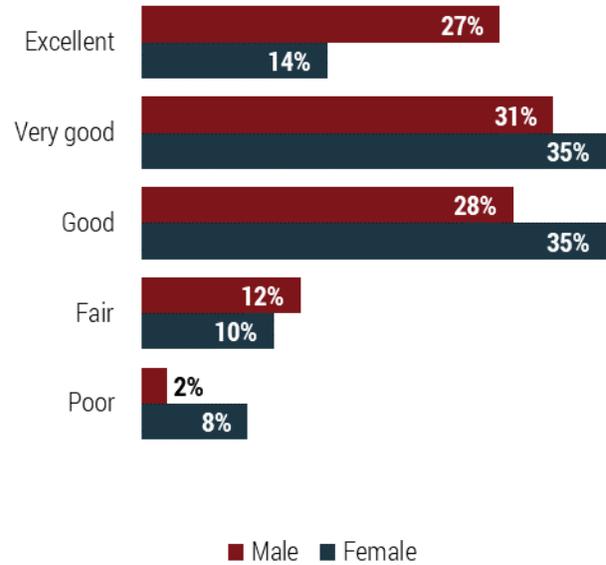
When it comes to your job, how is your morale right now?



Morale on the Job By Gender

Morale is stronger for male than for female officers. For example, 14 percent of female officers say morale is excellent as compared to 27 percent of male officers. Younger officers also have poorer morale. The average age of an officer who rates morale poor is 42. By contrast, the average age of an SRO who rates morale excellent is 50.

When it comes to your job, how is your morale right now?



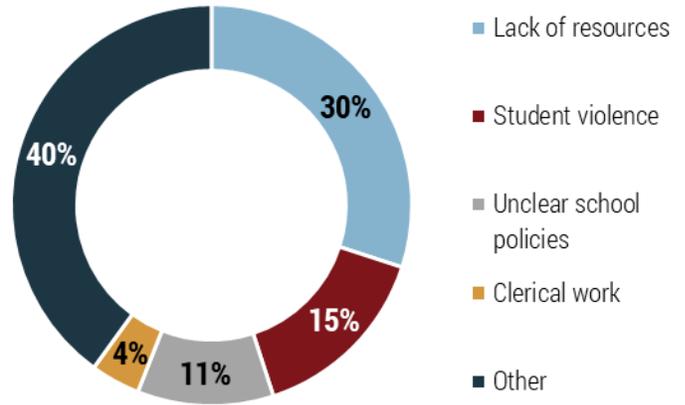
Current Challenges

Nearly 1 in 3 SROs report that a lack of resources is their top work-related challenge.

Among officers who said that their top challenge was something other than one of the options included on the survey, the most frequent challenges were:

1. Lack of cooperation/support from administrators and staff
2. Safety and security of the school building
3. The influence of technology, including social media

Which of the following is your biggest work-related challenge right now?



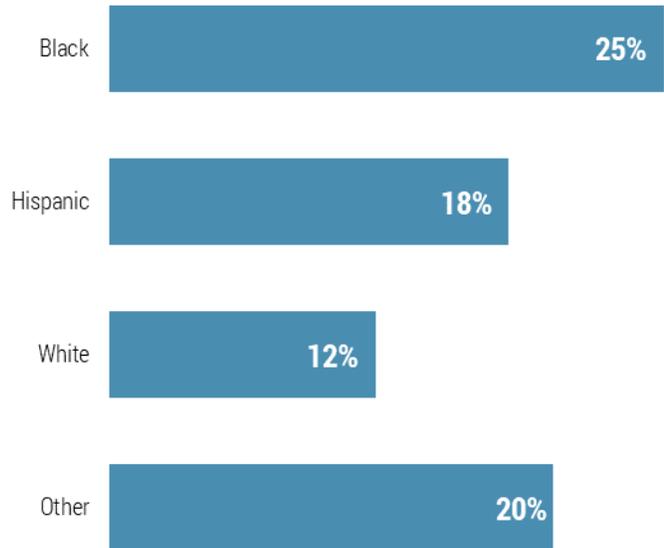
Challenges Vary By Race and Setting

SROs in school police departments are more likely to report that a lack of resources is their biggest work-related challenge. Resources are the top challenge for 41 percent of these officers as compared to 25 percent of their peers at local police or sheriff's departments.

More than twice as many SROs in high-minority districts report that student violence is their biggest work-related challenge. Student violence is the top challenge for 11 percent of officers in districts in which 50 percent or fewer students are minorities as compared to 25 percent of those in districts where more than half the students are minorities.

Black officers are more than twice as likely as white officers to say that student violence is their top work-related challenge.

Which of the following is your biggest work-related challenge right now?



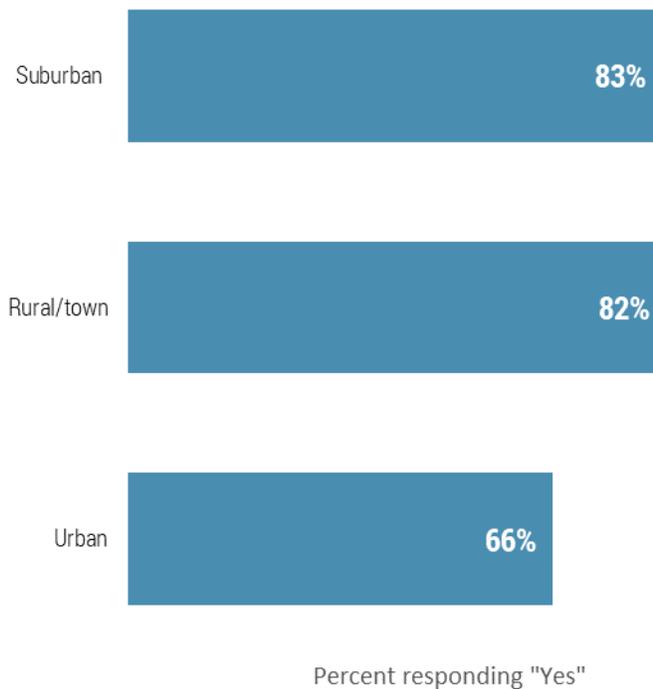
Percent responding "student violence"

School Shootings

Preparation for Active Shooters

Most SROs (79 percent) say their schools are prepared to handle an active shooter. Urban SROs are least likely to report that their schools are prepared to handle an active shooter.

Are the schools or school that you serve prepared to handle an active shooter?

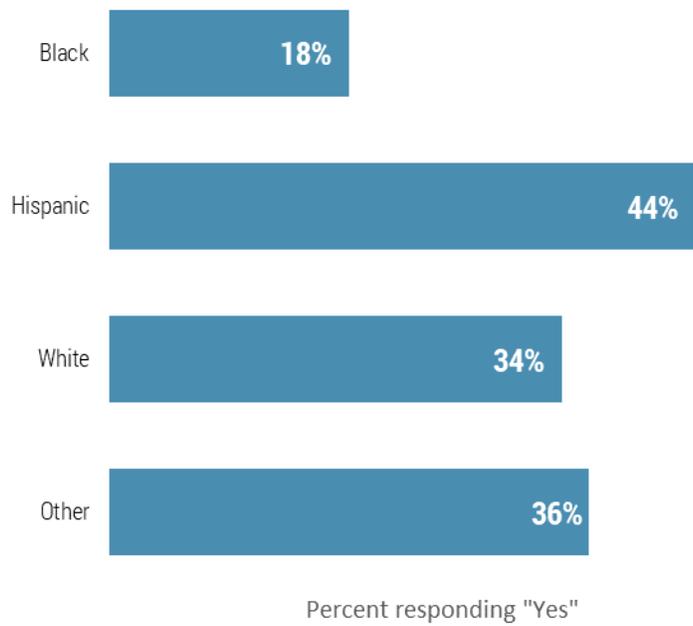


Arming Teachers

Only a minority of officers (33 percent) say that training and arming a select group of teachers would make schools safer.

Black officers are less likely than non-black peers to perceive that schools would be safer if teachers were armed.

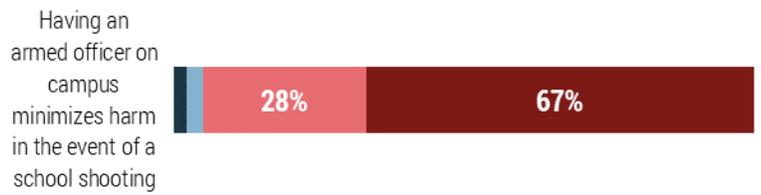
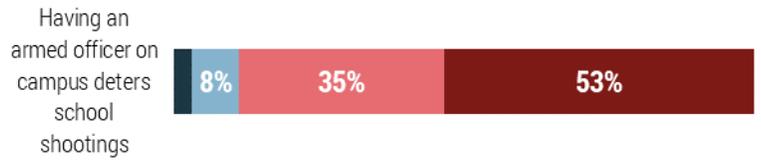
Would training and arming a select group of teachers make schools safer?



Armed Officers

Most SROs say that having an armed officer on campus deters school shootings and minimizes harm in the event of a school shooting.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



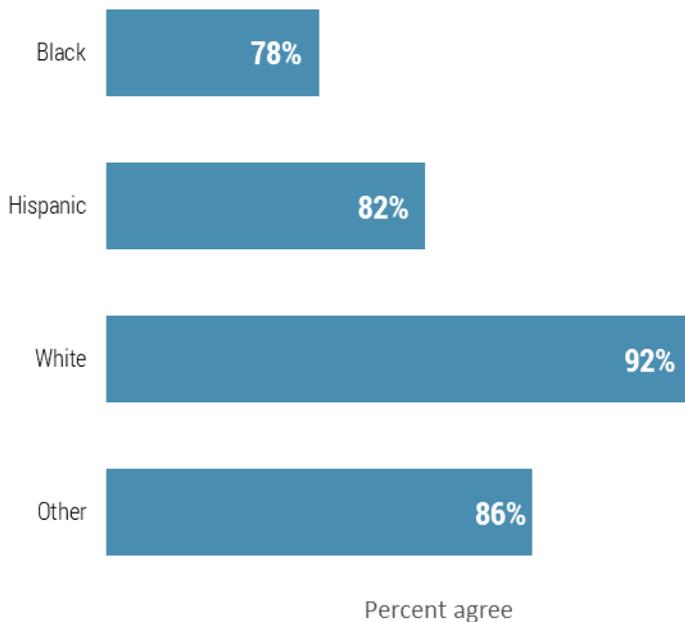
■ Completely disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Completely agree

Armed Officers-Views By Race/Ethnicity

Black officers are less likely to agree that having an armed officer on campus deters school shootings.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

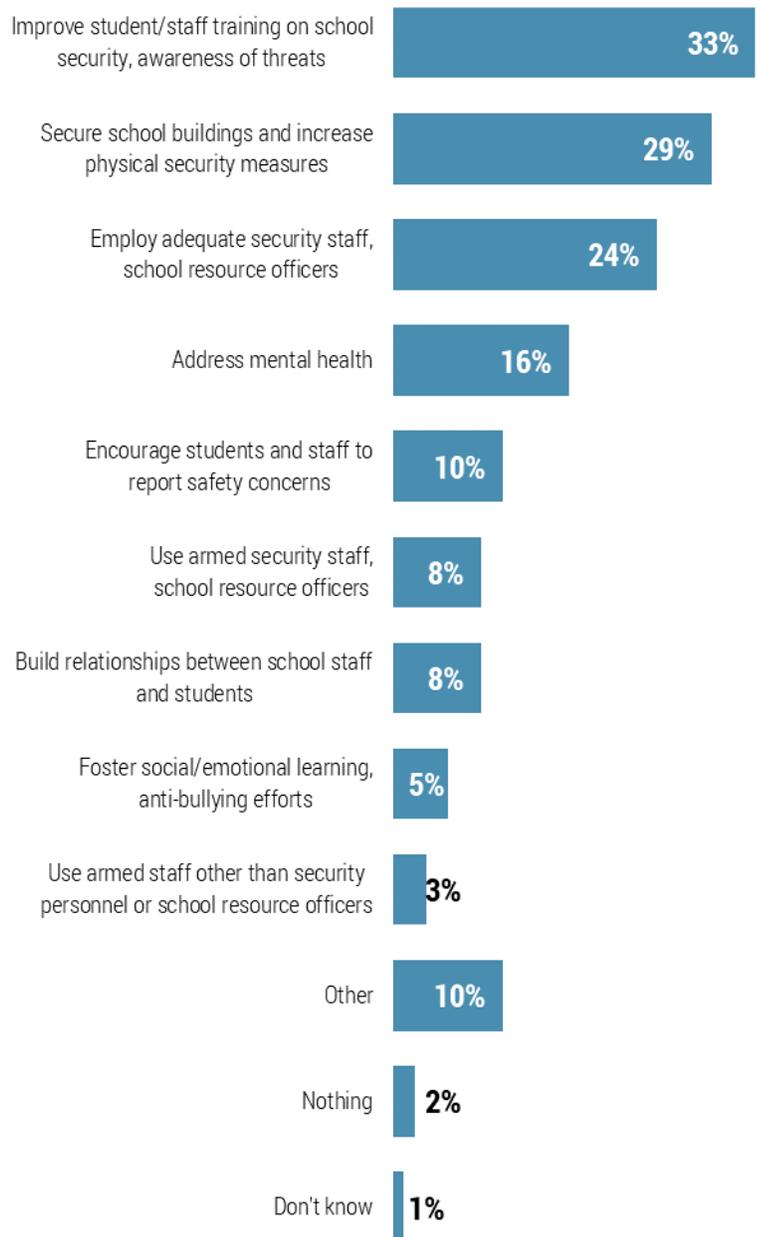
Having an armed officer on campus deters school shootings



Preventing School Shootings

The survey included an open-ended question asking officers what schools could do to prevent future shootings. The most frequent response was improving student and staff training on school security and awareness of threats.

What could schools do to prevent future school shootings?



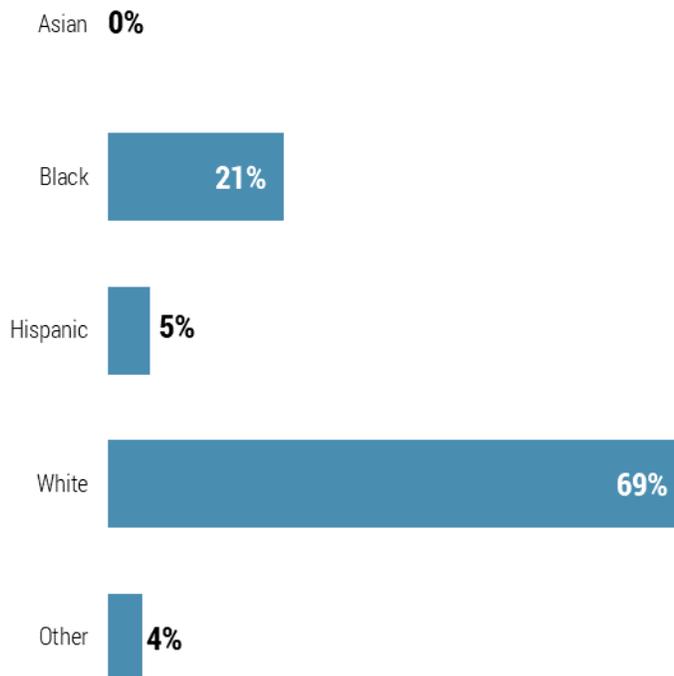
Note: Responses were coded into all applicable answer categories. Individual items do not sum to 100 percent.

SRO Demographics

Race/Ethnicity

The average school resource officer is 48 years old, has worked in law enforcement for 19 years and has been a school police officer for nine years. He is white and male. Sixty-nine percent of officers are white and about one-fifth are black.

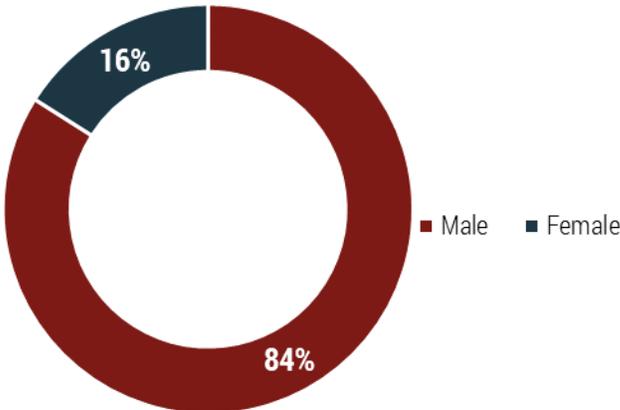
What is your race?



Gender

More than 8 in 10 school resource officers are male.

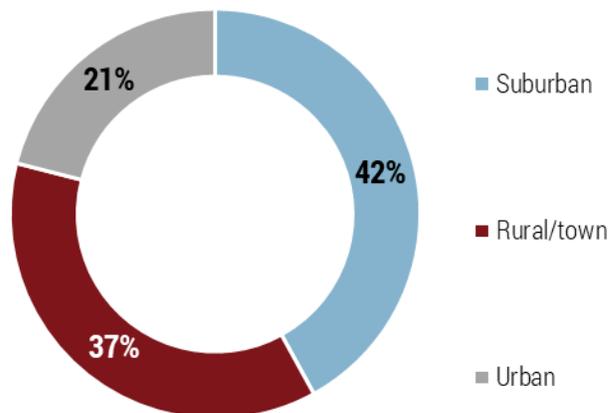
What is your gender?



Locale

Forty-two percent of SROs work in suburban schools.

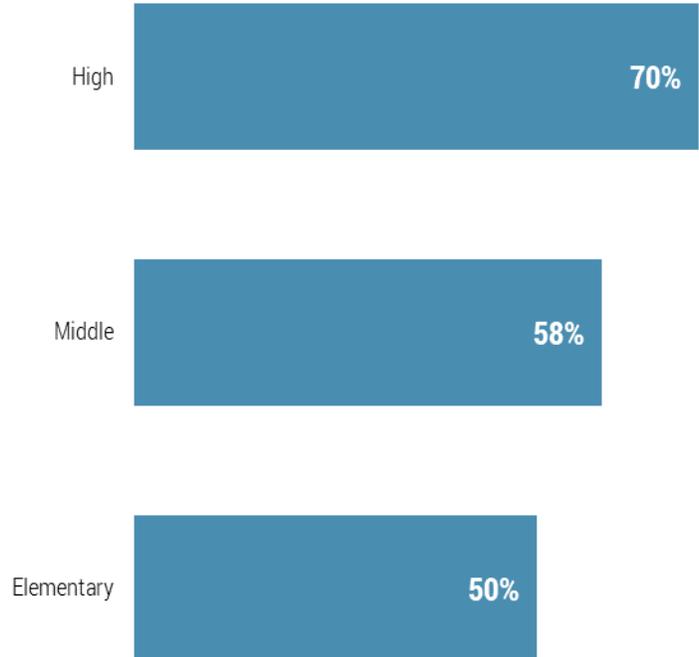
Which of the following best describes the location of the school or schools where you work?



Grade Level

SROs are more common in high schools than in middle or elementary schools.

Select the grade level(s) of the students who attend the school or schools that you serve. Select all that apply.



Note: Respondents were asked to select all answers that apply. Individual items do not sum to 100 percent.

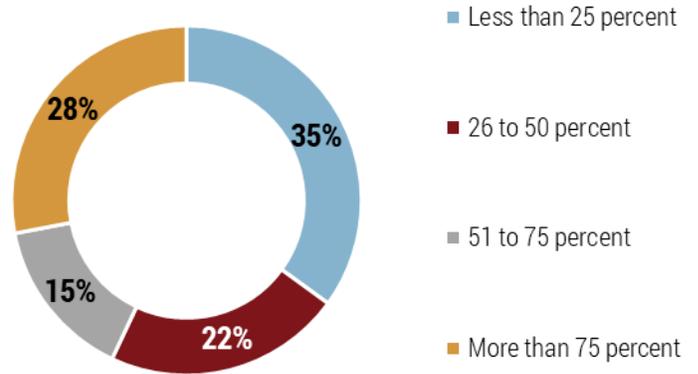
Student Demographics

Forty-two percent of survey respondents work in schools that are less than 25 percent minority.

Nationwide, 35 percent of students attend schools that are less than 25 percent minority, suggesting that SROs who took the survey may be over-represented at lower-minority schools.

Which of the following best describes the percentage of students of color in the school or schools that you serve?

U.S. Schools



SOURCE: NCES, 2015-16

Schools Served By SROs

