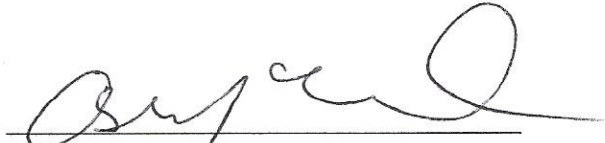




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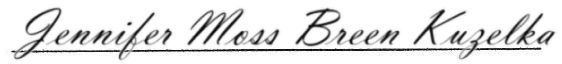
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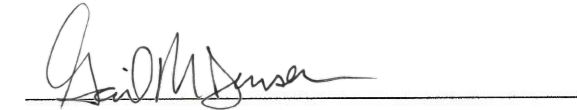
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HOW WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS SUPPORT  
SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH STUDENTS

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By  
JAMES R. CROUSHORE

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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University in Partial  
Fulfillment for the requirements of Doctor of Education in  
Interdisciplinary Leadership

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Omaha, NE

April 26, 2021

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## Abstract

School Resource Officers (SROs) are municipal police officers on patrol within schools and take orders and governance from their chiefs of police. Since SROs are not trained educators, they receive support from school principals to help build relationships with students while they patrol their schools. Recent research shows the importance of SROs' roles as mentors and emphasizes the importance of building relationships with students. The importance of relationships between SROs and students is the motivation for this research. This study is an instrumental case study that seeks to answer the research question: how do principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students in public high schools in Western Pennsylvania? The researcher interviewed nine high school principals, nine SROs, and completed a document review from nine public high schools in Western Pennsylvania. The interviews and document reviews were completed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from this qualitative research show principals can support SROs by increasing their access to students during the school day, ongoing communication between principals and SROs, building principals' trust in their SROs, principals remove SROs from the school discipline process, and principals' promotion of SROs' strengths. Findings to help SROs build positive relationships with students include utilization of the memorandum of understanding between the school and police department, regular meeting between principals and SROs, and school input into the selection of SROs.

*Keywords:* school resource officers, school discipline, communication, classrooms, trust, public schools

## Dedication

This doctorate of education is dedicated to teachers, school principals, and SROs whose tireless work keeps schools and students safe. The work you do builds futures for students and families. Never underestimate the power of the relationships you build with students.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to give special thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Ashraf Esmail and dissertation committee member and Interdisciplinary Leadership Program advisor Dr. Leah Georges for providing me the support necessary to complete this Dissertation in Practice and provide solutions to a real world problem existing in education. I am grateful for the feedback you provided me throughout this journey. Additionally, the support and encouragement from my colleagues at Burrell School District has been helpful throughout this process. Most importantly, I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my wife, Linda, and my sons Ethan and Ryan who have provided me support, encouragement, and motivation as I completed this journey.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
SRO History and Role.....	1
SROs and Relationships in School.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose Statement.....	5
Research Question.....	6
Aim of the Study.....	6
Definition of Relative Terms.....	7
Methodology Overview.....	7
Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases.....	8
Significance of the Dissertation in Practice.....	10
Addition to Scholarly Research.....	10
Improvement of School Principal Practice.....	11
School Policy Improvement.....	11
Summary.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13



History of SROs.....	13
Roles of School Resource Officers.....	14
School Safety.....	18
School Interventions.....	19
School Discipline.....	21
Implementation of SROs in Schools.....	22
Governance of SROs.....	23
Funding for SROs.....	23
Training and Development.....	24
Perceptions of SROs.....	26
Integrating SROs into Schools.....	28
Relationships with Students.....	30
Relationships with Educators.....	33
Relationships with School Leaders.....	35
Areas of Growths within SRO Programs.....	38
Trust and SROs.....	39
School Leadership Supporting SROs.....	41
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	47
Research Question.....	47
Method.....	48
Research Design Overview and Appropriateness of Study.....	48
Participants and Data Sources.....	50

Participant Recruitment.....	51
Participant Interviews.....	52
Document Review.....	54
Data Collection Tools.....	56
Data Analysis.....	57
Data Analysis of Principals’ Interviews.....	58
Data Analysis of SROs’ Interviews.....	58
Document Review Analysis.....	58
Validity and Reliability.....	59
Ethical Considerations.....	60
Summary.....	61
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS.....	63
Results.....	64
Themes from SROs and Document Review.....	64
Building Relationships in Classrooms.....	65
SROs Not Involved in the Discipline Process.....	69
SROs Know Families and the Communities of the Schools They Patrol.....	72
SROs believe they are a Part of the School Team.....	74
Principals’ and SROs’ Communication.....	77
Themes from Principals and Document Review.....	81
SROs’ Visibility within the School.....	82
Principals’ Trust in SROs.....	85
Student and School Safety.....	88

SROs as a Resource and Relationship Builders.....	92
Synthesis of Findings.....	95
Summary.....	97
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	99
Aim of the Study.....	99
Proposed Solutions.....	100
Increase SROs’ Access to Students during the School Day.....	102
Ongoing Communication between SROs and Principals.....	102
Principals Trust their SROs.....	103
Remove SROs from the School Discipline Process.....	104
Promote SROs’ Strengths.....	104
Evidence that Supports the Solution.....	105
Enabling SROs’ Access to Students.....	105
Ongoing Communication between SROs and Principals.....	106
Principals Trust their SROs.....	107
Remove SROs from the School Discipline Process.....	108
Promote SROs’ Strengths.....	109
Evidence that Challenges the Solution.....	110
Implementation of the Proposed Solution.....	112
Create a Selection Process for SRO Positions.....	113
Ongoing Communication.....	113
Cooperative Planning Between Schools and Police Departments.....	114
Solution Timeline and Evaluation.....	115

Implications.....116

    Practical Implications.....116

    Implications for Future Research.....117

    Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice.....118

Summary of Dissertation in Practice.....119

References.....121

Appendices.....135

## List of Tables

	Page
Table 1. School Demographic Information.....	54
Table 2. Themes from SROs' Interviews.....	65
Table 3. Themes from principals' Interviews.....	82

List of Figures

Page

Figure 1. Proposed Solutions for Principals' Increased Support of SROs.....101

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

**SRO History and Role**

K-12 student behavioral misdirection has changed over the past 20 years, as has how school principals respond to student transgressions (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Replacing smoking in restrooms and cutting class in the 1980s, vaping in bathrooms, and cyberbullying in the present day keeps teachers and school administrators active with managing student behaviors. Schools use codes of conduct to address and define misbehaviors while promoting positive student behaviors through social and emotional learning and building relationships within the school (Taylor et al., 2017). School Resource Officers (SROs) are police officers employed by a city or municipality who patrol a school or schools on a daily basis. SROs are different than school police officers who are employed by schools. The addition of SROs as an added layer of safety and security within schools can also help deter negative student behaviors. Day-to-day school discipline matters addressed by school administration and teachers that are non-criminal do not require the attention of SROs. However, offenses that violate criminal codes such as assaults, theft, school violence, and vandalism reach the attention of school administrators and SROs. SROs can issue citations for these offenses in the juvenile or adult court system, depending on the student's age (Price, 2009).

SROs' involvement in school teams can assist school personnel in their understanding of SROs' roles within the schools. SROs' roles can seem ambiguous or undefined by many within the schools. In Western Pennsylvania, the local municipality employs SROs, and their area of patrol is one school or the whole school district. Some SROs believe their position is confused with an administrative role within the school,

while other SROs believe school personnel see them as faculty members and do not value their professional contribution to the school (Barnes, 2016). While SROs may not see themselves as faculty members, SROs' approachability to students may help students perceive SROs as a positive and supportive member of the school community. Utilizing SROs as members of a school team along with teachers, social workers, and administrators can help SROs to participate in the school environment in a restorative and productive manner rather than serve in a reactionary and punitive role (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). Allowing SROs to function as members of a school team will enable SROs to interact positively with faculty members, understand the school culture and school climate, and develop an awareness of the student discipline issues within the school.

### **SROs and Relationships in the School**

SROs' abilities to develop relationships with faculty and students can help to define their role within the school. Dialogue with faculty members such as pupil personnel (counselors and school psychologists) can help SROs understand the importance of developing relationships with students inside the school (Jones, 2014). Simply being on a school team does not qualify SROs as experts in child development; training in child development, communication skills, and behavior management will help support SROs and their roles within the school (Ryan et al., 2018). However, a defined role can help SROs build relationships with students (Zhang, 2019). The nature of police patrol work is reactionary, which means asking SROs to be proactive and restorative in their practices within their school patrol may be out of SROs' comfort zones. As a result, developing relationships with students and faculty may be a difficult task for SROs.



However, the relationships developed by SROs with students and faculty can allow for a greater understanding of student behavior. In turn, these relationships may aid SROs in discipline matters and help them implement restorative practices when a student misbehaves (Jones, 2014). Further, positive relationships between SROs and students may increase students' feelings of safety within the school (Theriot & Orme, 2016) and reduce the number of instances of exclusionary discipline/school suspensions (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Although a school leadership team is a broadly defined group of administrators, and faculty or staff, school principals may be the individuals most responsible for creating a supportive environment for SROs to do their job well.

The researcher conducted an instrumental case study by interviewing nine high school principals and nine SROs and performed a document review of schools and police departments in Western Pennsylvania in an effort to learn how principals support SROs in building relationships with students. The document review focused on school districts' codes of conduct/discipline guidelines, SROs' job descriptions, and memorandums of understanding between these schools and police departments concerning their SRO programs. The instrumental case study design allowed the researcher to understand the support of SROs and how the support helped SROs in building positive relationships with students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Schools should be safe places for students to learn and grow. However, in the 2015-2016 school year, there were 28 crimes for every 1000 students enrolled in public schools in the United States (NCES, 2019). While this rate of 2.8% crime may seem small, no one should overlook or minimize crime in schools. Without accounting for

poverty factors, students who attend schools with SROs are five times more likely to be charged with disorderly conduct for school misbehavior, likely due to the presence of SROs within the school (Theriot, 2009). The criminalization of student misbehavior in schools can open the school-to-prison pipeline for students, resulting in an early criminal record and mistrust in police and the criminal justice system (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018).

Rather than criminalize student misbehavior at school and cast off misbehaving students as afterthoughts (Skiba, 2014), SROs can develop relationships with students, use restorative practices, and function as a positive influence for students within the school. Students who attend a school with a supportive climate are more likely to seek out help from an adult when in need of assistance (Eliot et al., 2010). Theriot and Orme (2016) also suggested continued research on SROs' interactions with students and how these interactions impact students' feelings of safety and school connectedness. Past research shows that developing and improving relationships between students and adults in schools has a positive impact on school safety (King & Bracy, 2019). Developing a preventative approach to school misbehavior for SROs through relationship development with students could reduce the escalation of school misbehavior and reduce the school to prison pipeline for students. A focus on relationship development between SROs and students could result in a decline in student behaviors that results in citations for school misconduct.

While SROs have been consistently used in schools across the United States, except for a 40-hour training for their roles as SROs (NASRO, 2020), they may not receive other preparations in working with students within their schools. While SROs are

municipal police officers who report to their police chiefs as the direct supervisor, the support from principals within the school can be complex. The support from school principals should ideally function as a partnership with SROs—just as any other relationship with employees who spend their working hours within the school, with principals facilitating SROs building relationships with students (Broll & Huey, 2015). SROs who have limited engagement or do not follow the triad model within the school (teaching, informal counseling, and law enforcement) have less opportunity for relationships building and have limited effectiveness in schools (Fisher & Devlin, 2020).

SROs have been an ongoing answer to school violence in schools in the United States (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Past research shows that developing and improving relationships between students and adults in schools has a positive impact on school safety (King & Bracy, 2019). These relationships between SROs and students are essential in maintaining school safety. King and Bracey (2019) asserted when using less punitive approaches with students, SROs can develop trusting relationships with students. Theriot and Orme (2016) suggested continued research on SROs' interactions with students and how these interactions impact students' feelings of safety and school connectedness.

Zhang (2019) suggested schools should focus on SROs' role as a mentor and liaison, directing specific emphasis on the development of relationships with students. The established importance of building SROs' and student relationships is the motivation for this study, specifically, how the school principal supports SROs in building positive relationships with students. By supporting SROs in building relationships with students, school principals can serve as leaders and mentors to SROs in meeting students' needs

through relationship building. This leadership and mentorship of SROs from principals can increase the trusting relationship between SROs and students to reduce the likelihood of student introduction into the juvenile justice system.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore how school principals provide support to SROs in building positive relationships with students within public high schools in Western Pennsylvania. Effective principals' support such as providing professional development in building relationships, providing SROs opportunities to participate in school teams, and creating expectations for SROs may reduce role confusion and focus SROs' roles within the school. While research exists on the effectiveness of SROs, this research focused on the support of SROs by principals in building positive relationships with students.

### **Research Question**

This research problem impacts faculty, staff, and students within public schools who use SROs as a tool for school safety and the development of positive school culture. SROs can have a tremendous, positive impact on the culture of the school (May et al., 2004). Utilizing SROs effectively within the school could lead to a positive school culture and reduce violence within the school and community (Eklund et al., 2018). School principals working closely with SROs and their local police departments in developing clear expectations and offering targeted professional development in relationship building with SROs could be key to SROs developing positive relationships with students in schools. This positive development of SROs helps students, faculty, and staff as an additional resource with expertise in law enforcement and the judicial system

(Eklund et al., 2018). This expertise, along with SROs' relationship development, can add another layer of safety and security to schools and positive school culture. In consideration of these facets of SRO programs, the central research question of this study was: How do principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students in public high schools in Western Pennsylvania?

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this Dissertation in Practice was to gain information and awareness of how school principals support SROs in developing positive relationships with students. School principals will benefit from this study by learning from peers and SROs about how principals' support helps SROs in building positive relationships with students. The data collected will be presented to school leaders in Western Pennsylvania for future training and implementation for principals.

### **Definition of Relevant Terms**

The researcher used the following terms operationally within this study.

*High school:* An educational institution with students in grades 9-12.

*Middle school:* An educational institution with students in grades 6-8.

*School Resource Officer (SRO):* A police officer employed by a local municipality with the area of their patrol as the local public school.

*School administrator:* A school leader with the role of principal, assistant principal, superintendent, or assistant superintendent.

*Restorative practices:* Related to school discipline, which includes repairing the relationships impaired by student misbehavior. Restorative practice is in addition to the consequences of the misconduct (Smith et al., 2015).

*PBIS*: Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, which has roots in schools as an incentive program for students and encourages positive behavior in schools (PBIS, 2019).

*Western Pennsylvania*: The Pennsylvania counties of Allegheny, Westmoreland, Armstrong, Butler, Washington, and Beaver.

### **Methodology Overview**

This study used an instrumental case study approach to data collection and analysis and explored how school principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students in public high schools in Western Pennsylvania. School principals have many roles, including instructional leadership of teachers, behavioral and disciplinary leadership of students, and cultural leadership of the school and community (Aydin et al., 2013). The additional leadership of SROs is an additional charge for school principals. Using an instrumental case study approach allowed the researcher to use a holistic approach to the specific and real-life bounded system giving the researcher in-depth information from a variety of sources (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The single-bounded case for this study was high schools in Western Pennsylvania. Participants were pairs of principals and SROs from the same school who had worked together for at least one year. The researcher interviewed nine principals and nine SROs for this study. Examining the support of SROs from school principals, this case study used data from the semi-structured interviews as well as document reviews from SRO programs and schools of the individuals interviewed. The data collected offered the researcher the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the forms of school principals' support and how this support helps SROs develop relationships with students.

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases**

In this instrumental case study, the data came from interviews of principals and SROs who worked in high schools in Western Pennsylvania. The research focused on SROs and not individuals who serve as school police officers or security guards within schools. SROs must work for the local municipal law enforcement agency or state police force and must have completed the SRO training conducted by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). Further, the structure of K-6 schools and their self-contained classrooms provide fewer options for students to change classes and have unstructured time akin to secondary schools. As a result, the lack of unstructured time can limit SROs' ability to develop relationships with elementary-aged students. As such, the researcher limited data collection to SROs employed by the local or state law enforcement agency working in high schools.

Delimitations of this study included the sample size of nine principals and nine SROs. The researcher found data saturation after these 18 SRO and principal interviews. The principals and SROs were from the same schools and had a working relationship with one another. The information gathered from these individuals, along with the document review of artifacts from their corresponding schools and police departments, may not apply to schools and police departments in other geographic regions. As such, the findings from this study should not be generalized to schools or districts outside of this narrow area. The researcher intended to conduct these interviews in person with SROs and principals. Due to the restrictions in place from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the researcher conducted interviews using web-conferencing video software.

The researcher previously held the position of safe schools administrator, along with his role as high school assistant principal, at a suburban school district in Western Pennsylvania. While in this position, he worked closely with the SRO assigned to the school district. Excluded from this study is this SRO, as the researcher is keenly aware that his bias from his safe school background must not influence the interview and subsequent data analysis process with SROs and principals. The researcher bracketed personal beliefs of principal support and leadership as well as personal beliefs about how to implement a successful SRO program within a high school from the analysis of data in this research.

### **Significance of the Dissertation in Practice Study**

#### **Addition to Scholarly Research**

SROs fill essential roles within the school. First, they facilitate the safety and security of students. Second, they provide educational experiences to students. These roles highlight the importance of their position within public schools. The school leaders' support of SROs can provide structure and expectations for the SRO position, allowing for SROs to have a defined role within the school (Price, 2009). This study adds to scholarly research by examining how school principals can support SROs in developing positive relationships with students. SROs are police officers and not employees of schools; they are usually members of the local police department. Understanding the principals' support in consideration of the SROs chain of command and leadership structure within the local police department can assist other principals in navigating this sometimes complex hierarchy and role identity. Further, structure within SRO programs and clear expectations through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between SROs



and schools can lead to positive working relationships between school leaders and SROs (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Adding structure to school leaders' support in the development of SROs' relationship development with students is a growing area of research.

### **Improvement of School Principal Practice**

From this research, principals have guidance on how they can support SROs in developing relationships with students. Additionally, the school principals have evidence of what SROs need from school leaders to effectively improve upon their practice of developing relationships with students within the school. Finally, school principals have proposed solutions from which they can create a plan of action to support their SROs in building relationships with students.

### **School Policy Improvement**

The information gained from this research can help to inform local school boards on policy development and potential development of an MOU between the police department and the school outlining the expectations of SROs. An MOU can clear ambiguities and allows for both parties' understanding of SROs' responsibilities within the school (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Additional policy development could center on the role and function of SROs within the school and what specific school rule violations SROs respond to in schools. Giving SROs minor violations could minimize the role of SROs and keep SROs from duties of greater importance, like building student relationships. Finally, policy and SROs' job descriptions could direct the school leader in the development of SROs and their skills in relationship development within the school.

### **Summary**

SROs have roles within the school that have potential in reducing crime through relationship development with students and the development of corresponding structures within the school. The evolution of SROs from reactive police officer to a proactive member of the school community could help build trust with students who may otherwise view the police as a negative influence. The development of these new skills for SROs must come from the school leader. The development of relationships with students by SROs could decrease school violence and increase student achievement.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore how school principals provide support to SROs in building positive relationships with students within public high schools in Western Pennsylvania. The central research question of this study was: How do principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students? Answering this research question through the instrumental case study of principals and SROs in secondary schools in Western Pennsylvania will add to the current research in principal leadership, school safety, and positive school culture.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Current police officers who function as School Resource Officers (SROs) have been an ongoing answer to school violence in the United States (Cray & Weiler, 2011). SROs function as trained police officers who often rely on relationships with students to help reduce crime and violence in United States schools (Barnes, 2016). As schools continue to look to new and creative ways to end school violence, SROs can continue to make a positive impact on school culture. The first topic of this literature review is a brief history of SROs. Second, the review focused on SROs' roles within schools. The third topic of this literature review examined the literature related to the perceptions of SROs. The fourth topic focuses on integrating SROs into schools and the last topic of this literature review examined trends in the literature related to school leadership. The information gained from further study could impact future training programs for principals and school leaders and the development of best practices for SROs and school administrators. These best practices and training programs could increase positive school culture, lead to the reduction of school violence, and possibly save student lives.

### **History of SROs**

The history of SROs extends back to the middle of the 20th century to England when a school employed a police officer to be a security presence within the school (Weiler & Cray, 2011). The modern version of SROs began later in the 20th century in response to school safety measures as increased school violence presented concerns for schools (Price, 2009). As violent crime increased and the resulting zero-tolerance policies in schools began in the 1970s and 1980s, police began to have a more significant presence in schools (Price, 2009). Since the 1980s, the role of the police in schools has

shifted. As a result, the SROs' role also extends beyond daily police work. School personnel see SROs as an added resource for students and teachers, a peacemaker among students, and an individual who can build a sense of community within a school (Counts et al., 2018). SROs use as an added community resource has increased as school safety needs have increased.

During the mid-1990s, most public schools used local police for reactionary purposes by responding to crimes committed in schools (Eklund et al., 2018). The change of the use of SROs and increased implementation of SROs arose from necessity with active shooters within schools becoming more common after the attack on Columbine High School in 1999 (Reyes, 2014). Before the commonality of active shooters in public schools, police in schools were responsive to crimes in schools only when called upon by a school administrator (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). Across the United States, the number of SROs increased by 38% between 1997 and 2007 (Elias, 2013). The number of schools with SROs expanded from 32% to 42% from 2005-2015 (Morgan et al., 2015). Despite the expanded role of SROs and police presence in schools since 2000, the United States averages one school shooting per month (Bump, 2018). While the increased numbers of SROs in schools has not decreased the number of school shootings, therein lies the possibility that schools are not utilizing their SROs in the best possible capacity to diminish school shootings and other types of school violence.

### **Roles of School Resource Officers**

Brown (2006a) compartmentalized SROs' functions into two areas, manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions relate to police work, including patrol of the school, responding to crime in schools, drug prevention, and investigations. Latent functions

relate to prevention and include teaching and mentoring and closely related to the NASRO (2020) Triad model. Each school has a unique set of needs around the use of SROs based on their student demographics, community engagement, and expectations based on their governing school board. With these needs being different from school to school, the expectations of SROs can also vary. The roles of SROs are not always clear. The needs of the schools' SROs serve will likely dictate the role SROs serve in their schools.

While SROs are often trained before beginning their patrol within their schools (NASRO, 2020), their background and experience in law enforcement impacts and informs their practice as SROs. SROs may serve as mentors for students, attend school activities outside of the workday, serve as consultants for teachers in a social studies class, and teach lessons related to positive choices by students (Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020). SROs' roles are different than traditional police work as they patrol the halls of their school rather than the municipality streets. NASRO supports the role change from traditional police work by focusing the training on definition and explanation of the SRO Triad Concept, (communication, and planning, prevention, and response to school safety) (NASRO, 2020). The NASRO Triad Concept seeks to divide the responsibilities of SROs into three main areas: teacher, informal counselor or mentor, and law enforcement officer (NASRO, 2020). NASRO (2020) believes the Triad Concept of school-based policing is the power behind SRO programs and provide increased benefit from school police and school security guards.

Roles of SROs can become conflicted and counterproductive. Na and Gottfredson (2013) suggested there was an incentive for schools to remove problem students from

schools at the secondary level. Removing problem students could be due to low student test scores; schools may have been compelled to do so because of test score attribution to the publicized performance of the school. Corresponding pressure on SROs by school personnel to apply pressure on the student to quit school or move to another school would be counterproductive to the community policing, which seeks to use community partnerships' problem-solving to address public safety (Rahn, 2021) and NASRO Triad model explained earlier. However, without a shared vision for the SRO programs, SROs could become a conduit for school personnel to eliminate perceived problems within their schools.

The role of SROs to protect students and develop community relations within the school may vary depending on the location of the school. In a qualitative study completed by Curran et al. (2019), they found that SROs believed in the importance of defined roles related to school discipline outlined by the school principals. Additionally, most of the interviewed SROs understood their position within the school was to protect students from outside threats such as an intruder or school shooter rather than intervening in day-to-day squabbles among students (Curran et al., 2019). SROs intervention into minor school discipline infractions could negatively impact students' view of SROs and police.

The roles of urban SROs may take on the charge of community builder with the schools they serve. Urban school students often have a differing view of SROs and their functioning within the school when compared to students in suburban or rural areas (May et al., 2016). Price (2009) researched the development of SROs in schools along with generalized police presence within schools (school police, security guards, etc), and found that in 2003 and 2004, 54% of schools had a daily police presence. An increase in

SROs' daily availability resulted from increased violence presence in schools (Weiler & Cray, 2011). However, in urban areas, students often look at the police in a negative light and view SROs as a negative function of the school and conduit to prison (Price, 2009). An expanded look at SROs' roles in school discipline and the school to prison pipeline resulting from an expanded police presence in urban schools is included later in this literature review.

SROs may have specific duties outside of their assigned patrol. Some SROs may also be required to teach classes, support teachers and staff in the school cafeteria, or patrol a specific area within the school during particular periods of the day (Barnes, 2016). SROs may be on-call throughout the school day, responding to incidents that require police attention or intervention with student behavior (Thurau & Wald, 2009). While SROs have specific duties during the school day, they may also have expectations for school activities outside of the school day. These outside duties may complicate the role of SROs as well as the labor agreement between officers and the police department.

It is essential for SROs to have a full understanding of their expectations within the school and for school personnel also to understand the expectations of SROs. This full understanding may help them to understand and embrace their roles within the schools they serve. A primary source of frustration of SROs occurs when school personnel believes SROs should act as if they are school employees (Kelly & Swezey, 2015). SROs are police officers patrolling the school during the school day. Confusing their role as school personnel can diminish their effectiveness as SROs and take valuable time away from their primary role in patrolling the school. SROs are police officers on

patrol within the schools they serve, school safety is a primary responsibility of theirs and takes on different forms dependent on the needs of their school.

### **School Safety**

SROs providing support for a safer environment for students can lead to students' overall feelings of safety within the school. These positive interactions with students and the development of connections with students create positive beliefs and attitudes toward SROs by students (Theriot & Orme, 2016). These positive interactions can take place in various situations with the school, such as classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias throughout different times during the school day. Positive interactions with police by students in a study related to community policing created favorable attitudes toward police within and outside of the community policing program (Leroux & McShane, 2017). The positive school culture brought about through relationship building within the schools by SROs can have a positive impact on safety and security within schools (Bracy, 2011). Even though SROs have specific roles that include police patrol within the school, SROs taking the time to build relationships with students can create favorable attitudes toward police by students.

To enable a more comprehensive approach to school safety, school principals can implement SROs as a layer of protection while offering other options for SROs to positively influence student behavior. Using restorative practices helps to decrease misbehavior in schools by the use of guided communication with the offender and the victim of misconduct through formal and informal discussions, usually facilitated by an adult in the school (Smith et al., 2015). For example, West Philadelphia High School lowered the incidents of severe acts of misbehavior and assault by 52% through the



utilization of restorative practices with fidelity in the 2008-2009 school year (González, 2012). SROs can play a role in the implementation of restorative practices or other preventative programs such as the use of D.A.R.E. within schools at the elementary and middle levels (Kersten, 2006). However, relying on SROs as the sole method of violent crime deterrent or would be irresponsible on the part of school districts. Other layers of school safety including restorative discipline practices and social and emotional learning are considerations.

SROs also work with school officials on safety planning for individual schools and school districts (Eklund, Meyer, & Bosworth, 2018). SROs can solicit support from the network of police as well as tiered support from counselors, mental health professionals, and first responders to assist in the safety planning for the school district (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). These individuals bring knowledge and experience to safety and all hazards planning. SROs combining their experiences with counselors, first responders, and school officials can enhance safety planning within their schools.

### **School Interventions**

SROs use of restorative practices to address crimes within schools by students can provide support in their development of relationships with students (González, 2012). Building relationships with secondary students may be more difficult due to secondary students' developmental level as well as their increased focus on peer relationships and not adult relationships when compared to younger students (Lam et al., 2014). Students who have positive relationships with teachers have more intrinsic motivation to learn within their classroom (Raufelder et al., 2016). SROs developing relationships with students may have a similar impact on a student's motivation to follow school-wide

expectations within the confines of the SWPBIS (School Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports) program.

Developing relationships between adults in schools and the students attending the school is an effective way to make schools safer (King & Bracy, 2019). How SROs develop these relationships with students can have flexibility within the confines of the school day. One possibility is the SROs' engagement in the school's School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) team. SWPBIS provides a reward for positive student behavior and is a method in developing positive school culture and climate (PBIS, 2019). Students having access to a SWPBIS program in their schools have a lower percentage of office referrals for misbehavior and lower rates of suspensions than students who do not have access to SWPBIS programs in their schools (Bradshaw et al., 2010). SROs using the tools provided to them from school leadership in the form of restorative practices and SWPBIS can assist in relationship development and linking the critical role of the relationship to the intrinsic motivation of the student.

School leaders' support of SROs in the school-wide development of social and emotional learning (SEL) is another tool for SROs in the development of relationships with students. SEL is a way for educators to build social and emotional learning strategies within the context of the classroom, often focusing on skills related to social awareness and self-management (Blad, 2017). Using SEL in schools alongside the regular academic curriculum can improve academic performance and students' ability to build relationships while reducing incidents of negativity such as arrests and mental health disorders (Taylor et al., 2017). Involving SROs in the implementation of an SEL curriculum may require special considerations from the school as well as the local police

department since SROs are not teachers within the school (Weiler & Cray, 2011). The integration of SROs in student development through an SEL program within the school could have a positive impact on students and the development of relationships by SROs with students.

### **School Discipline**

Classroom teachers and school administrators should not leave the day-to-day school discipline to SROs (Barnes, 2016). Having school administrators and teachers attend to daily student misbehavior is a function of their primary role as educators. Educators should implement school discipline and subsequent parent phone calls rather than adding this to the responsibilities of SROs. For example, students may seek out the expertise of SROs regarding a bullying situation. And while SROs can offer technical assistance to bullied students, this behavior is typically guided by the school's discipline code or policy and is not considered a crime by law enforcement (Broll & Huey, 2015). Keeping school disciplinary infractions separated from criminal conduct is essential to the culture of the school and the delineation of authority roles within the school (Price, 2009).

Keeping the roles of school personnel and SROs consistent can help the student to understand the role of SROs. SROs' involvement, as it relates to matters that might result in discipline, should be limited to severe student infractions that require the enforcement of the law. As trained police officers with expertise in law and criminal behavior, SROs must not be the primary disciplinarians within schools (Counts et al., 2018). While SROs can provide support to school principals and teachers, the primary disciplinarian should remain the principal or a classroom teacher with SROs maintaining their role as an

outside, supportive agency (Dickmann & Cooner, 2007). Often, SROs do not have an understanding of the schools' discipline code to effectively manage school discipline (Lopez et al., 2019). Management of these processes often occurs through communication between the school and police department informed by an MOU.

Implementing formal processes with the help of an MOU between the school and police departments allows for precise and consistent expectations for SROs (Cray & Weiler, 2011). The development of an MOU or other governing documents that delineates X and Y is integral in implementing SROs and in the school's ability to differentiate the roles and expectations of SRO positions. These MOUs between X entity and Y entity are common and important to ensure all parties are clear on their roles and the scope of those roles in the school. Michelman (2019) suggests that the MOU should have provisions within the document to reflect the importance of making students feel welcomed and respected within the school. Without the existence of an MOU, SRO programs may be without clear expectations for the school and the SROs.

Despite the diverse needs of many schools, SROs must maintain their supportive role rather than function as a school disciplinarian (Eklund et al., 2018). Relying on SROs for the disciplinary issues of the school will create a governance structure within the school that is not sustainable for the present administration and faculty (Barnes, 2016). School personnel trained to integrate school discipline should remain under the governance of school principals.

### **Implementation of SROs into Schools**

Adding one or several SROs into a school will take planning from both the school and the local police department. Schools and police departments should seek answers to

questions such as funding, supervision, and providing SROs with the necessary means to conduct their roles effectively within the school (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Model programs and MOUs are available through NASRO (2020) for schools and police departments to reference and inform their decisions on SRO programs.

### **Governance of SROs**

SROs are police officers working for their local municipality while on patrol within the school; SROs are not employees of the school, but rather directed under the supervision structure of the local municipality. Typically, SROs report daily to their school(s) of patrol and carry out their duties as they relate to this school. Barnes (2016) suggests relaying information to school staff outlining the expectations of SROs to eliminate any role confusion for SROs. Likely, the supervision of SROs comes from the chief of police within the city (Weiler & Cray, 2011). However, collaboration between SROs and school personnel is vital to the development of successful SRO programs (May et al., 2004). Collaboration between SROs and school personnel can occur informally or formally. Engagement with students is an integral function of SROs. Allowing SROs to follow the expectations specific to their police work outlined in the MOU will positively contribute to their ability to conduct aspects of their job, build relationships with students, and reduce role confusion of SROs (Thomas et al., 2013). Inclusion in the MOU could address funding of the MOU program as well as responsibilities for training and development of SROs.

### **Funding for SROs**

Depending on funding, a school district may have the resources to have SROs in every school building within the school district. In contrast, other schools may only have

the resources to commit to one SRO for multiple school buildings (Swift, 2013). The local police municipality employs SROs. However, funding for these positions may come from local school districts. If the school is committed to sharing the cost of SROs with the municipality, the two entities should integrate this partnership into an MOU for SROs' services. The MOU addresses hours, roles and responsibilities, SROs' expectations, and finances (Weiler & Cray, 2011).

As needs for SRO programs increases due to violence in schools and resources for SRO programs remain level (Cray & Weiler, 2011), there are still schools that do not have SROs daily. Districts across the United States have explored a variety of funding sources to support SRO programs. For example, in Colorado, federal stimulus money allowed for an increase in SROs (Cox & Cornelius, 2009). In Pennsylvania, the Department of Education awarded safe schools grants to schools to fully and partially fund SROs in many Pennsylvania schools (Reigelman, 2018). However, when grant money recedes, the individual school districts must take over the cost of SROs. With the cost covering salary, benefits, and insurance the cost of one SRO depending on experience level can range from \$75,000 to \$100,000 (Hill, 2013).

### **Training and Development**

SROs rely on their training to serve their purpose to help create a safe and systematic school (Wolf, 2014). First and foremost, SROs are police officers charged with patrol and maintaining the safety and security of their schools (Weiler & Cray, 2011). The SROs training to respond to acts of misbehavior or school violence will likely lead to citations or arrests of student perpetrators; these are the methods SROs receive training for and vital aspects of their positions within the school (NASRO, 2020). It is

unrealistic to expect SROs to act on or respond to student misbehavior and school incidents the same as school personnel. Their training, life experiences, and roles are different than school personnel and their responses are a result of their training. Offering SROs ongoing opportunities for training in areas of student development and education could lead to changes in their responses to student behavior.

While there may be specific trainings for SROs from school districts or municipalities, most SROs seek an initial training from NASRO with more opportunities for NASRO sponsored trainings for SROs. In a 2020 project completed by Esplage et al., they examined the professional development of SROs and developed a training program incorporating elements of teacher preparation program. The study integrated trauma-informed care, social-emotional learning, restorative practices, and cultural competence for SROs. Completion of each module increased SROs' understanding of each training area allowing SROs to have added areas of expertise in meeting the changing needs of students in their schools. Including SROs in similar trainings of teachers can help to create a better understanding of teachers by SROs. Kennedy (2001) offered that similar training allowed SROs to develop skills in speaking and listening to students. This training helped SROs in their approachability to students and permitted SROs to immerse themselves in the school culture.

As mentioned previously, NASRO (2020), offers training for SROs to implement SRO programs. The training for SROs includes 40 hours of training focused on the teen brain, social media, and the development of relationships with students (NASRO, 2020). Given the amount of training required of teachers to work with students, which is at minimum a four-year degree in all states, the existence of a 40-hour training program

without job embedded training and support may not be sufficient for SROs to meet the needs of students in schools. Furthermore, it is unclear from NASRO (2020) training if SROs have training to build their capacity to speak up to school administrators or teachers when pressured into making decisions for arrests and removal of students viewed as problem students. However, an objective of the NASRO (2020) training is for SROs to demonstrate positive and professional communication. Kim and Geronimo (2010) assert that additional training focused on school district policies and procedures could be an avenue to help bridge the gap and integrate SROs to the schools they patrol.

Theriot and Cueller (2016) assert that an introductory training is vital to the success of SROs. In addition to the initial NASRO training, schools should consider an additional training program specific to the needs of their school with SROs and school administrators attending this program together (Theriot & Cueller, 2016). In addition to the introductory training for SROs, NASRO (2020) provides refresher courses designed to update current SROs with updates and changes related to their practice as SROs. For example, though police training may not include behavior modification and education strategies of students, SROs can learn these skills through close work alongside teachers and school leaders. With the development of a school district-specific training program suggested by Theriot and Cueller (2016), SROs and school principals might have a clear understanding of the SROs' expectations, and SROs will be educated related to school-specific expectations and rules.

### **Perceptions of SROs**

Individuals who do not regularly spend time in public schools may not understand the need for or the use of SROs within the public school. Education and the processes of



schools have evolved over the past 20 years due to school safety measures and the changing needs of students (Jones, 2014). In Pennsylvania, The Department of Education offered competitive grants for SROs and training for existing SROs and school security guards beginning in 2018, with continued opportunities for schools to apply for these grants (Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 2020). Regardless of the funding source, municipality, or school district, the salary, benefits, and insurance of SROs will likely come from tax dollars or grant funds provided by tax dollars.

With the existence of zero-tolerance school policies beginning in the 1980s, schools started to change codes of conduct and disciplinary policies to increase lengths of suspensions based on rules infractions (Skiba, 2014). With these changes in codes of conduct and behavioral expectations, an increased police presence in schools became the norm, which created concern by some over the treatment of students by SROs (Mallett, 2017). The concerns for police in schools continues to present day with groups of students and other stakeholders fearful of police in schools.

While we live in time of public and school gun violence, some students and families welcome the police presence in schools. The same may not be accurate for students who have an already ingrained belief of mistrust and negativity toward police in their community. Feelings of safety and positive perceptions may not exist among all racial and ethnic groups, for example. Due to negative perceptions and feelings about the school discipline process, American Indian, Black, and students of mixed race may have a less than positive view of SROs than Caucasian students (Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018).

In a study of SROs in Alaska, the consistent predictor of public perception of the SRO having the ability to do their job appropriately and effectively depended mostly on

the social interactions between students and police officers within the previous year (Myrstol, 2011). These social interactions helped create an opinion of SROs' ability to do their job within the school effectively. Negative social interactions, much like the ones mentioned previously, may create negativity around police in schools and their ability to create effective SRO programs within their school (Kim et al., 2017).

### **Integrating SROs into Schools**

There are genuine concerns regarding the implementation of SRO programs in public schools. The use of an armed police officer in a school may not lead to the feelings of overall safety and security to students because of the backgrounds and experiences of the students attending the school (Theriot, 2013). Additionally, the implementation of SRO programs with sworn-in police officers who have the ability to write citations and arrest students can be viewed as an increased criminalization of student misbehavior (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Na & Gottfredson, 2013). An argument can be made that strong feelings exist on both sides of the debate with police viewed as a deterrent to violent crime in schools while others believe police do not have a role in schools.

In a longitudinal study completed for the years 2004, 2006, and 2008, schools with SROs had higher amounts of recorded and reported crime than schools without SROs (Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018). While weapons infractions and assaults are often reported due to the nature of zero-tolerance policies governing these types of behaviors (Skiba, 2014), the increased use of the SRO's presence likely increases the number of smaller crimes reported and acted upon in schools. These incidents were likely previously unreported and administratively dispositioned by school administration. Even though sensationalizing school violence occurs in the media, the reports of school violence are

relatively low in the United States (Morgan et al., 2015). While school shootings are newsworthy and heavily publicized, the number of incidents of school violence are continuing to decrease.

It is common to see SROs chaperoning a school dance or attending an athletic event after schools, enhancing their approachability among students (Counts et al., 2018). While not all SROs have a comfort level in participating in school extra-curricular activities and events, attending such events would give SROs a level of understanding of students that attend their school of patrol. This understanding could have a positive impact on relationship building with students by SROs.

Unifying SROs with the faculty of the school could prove difficult as SROs are members of the police force. Before the integration of SROs into the faculty and staff of the school can occur, the development of trust should occur. The cultivation of this trust can occur through the development of positive interactions between SROs, students, and faculty (Theriot & Cueller, 2016). As the school leader, an objective of the principal should seek to unite the school as an organization through the development of a shared mission and vision for followers (Gardiner, 2006). Sharing the mission and vision to students, along with the unification of faculty and SROs, creates an atmosphere of collaboration with all stakeholders to understand the expectations within the school. With everyone in the school understanding the behavioral expectations for students and staff, everyone within the school will be better equipped to feel as if they belong (Davis, 2007).

Unification of the school with SROs as an integral member of the team can have positive impacts on the climate of the school. A positive and welcoming school climate can create peace within a school, keep negativity to a minimum, and increase the

likelihood of student success inside and outside of the classroom (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). SROs' ability to build relationships within the school with both students and adults can help SROs with their acceptance into the school. Additionally, these relationships can have a positive impact on school climate.

### **Relationships with Students**

Building relationships with students may be the key to unlocking student achievement (Comer, 2005). Students, especially younger students, are eager to please their teacher and are more likely to extend their learning for a teacher they think is interested in their development (Noland & Richards, 2015). Students work hard for teachers who present as interested in their educational and personal development. The same understanding can hold for SROs and their relationships developed with students. Improving communications between SROs and students within schools is integral in the reduction of school violence by students within schools (King & Bracy, 2019). Pentek and Eisenberg (2018) suggested that the relationships developed between SROs and students promoted safety and positive school discipline within the school for all students. The development of relationships with all students by SROs can influence positive school culture, reduce discipline offenses, and give students a feeling of safety within their school.

The utilization of SROs in conjunction with other school personnel engaging in dialogue with SROs and developing relationships with students can impact student behavior in a positive manner (Jones, 2014). Community policing, collaboration between police and community focused on solving community problems, has found success in dealing with crime and developing positive police-youth interactions and relationships

(Leroux & McShane, 2017). Using SROs within a school with a structure similar to community policing could realize the same benefits. The consideration of the school as the community and using community policing as a framework for SROs to follow could create a positive and safe atmosphere for students to learn and grow (Raymond, 2010). Barnes (2016) found that SROs using a similar model to community policing in their interventions and interviews with students allowed for a more significant opportunity to gather information from students and the chance to solve crimes. For example, Rhodes and Clinkenbeard (2020) interviewed SROs who used the community policing approach that included developing relationships with students, found they had a sense of ownership in their SRO positions and were empathic and relational in their approach as SROs. SROs interviewed believed they made a difference at the schools they served and had emotional ties to the individuals in the school. The community-based approach of collaboration and problem solving suggested by Leroux and McShane (2017) can show a more human side to police and SROs who utilize this model; creating the opportunity for relationship development with students.

Barnes (2016) studied SROs' effectiveness with close attention to what SROs would like educators to know about SROs' role in schools, and she found SROs' effectiveness was related to positive SRO relationships. Specifically, positive relationships between SROs and students in schools positively impacted the overall school cultures (Barnes, 2016). The positive relationships developed by SROs are useful in other areas as well. Cultivated relationships provided an opportunity for SROs and local police departments to solve criminal investigations based on the information gathered from SRO-student relationships (Mulqueen, 1999). Schools fortunate enough to

have limited student crime could benefit from SROs focused less on writing citations and more focused on building relationships with students; these types of SROs would be viewed more as a community liaison (Zhang, 2019). The development of positive relationships by SROs can assist in the development of more positive behaviors of students leading to better attendance, supportive student behaviors, and a positive impact on school culture (Zhang, 2019).

Thurau and Wald (2009) interviewed 16 SROs and police chiefs to explore the roles of SROs in schools in Massachusetts. One SRO explained the thought processes behind the difference in procedures in responding to criminal activity for an SRO and a traditional police officer on the street. The SRO viewed their role in response to student behavior as more of an approach of intervention while the typical conventional police approach officer was more of suppression. SROs' intervention after students engage in criminal activity examined the reason for the chosen act, the severity of injuries, and the frequency of misbehavior by the perpetrating student. The typical suppression response from police officers was more of a literal interpretation of the rules' violation within the school. There was minimal account in reports of why the behavior occurred. SROs accounting for the intervention of student behavior may rely on their relationships built between themselves and the student. Theriot and Orme (2016) suggest if there was not a relationship established, that could be an opportune time for SROs to engage in the development of a relationship with the offending student to gain information about the current incident and prevent future incidents from developing.

For many years, the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program was a link between students enrolled in the program and a positive police experience (Lee et al.,

2016). While there was evidence to suggest that the D.A.R.E. program has little positive impact on the reduction of drug and alcohol use by students (Lilienfeld & Arkowitz, 2014), the access to D.A.R.E. officers within the school could have portrayed police officers in a positive light to students who may otherwise believe in negative stereotypes represented in television, movies, or other media (Anderson, 2018). Lessons learned from the relationship development of D.A.R.E. officers with students could have logical transfer to SROs helping them to develop relationships with students in their roles as SROs.

How young people attend to and understand their interactions with police tend to impact the positive or negative direction of the encounter with police (Kennelly, 2011). Some students and young people with negative police experiences may further impact their behavior leading to a negative interaction with police or SROs (Theriot & Orme, 2016). Creating an atmosphere of respect where all students feel safe within the school should be the goal of all SROs (Michelman, 2019). Student backgrounds and lack of understanding of the human interaction process place further importance on the ability of SROs to strive for the development of relationships with students. Understanding that students may have a negative experience or know of a family member with a negative police experience could impact how SROs interact with students. Placing a higher emphasis on the relationship development may be necessary for students with these experiences.

### **Relationships with Educators**

While SROs have different training and backgrounds than educators, that diversity can have a positive impact on the school community as a whole if proper

collaboration exists between SROs and school personnel (Page, 2017). Collaboration between educators and SROs in developing SROs' roles within the schools increased the effectiveness of SRO programs in the schools studied (Barnes, 2016). Using SROs as a consultant in matters related to safe schools would offer the school an opportunity to benefit from the SROs' skills and training in the development of safety plans through collaboration with educators (Mulqueen, 1999). Because of training differences, educators and SROs may differ in their perceptions of crisis intervention and the events in which they respond in conflict situations in schools (Eklund et al., 2018). Using SROs as a consultant on safety planning and responding to crises may increase awareness and change the response practices of school administrators and teachers.

Despite educators and SROs having different training, they share a common goal in the safety, security, and achievement of students. In a study by Jones (2014), she found more differences than similarities between the two professions. School psychologists are considered proactive and restorative in their professional practices, while SROs are reactionary and punitive in their methods (Jones, 2014). Incorporating restorative practices, beginning with building relationships with students, can help SROs in reaching the social and emotional needs of students (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). Asking SROs to incorporate restorative practices into the daily activities would require training and support from the schools and faculty they serve. Schools using these practices could train their SROs to create a school wide commitment to these practices and likely providing more consistent application for students.

Other programs linked to SROs benefit from school wide support and commitment from faculty and staff despite the differences in educators and SROs



outlined by Jones (2014). As mentioned earlier, SROs do spend time in classrooms with students with programs like D.A.R.E. Facilitation of D.A.R.E. by police in schools aims to educate students about the dangers of drug abuse while encouraging students to make positive choices even when drugs are not involved (Kersten, 2006). Donnermeyer and Wurschmidt (1997) examined educators' perceptions of the D.A.R.E. program and found that educators thought positively about the D.A.R.E. program. Despite evidence suggesting D.A.R.E. programs had limited to no positive impact on middle school and elementary students (Gottfredson, 2016), positive outcomes linked to this study were the interactions and collaboration between the SROs/ D.A.R.E. instructors and educators. The better the relationship between the SROs/ D.A.R.E. instructors and educators, the higher the rating of the D.A.R.E. program (Donnermeyer & Wurschmidt, 1997).

### **Relationships with School Leadership**

School principals lead teachers, counselors, students, and SROs when assigned to a school. The working relationship between SROs and principals should be productive with regular interactions because principals believe the communication skills of SROs are more critical than the specialized training they receive (May et al., 2004). Schools are complex systems with their characteristics and cultural systems determined by students' actions and behaviors within the complex system (Hawkins & James, 2018). It has been suggested that school principals are called to their role as school leaders. Due to the professional demands both inside and outside of the school, school principals must be willing to accept these demands before taking on the role of school principal (Swen, 2020).

With SROs being the first line of defense from an intruder in the creation of safe schools, building relationships with students by SROs can be an additional layer in the development of safe schools (Zhang, 2019). The shared vision of school safety by SROs and school principals can carry over into a shared vision in the development of relationships by SROs in schools. Principals sharing the relationship development responsibility with SROs can create long-term investment into the school community by SROs and create higher levels of positive school culture (Fiarman, 2017). Even though SROs are not a direct subordinate of the principal nor an employee of the school, their investment into positive school culture through their practice of building relationships with students can have benefits for all students.

The value of the interagency relationship between the principals and SROs can have far-reaching effects within the school with possible influence on the community outside the school (Lopez, 2019). This success relates to the earlier mention of the success of community policing and the comparison to the SRO programs (Leroux & McShane, 2017). A strong relationship between the school principals and SROs can enhance the interagency development between the police force and the school district, creating an interagency collaboration benefitting students and community members. This interagency collaboration can work toward the development of safer schools and safer communities, helping students and families.

A positive and constructive working relationship between SROs and school personnel, along with a proper governance model are positive predictors of success in the SRO programs (May et al., 2004). School principals who view SROs as fair and balanced in their assessments and dealings with students within the school are more likely to see

SROs as legitimate within their patrol of the school (Wolfe et al., 2017). Wolfe et al. (2017) also suggested that principals view favorably SROs who respect students and staff. This existence of positive relationships between SROs and school personnel could have parallels to SROs' and students' relationships. SROs may draw upon existing knowledge or relationships when responding to situations within the school. Having relationships with students may influence SROs not to file charges based on the understanding of a particular student or extenuating circumstances of the situation (Wolf, 2014). An understanding of a student's situation could lead to SROs, referring the student to another member of the school team for assistance rather than filing charges and involving the juvenile justice system.

The researcher previously mentioned the importance of restorative practices and how these practices may help in the development of SROs' and student relationships (González, 2012). Principals' role in the development of the school community, for which SROs are members, can also be a champion for restorative practices when adopting them to the student's code of conduct. A restorative community connects students through responsibility to one another and an understanding of collaboration (Block, 2018). SROs can become a vital member of the restorative community as they respond and intervene in the schools they patrol. School culture and community are of vital importance in schools as they impact school success, teacher effectiveness, Student achievement, and how students learn (Howard, 2019). The relationship between principals and SROs may be a catalyst to enhance outcomes of SRO programs. Principals' support of SROs in building relationships with students may help to enhance

SROs' feelings of community within the schools they serve. This feeling of community by SROs can then help to shape their routines and practice within the school.

### **Areas of Growth within SRO Programs**

With SROs employed by the municipality on patrol within schools under the direction of a principal, there may be role confusion on the part of SROs. Adding to the role confusion can be the SRO's lack of understanding of the school's disciplinary code and the principals' lack of understanding and experience with police processes (Lopez, 2019). While both school principals and SROs work together on a variety of school safety concerns such as building walkthroughs and assessments, evacuation and reunification plans, and community crime concerns, the relationship between the two individuals could be adversarial (Coon & Travis, 2012). Understanding the perspective of the other is integral in the development of the SROs' and principals' relationship. The relationship development between these two individuals can help SROs in the transition and tenure of their work with students within the school.

Consistent communication should be a staple between SROs and principals. In a case study by Lopez (2019) that interviewed SROs and school principals found that specific barriers existed between SROs and school principals. These barriers existed due to the lack of communication opportunities between SROs and the school principals. While the duties of SROs and school principals are vastly different, their communication and collaboration can be critical to the development of a safe and supportive school. Remedies for the lack of communication, as indicated by the interviews by Lopez (2019), included increased collaboration between SROs and principals, stability in SRO positions, and a mutual understanding of roles between SROs and principals.

SROs and principals scheduling regular meetings to discuss issues with their school can help with collaboration. The need for both formal and informal collaboration is vital for SROs' development and a consistent understanding of their expectations within the school. The lack of collaboration between school principals and SROs is a common theme in unsuccessful SRO programs within a school (Coon & Travis, 2012). Formal MOUs are a way to ensure the formal collaboration of SROs and principals (Dickmann & Cooner, 2007). Developing these documents together by the school district and local police department to ensure joint ownership of the procedures and input from both parties (Kim & Geronimo, 2010).

One challenge of the school principal is to garner the interest of SROs to begin to think in the collective interest of the school, which means a collective we before me attitude that drives decisions of SROs (Haslam et al., 2011). Developing this collective interest can be challenging for principals since SROs are not school employees. The principals' role in helping SROs understand they are members of the school team is very important. The goals of the school are too great to accomplish alone, and the collective and interdisciplinary voices help to create the best solutions that can help to achieve this goal (DeWitt, 2017).

### **Trust and SROs**

This trust may take time to build as SROs and school principals come from separate backgrounds and understandings. The need for both individuals to listen to the needs of the other can be important in relationship development. Principals and SROs need a working relationship as the two will be working together on a variety of tasks within the school. Development of the relationship can begin through the establishment

of trust between SROs and school principals and having transparency between the two concerning expectations (Harrison et al., 2017).

The school principal's belief in and trust of SROs has importance in the development of SROs within the school. As mentioned previously, school principals and the SROs will work closely on school safety planning within the school and school district. The successful development of school safety plans occurs from the relationships and networking of the school administrators and law enforcement personnel (Lopez et al., 2019). The ability of the two to collaborate and function as a team could depend on the trusting relationship between the two. The trust in SROs by the school principals depends on how school principals perceives the SROs is treating students in a fair and just manner. When principals believe SROs treats students fairly, their level of trust and legitimacy in SROs increases (Wolfe et al., 2017). Students' trust in SROs is also important as students are more likely to report a crime or issue to SROs when students have a positive relationship with SROs (Theriot, 2013).

Positive school culture is important to the safety and security of students and adults in the school. Sowell (2019) found through qualitative interviews that principals could create a foundation of trust with students by creating a school culture that offered consistency, fairness, and high expectations for students. Additional trust and relationship development came through making an effort to get to know students on a personal level and taking opportunities to have fun with students (Sowell, 2019). While SROs receive some training for their role within the school, their NASRO (2020) training only briefly includes how to build relationships with students. This is an area in which school

principals will likely need to offer support and guidance in the development of positive relationships with students.

In addition to consistency, fairness, and high expectations needed to build trust, displaying compassion is another way for adults to help the development of relationships with students (Calahan, 2014). Speaking frankly but with compassion regarding a student's behavior is an effective leadership style of principals and other school leaders (McLellan, 2009). Influencing SROs to develop compassion in their role within the school may prove to be difficult, depending on the role and expectations of SROs. As indicated by Barnes (2016), utilizing their expertise in the development of daily prevention and SROs' activities rather than keeping SROs occupied with mundane tasks could develop SROs into a compassionate member of the school team with the ability and willingness to build relationships with students.

### **School Leadership Supporting SROs**

In the early days of SROs in the 1950s, the SROs' role was to address school violence and build a bond with police and young people in schools (Joyner, 2015). Even 70 years ago, the positive outcomes were a goal, as was the need to develop bonds or relationships between young people and police. The development of relationships among students, teachers, and school staff is vital to the promotion of positive school culture and climate (Whitaker, 2003). A school principal's leadership style often informs their ability in how they build successful relationships within their schools.

While not one school leadership theory or approach is widely recognized as a standard for principals, aspects of school leadership theories could have effectiveness in school with SROs. The support and leadership given to SROs by principals can be a

positive force in SROs' ability to build relationships with students. This can be done through a strong interagency relationship between schools and the police department with school principals working closely with the police department to understand each other's roles (Lopez, 2019).

A principal who strives to serve their school stakeholders as a servant leader will build relationships through their interpersonal skills and their ability to help their followers succeed (Fitzgerald, 2015). Servant leadership requires leaders to listen to their followers, engage in meaningful conversations with followers about followers' needs and desires, and empower followers to successfully meet their goals (Nandram & Vos, 2010). The first pillar of servant leadership is a person of character; the servant is trustworthy, honest, committed to serving beyond themselves, and has the highest integrity (Sipe & Frick, 2015). Often, educators fit the mold of Sipe and Frick's (2015) first pillar; people of character. Educators fitting into the first pillar of servant leadership will place students' and schools' needs above their own, treat colleagues with honesty and integrity, and serve as an educator with integrity. Educators answer the call to serve in classrooms for various reasons, but these reasons can be rooted in altruistic and self-fulfilling motivations (Struyven et al., 2013). School leaders acting as servants will work with SROs to build their capacity to develop relationships with students and enhance their ability to utilize restorative practices in their patrol of the school. By enhancing SROs' ability to develop relationships and meet the needs of students, principals serve their school.

Servant leaders have a positive impact on student achievement and on school culture (Saglam & Alpaydin, 2017). The ability of a servant leader to think of the



organization first before themselves has a positive impact on the organization (Keith, 2016). School principals who are transcendent, servant leaders who think of the organization first before the needs of their own will are likely to place SROs in a position of success within the school to ensure the success of the SRO programs. A position of success for SROs could come from a variety of methods. The school principal may need to initially act as a liaison for SROs if SROs are new to school districts. This servant leadership role could change into a mentorship role as SROs become acquainted with expectations of schools and the needs of the students. Finally, school principals may work closely with SROs related to student needs in cases of discipline or school safety.

Transcendent leaders are leaders of self, others, and organizations while combining aspects of transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Crossan et al., 2008). Transcendent leadership uses appropriate extrinsic rewards while appealing to the internal motivations of followers to achieve the desired outcomes (Cardona, 2000). Transcendent leaders are similar to transformational leaders who are widely regarded as highly ethical leaders who treat followers with a considerable amount of respect and have a sense of obligation to the group or organization (Johnson, 2015). Using transcendent leadership within a school setting, organizational dynamics can take a positive direction for SROs and principals by uniting both in the belief the success of the organization is higher than the success of the individual (McLellan, 2009).

Transcendent leadership intends to unite organizations through shared governance while the transcendent leader is value-centered and reflective, thinking globally rather than focusing on day-to-day minutia (Gardiner, 2006). Developing SROs into servant leaders may be a difficult task as SROs may not embrace the opportunity to lead within

their role within the school. Since not all educators are in favor of having SROs in schools, schools' SROs could benefit from principals uniting the faculty to accept the concept of SRO programs. Additionally, servant leaders seek to grow their followers through service to them with the test of servant leadership examining the growth of those served; have they developed in areas that will enable them to become servants themselves? (Keith, 2016). Uniting a school faculty requires a leader who is self-aware and able to stand up to conflict if presented by individual faculty members of the school. School unification may require individualized consideration of SROs who need coaching in their development as a collaborative member of the school (Johnson, 2015).

### **Summary**

The role and expectations of SROs have evolved, allowing SROs the opportunity to utilize their skills as a police officer and expertise in criminal behavior to meet the needs of educators as a supplement to school safety. Even though SROs' availability increased, school shootings have also increased in the United States (Bump, 2018). As a result of this trend, it is reasonable to believe the presence of SROs will continue in schools. Additionally, the role of SROs may vary in different schools. The primary role of SROs is school safety and security. Often, SROs expand the school safety role by participating in safety planning, training, and community education in police matters (Eklund et al., 2018). Students have a favorable view of SROs who can build a relationship with students (Brown, 2006).

Though not school employees, SROs have common goals and objectives of educators, such as school safety, increased student achievement, and meeting the social and emotional needs of students (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). The local police

departments typically employ SROs while SROs' serve the school through their daily patrol. Often, an MOU is in place with the local municipality governing the expectations of SROs (Ryan et al., 2018). SROs should not insert themselves into school disciplinary matters intended for school personnel. Instead, SROs attend to issues regarding criminal behavior in schools (Dickmann & Cooner, 2007).

School leadership often works in conjunction with SROs in matters of school safety and when students commit crimes within the school. School leaders must provide opportunities for SROs to build relationships with students, creating opportunities for SROs to learn more about the needs of students while providing students with an understanding of SROs role. Creating these opportunities for SROs to participate in SWPBIS programs and SEL teams place SROs in a position of positive regard by students and teachers. Students who have positive relationships with teachers are more motivated to learn (Raufelder et al., 2016), and students who have positive relationships with SROs may be more likely to engage in positive behavior within the school. Within the research presented in this review, conclusions show that positive relationships between adults and students increase student achievement and students' sense of safety and security within the school. Additionally, SROs' participation in SWPBIS or other evidence-based interventions in schools can have a positive influence on students within the school.

Literature focusing on successful school leadership at the secondary education level is plentiful. However, there is a gap in research related to how the school leader and their influence on SROs. NASRO (2020) offers insights and examples for SROs and police departments on the implementation of SRO programs and the necessary training

needed for successful SRO programs. NASRO (2020) also recommends that SROs have visibility within the school and availability for student needs and the development of relationships within schools.

### CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods used to answer the research question: How do principals support SROs in building relationships with students in public high schools in Western Pennsylvania? Research has shown that improving and building relationships between students and adults in schools has a positive impact on school safety (King & Bracy, 2019). Additionally, building positive relationships by SROs with students was helpful in the development of SROs' role within schools. Building positive relationships offered SROs the opportunity to integrate themselves into the school community (Barnes, 2016). Zhang (2019) suggested schools should focus SROs' role as a mentor and liaison with specific emphasis on the development of relationships with students. The researcher used an instrumental case study approach to identify how principals support SROs in the development of positive relationships with students. SROs can be a central element in the school safety plan, and their relationship development with students can have a preventative impact on crime and violence within the school (Wolfe et al., 2017). By understanding the environment required for SROs to develop relationships within the school and their role in the development of this climate, school principals can formulate plans for SRO programs and protocols. These protocols may ultimately meet the needs of students in reducing school violence and creating safer schools with positive learning environments.

#### **Research Question**

Considering the current problems related to school safety, school culture, and the increase in SROs in schools (NASRO, 2020), the central research question of this study

is: How do principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students in public high schools in Western Pennsylvania?

### **Method**

The researcher used a qualitative method to study how principals support SROs in building relationships with students. Creswell and Poth (2017) assert that qualitative studies gather information from interviews, document reviews, and observations. The researcher completed interviews of principals and SROs and completed a document review of student codes of conduct, SROs' job descriptions, and MOUs between school districts and local police departments.

### **Research Design Overview and Appropriateness for Study**

Understanding how school principals support SROs in developing relationships while on patrol within a school is the focus of this study. School principals and their leadership have many facets: instructional leadership of teachers, behavioral and disciplinary leadership of students, and cultural leadership of the school and community (Aydin et al., 2013). The support of SROs is an additional charge for school leaders (Weiler & Cray, 2011). The support offered to SROs from school principals can help SROs navigate the complex behavioral structures schools offer and help SROs effectively manage their patrol and roles within the school. Using an instrumental case study approach allowed the researcher to use a holistic approach to the specific and real-life bounded system giving this researcher in-depth information from principals, SROs, and the reviewed documents (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

“Case study research is defined as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems (cases)

over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). The single bounded case for this study was suburban high schools in Western Pennsylvania. Examining the support of SROs from school principals, the case study examined data from the semi-structured interviews of SROs and school principals as well as document reviews from SRO programs and schools of the individuals interviewed. Using the instrumental case study methodology offered the researcher the opportunity to identify and understand the types of support principals provide to SROs. Understanding the support needed and how SROs experienced support from school helped the researcher answer the research question.

There were several reasons for the appropriateness of an instrumental case study approach for this research. First, using an instrumental case study approach offered a holistic examination of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2017), specifically in this case principals’ support of SROs building positive relationships. School principals influence school culture through their development of relationships and their treatment of students throughout the school (Leithwood, 2010). Even though SROs are police officers on patrol within the school, in the eyes of students, they function as a faculty member and influence the culture of the school (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). This instrumental case study examines the support from school principals by interviewing principals, SROs and reviewing documents related the SRO programs within their schools. These individuals are all from five counties in Western Pennsylvania, which is the boundaries for this case study. The holistic and in-depth nature of the case study provides greater depth and breadth of information than would narrative research focusing on the experiences of and

individual or a small group of SROs (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Narrative research would not give the researcher the needed information for this study.

Second, the instrumental case study approach provided the researcher an opportunity to identify an in-depth understanding of circumstances or a phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). In this instrumental case study, the circumstance studied is principals' support of SROs. The interviews of SROs and principals offered insights about how the principal offers support from both principals' and SROs' perspectives. Additional information from the organizational and cultural aspects of their support was evident in the document review process. While phenomenological research seeks to understand the essence of experiences, focusing only on the experiences of SROs would not give the researcher necessary information from principals and the document review (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Third, researchers use instrumental case studies to solve problems (Creswell & Poth, 2017), and when the researcher wants to study how and why questions (Yin, 2003). One problem with the structure of SROs in schools is the organizational dynamic of SROs working for the local police department while on patrol in a school. Principals navigating how to support SROs within the school while SROs are not school employees is an identifiable problem for this case study. Solving a complex problem is not the focus of grounded theory research or an ethnography. Grounded theory research seeks to develop a theory from research while ethnographic research would include group or individual observations in an effort to understand patterns or behaviors of those observed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).



The primary focus of this instrumental case study was the support of SROs by school principals. While the case study's focus was the principals' support, the information about how principals offer their support came from interviews of principals, SROs, and document reviews. As Hancock and Algozzine (2017) asserted, much of the information gained from instrumental case studies come from insights and procedures that result from the specific phenomenon of study. Using the interview questions specific to exploring the support of the school principals offered a window into how each principal created an atmosphere and culture within the school that enhances SROs' ability to build positive relationships with students.

### **Participants and Data Sources**

#### **Participant Recruitment**

Participant recruitment began by emailing information about the study and a request for participation to suburban high school principals in Allegheny, Washington, Butler, Beaver, and Westmoreland Counties in Western Pennsylvania. The researcher excluded the City of Pittsburgh Schools in Allegheny County as they employ their own school police officers. See Appendix A and B for the invitation letters. In all, the author sent invitation emails to all 76 suburban high schools in the five counties in Western Pennsylvania. Suburban schools were the focus of this study because many rural schools did not have SROs or local municipal police departments. To qualify for the study, each school must have an SRO program with an SRO employed by the local police department and the principal and SRO must have worked together for at least one year. To ensure that a principal/SRO pair ultimately qualified for the study, the researcher asked

principals specifically if their schools had an SRO or SROs with an agreement with the local police department.

Since some schools in Western Pennsylvania employ school police officers and school security guards rather than SROs, the researcher did not know the number of schools meeting the criteria for participation. Schools who employ their own school police did not qualify for this study. The researcher sent recruitment emails to the 76 high schools with four high school principals initially responding. The researcher sent follow-up emails to the remaining schools after two weeks. The researcher received responses from 15 principals about their interest in participating in the study. Nine were interviewed while the remaining six withdrew from consideration or were unable to meet with the researcher.

### **Participant Interviews**

The researcher sent copies of the study information and participant bill of rights to each participating principal and SRO from each school via email after confirmation of participation in the interviews. Copies of these are in Appendix C. The interviews conducted between July and September in 2020 lasted between 20-35 minutes each. Even with the specific question to principals regarding the presence of SROs and agreements with local police departments, the researcher mistakenly interviewed two sets of principals and school police officers. This information came to light during the interviews and these responses are not included in the reported results. After completing the nine sets of interviews and achieving data saturation, the researcher informed the tenth set of participants that the interviews would not take place.

The researcher utilized Google Meet and Zoom to complete the interviews remotely due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. For each interview, the researcher sent an invitation link to each participant at an agreed-upon time. All interviews with principals and their SROs were independent of one another. Since these interviews took place primarily over the summer, many SROs were working shifts within their police departments as school was not in session. The researcher met with all of the respondents at their convenience due to the chaotic nature of school principals' schedule preparing for school during the COVID-19 pandemic and police officers' shift-work requirements.

To ensure the recording of interviews, the researcher used a handheld digital recording device, in addition to the embedded recording tool in Zoom as a backup during the virtual interviews. Once the Google Meet or Zoom digital download was completed and saved, the researcher deleted the handheld digital device's recording. The researcher has a matrix of schools interviewed coded confidentially and locked within a safe in the researcher's home. Table 1 contains some demographic information of the schools along with information from the participating principals and SROs.

**Table 1***School Demographic Information*

School	Enrollment	Grades	Percentage of Students Economically Disadvantaged	Length of Principal/SRO Relationship
1	493	7-12	45.4	3
2	1296	9-12	34.3	5+
3	686	9-12	34.6	2
4	1504	9-12	38.4	1
5	1120	9-12	37.5	5+
6	601	7-12	45.7	4
7	1371	9-12	8.4	5+
8	823	7-12	65.1	1
9	1396	9-10	6.8	3

**Document Review**

The researcher's document review focused on documents within the school and municipal police departments that directly and indirectly influence SROs in their daily patrol. Documents reviewed for this study included MOUs between the school and police department, student codes of conduct, and SRO job descriptions. Student codes of conduct included examples of behavioral infractions with appropriate consequences. Additionally, codes of conduct offer opportunities for student supports for student misbehavior. Student codes of conduct were available on the school districts' websites

while the job descriptions and MOU's were on file within the school districts' central offices and police departments.

The documents reviewed for this research did not require permission as these documents are a part of public record. A formal open records request was not necessary for any of the documents reviewed as the schools forwarded the requested documents after an informal request. Included in the invitation letter to principals and SROs was information regarding the document review. The document review shed light on understanding the school policies, procedures, and SRO procedures related to school culture and the SRO programs. Of the nine schools who provided principals and SROs interviewed for the study, eight of the nine schools provided the documents requested by the researcher. Only School 4 did not produce the MOU and SRO job descriptions for the researcher.

SRO job descriptions averaged five pages in length and MOUs between schools and police departments averaged three pages in length. Schools codes of conduct are multiple page documents with some being standalone codes of conduct while some schools' codes of conduct are integrated into student handbooks. The researcher organized the information that resulted from these documents in a matrix focusing on implications of SROs into student codes of conduct MOUs with language related to SROs building relationships with students. The Document Review Matrix is in Appendix D.

Documents from schools and police departments were difficult to retrieve by the researcher. When requested by the researcher, typical responses from principals and SROs centered on the need to find the requested documents as these were not readily

available. School websites contain sections for student codes of conduct and discipline related information. Despite numerous phone calls, text messages, and emails to both the SRO and principal, the researcher could not obtain the SRO job description and MOU from School 4 whose SRO and principal participated in the semi-structured interviews.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The researcher conducted the qualitative, instrumental case study by interviewing school principals and SROs within the schools they patrol and a document analysis from each of these schools. The interviews consisted of eight questions focused on how principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students. The semi-structured interviews allowed for follow up questions related to the research question. Adding relevant follow up questions allowed for participants to expand on details and answers previously given to the researcher. The interview protocol for the SROs used for this study is available in Appendix E. Due to the social distancing requirements by the Center for Disease Control from the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher used Google Meet and Zoom for the interviews and recording. The interview protocol for school principals consisted of eight open-ended questions focused on examining the principals' support of SROs in building positive relationships with students. The interview protocol for principals is in Appendix F.

The researcher developed each interview protocol from the literature review with information related to both principals and SROs. The researcher piloted each interview protocol with three individuals serving as secondary principals and one SRO for instrument validation. None of these pilot participants' data is included in this study. These principals and the SRO gave the researcher feedback about the questions related to

clarity and content. From the feedback, the researcher eliminated one of the questions as the question did not relate directly to the research question. Rather, the question sought to understand the working relationship between the principal and their SRO. Each principal offering feedback believed the questions would capture the details of how principals can support SROs in developing relationships with students.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis procedures for the interview data consisted of open coding for the interviews and general gathering of chunks of information from interviews, categorization of codes, and the analysis of categories for thematic development (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher analyzed the interviews of principals and the interviews of SROs independent from one another resulting in different themes from each groups of interviews. A third analysis of the documents provided from each school and municipality was independent from each of the groups of interviews. The researcher's mindfulness was vital in this process (Creswell & Poth, 2017), focusing on the research question, which was principals' support of SROs in the data collection process.

Due to the large amount of data collected from interviews, the researcher used the computerized coding software MAXQDA for coding the qualitative interview data, but not data from the document review. MAXQDA allowed the researcher to organize data through the upload of transcripts, highlight text, organize information, identify codes, categorize codes, analyze, and report data. While data analysis programs are not without fault, MAXDQA helped the researcher with the organization of data and improved the accuracy of qualitative studies (Zamawe, 2015).

**Data Analysis of Principals' Interviews**

Nine principals were interviewed from the principal interview protocol. After the initial open coding and of data from interviews, the researcher identified 263 codes from the principals' interviews. The subsequent axial coding permitted the development of categories created from those codes and allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of the participants interviewed. There were 13 categories identified from the codes identified within the principals' interviews. From the spiral analysis of open coding and axial coding, the researcher identified four main themes from the principals' interviews.

**Data Analysis of SROs' Interviews**

Nine SROs were interviewed from the SRO interview protocol. After the initial open coding and of data from interviews, the researcher identified 254 codes from the SROs' interviews. The subsequent axial coding permitted the development of categories created from those codes and allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of the participants interviewed. There were 16 categories identified from the codes identified within the SROs' interviews. From the spiral analysis of open coding and axial coding, the researcher identified five main themes from the SROS' interviews.

**Document Review Analysis**

Analysis of documents began with coding for thematic development. The use of codes and coding in the document review process focused on the document content (Bowen, 2009). The intention of the document review was to analyze each of the documents specific to the school's SRO and principal to determine if there was a



connection in the documents' principals supporting SROs in building positive relationships with students. The researcher expected document availability from school districts and police departments having similarities across schools and police departments. Similarly, was the case with school and police department MOUs and SRO job descriptions. These MOUs and SRO job descriptions were very similar in content and style with little content and direction focusing on the development of relationships by SROs. Only one of the SRO job descriptions created the expectation of building positive relationships with students. The researcher embedded the data analysis of the document review into the analyses of the SROs' and principal's interviews reported in Chapter 4.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are essential to the research process as they determine accuracy and consistency in the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher triangulated data after collecting data from interviews and a document review to ensure the validity of the data. Triangulation uses several different data sets to test the same findings (Carlson, 2010), in this case how principals can support SROs in building relationships with students. For this research, interviews with principals, SROs and a document review were the primary data sources. Triangulation of these data sources occurred throughout the coding process and the development of themes. The researcher utilized member checking throughout the interview process, validating the responses of the participants. Specifically, the researcher emailed each participant the transcription for their review to ensure the transcription is an accurate account of what the participant said and meant from their responses. The researcher asked participants to evaluate the transcript and respond to the researcher if they believed errors or omissions occurred.

One SRO and one principal responded with changes. These changes were the result of a typographical error from the transcription service.

The researcher has extensive experience working with SROs in a high school and elementary school setting and developing SRO procedures within these schools. As a former assistant principal and current principal, the researcher bracketed experiences related to school safety and the role of SROs within the qualitative interview to keep the interviews, data analysis, and interpretations reliable and valid (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher strictly followed the interview protocol ensuring his personal biases and preconceptions did not interfere during the interviews with principals and SROs. The researcher was careful not to offer his own insights during the interview process and did not allow personal biases to encroach upon the data analysis in this research. The researcher allowed SROs to speak freely about their lived experiences from the principal's support of their ability to develop relationships within the school they patrol.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues should be given consideration in all parts of the research process. (Creswell & Poth, 2017). As a school principal with an extensive background in school safety, the researcher was aware of this possibility when interviewing principals and SROs. The researcher's beliefs about the effectiveness of SROs and school principals' ability to build capacity in an SRO program did not come about during the interviews nor did it impact the coding and analysis of data. The researcher was mindful of the possibility of bias by being reflective and mindful of the analysis process. In addition, the researcher provided clarity of the study to participants, avoided leading participants in

questions asked, and kept the identities of the participants and their organizations confidential.

Despite educators and SROs having different training, they share a common goal in safety, security, and the achievement of students. Many school leaders are considered proactive and restorative in their professional practice, while SROs are often considered reactionary and punitive in their methods (Jones, 2014). Although the researcher has experiences in these areas, the researcher was always aware during the interviews, coding, and analysis of the results to control potential biases while completing the research.

The researcher received Creighton IRB exempt status approval on July 15, 2020, see Appendix G for the Creighton University IRB approval letter. The researcher provided all participants an electronic copy of their information letter and the research participant's bill of rights. The researcher informed all participants their participation was voluntary, and the names of participants and their organizations are not included in the reporting of results. The researcher removed identifiers and pseudonyms of all participants so their responses and results cannot be traced back to the schools or police departments from which they are associated. The researcher has a codebook of all participant identifying information locked in a safe in his home. The data stored electronically is password protected and uploaded to the researchers Google Drive.

### **Summary**

This instrumental case study examined the phenomenon of principals' support and how principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students. Interviewing SROs and principals consisted of questions focused on how principals

support SROs in building positive relationships with students in schools and how school principals help the transition from traditional police work to SROs work within schools. The researcher used open coding and axial coding to develop trends and themes in the data in determining how school leaders influence SROs. In Chapter 4, the researcher will report on the results and findings of this research, including themes from the qualitative interviews and findings related to the research question.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore and answer the research question, how do high school principals provide support to SROs in building positive relationships with students within public high schools in Western Pennsylvania? School police and SROs often experience role confusion within the school that keeps SROs from completing the most desirable functions, including educator, student mentor, and informal counselor (Javdani, 2019). Significant principal support such as providing professional development in building relationships, providing SROs opportunities to participate in school teams, and creating expectations for SROs could help reduce role confusion and focus SROs' roles.

This study attempted to identify how principals support SROs in developing positive relationships with students through qualitative interviews with SROs and principals as well as a document review related to the schools' existing agreements with SROs. Hancock and Algozzine (2017) assert that information gained from instrumental case studies comes from insights resulting from the specific phenomenon of study. In this case, the phenomenon being studied is the principals' support of SROs. Using the interview questions specific to exploring the school principals' support offered a window into how each principal created an atmosphere and culture within the school that enhances SROs' ability to build positive relationships with students.

This chapter analyzes themes from the document reviews and qualitative interviews and of SROs and principals. Presented are themes gained from SRO interviews, principal interviews, and the data from the document review. Due to a large amount of data from 18 interviews, the researcher used MAXQDA qualitative software to

assist with coding and the analysis and development of themes. The researcher used information gained from the document review to provide support for the themes identified in the sections below. Specifically, the researcher embedded the document review data into the analysis of interview data rather than an independent section outlining independent data from the document review.

### **Results**

The researcher analyzed the data from interviews with principal participants separately from interviews with SRO participants. Each is reported in turn below. While there was overlap of many codes and some themes from the two sets of data, the themes from these data sets had separate meanings and impacted the researcher's findings.

#### **Themes from SROs and Document Review**

Five emergent themes emerged from the interview coding of SROs and the document review. The codes and themes developed a detailed description of how principals support SROs, as seen through the eyes of the SROs interviewed for this case study. Table 2 contains a summary of these themes of SROs' responses. The following section will describe each of the five themes and provide supporting and informative quotations from the participants to provide color and detail about each theme.

**Table 2**

*Themes from SROs' Interviews*

SRO	Building Relationships in Classrooms	SROs are not involved in School Discipline	SROs Know Families and Community	SROs Part of School Team	Principals' and SROs' Communication
1	X	X	X		X
2	X	X	X	X	X
3	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X		X
5	X	X	X	X	X
6	X	X	X		X
7	X	X	X	X	X
8	X	X		X	X
9	X	X	X	X	X

**Building Relationships in Classrooms**

Building relationships in classrooms through teaching lessons, conducting informal classroom observations, and serving as mentors to students within the classroom helped SROs build relationships with students. SROs also facilitated speakers for students to learn about law-related subjects, career development lessons, leadership programs, and safety issues impacting teens. Principals give SROs opportunities for leadership to build programs and invite speakers within their schools, much like the one invited by SRO 9. Principals have a wealth of educational experience and provide support to teachers and SROs in a variety of ways including program development, staffing, and

feedback. SRO 9 talked about the importance of building relationships through the speaker he invited to the school to talk to a physical education class. He said:

I had a Navy SEAL come in and talk to them. I had to bring adults in to talk to kids about all different aspects of life to succeed. They see what I, who I bring in, and what I do in that shows she gives me a lot of leeway on what I can do within the school to build relationships. If I run it by (principal), and she doesn't have a problem with me doing it. It's for the benefit for the kids she lets me do it.

SROs indicated that principals granting them the opportunity to be a part of the classroom experience for students was an opportunity for SROs to build relationships with students.

SRO 5 said, "You know how you were talking about... and that's how we start a conversation. Being in the classroom gets your relationships built, and so I think a principal supporting an SRO to go into a classroom will help 100%."

SRO 4, who is no longer in School #4, indicated that speaking to students in classrooms came naturally to him as he considered being a teacher over a career in law enforcement earlier in his adult life. He said:

I enjoyed it so much. I loved being in that school. Like I was telling you before, the crux of what I did was teaching, and they [principals and assistant principals] understood that they kind of left that up to me. The old SRO, that was his big deal, and that was my big deal. If I wasn't a cop, I'd want to be a teacher, I just did. This was just hitting the lottery for me. I get to be a police officer, and I get to go in and teach. I would jam pack my schedule with teaching, whether it be the D.A.R.E. program or a class I made up. I developed a class on vaping right before



COVID hit. I was going to go into the sixth grade. I was going to spend a week in there hitting all the sixth graders.

SRO 3 discussed that he tried to insert himself into classes that needed his attention the most. SROs might not feel comfortable in a higher-level academic class since the teacher or students may view their presence as a distraction. Rather, SRO 3 discussed the importance of being in less strenuous academic classes such as technology education or physical education. These classes allowed the SRO to interact and participate freely with students during classroom activities without being a distraction to the teacher or other students:

I try to stick to the art room, tech ed, and the media center. I try to go into those classes more, again because I don't want to interrupt someone's education. I don't want to take away from the teachers trying to teach their class. There are a couple of teachers that said anytime you want to stop in, and it's no big deal. Again, that's an effective way for me to encounter these kids, it's structured, it's in an educational setting, but it's also an opportunity for me.

The opportunities for SROs to interact with students and teach classes within the schools they patrol could not happen without the building principal's support and access. As indicated by the SROs, their presence in classrooms was an opportunity to learn about students and how they interacted in classrooms. Their presence also gave students an opportunity to learn about the SROs. Students were able to experience and participate in interactions with the SRO and develop an understanding and make their own judgments about the SRO. SRO 8 made this point in the interview:

They see me in the classroom. They can relate what I do to things they see, things they hear. Cut out the rumors, I can give them the facts on different laws and things like that. The school is really supportive of that program. I've really had no issues at all.

SRO 8 spoke about a presentation given to students, specifically what to do when presented with a situation when police are present in the community. SRO 8 presented to students how to interact with police in the community. The necessity of classroom discussions like this one might not exist in all schools. However, it was necessary in their school, and the principal allowed the SRO to have these conversations and lessons within the high school. School 8 has a high minority population. Given the current climate within our country related to law enforcement, teaching students how to act when confronted with a situation that requires police involvement can help these students if such a situation presents to them.

The support principals offer SROs in building relationships in classrooms includes giving SROs opportunities to teach classes, scheduling speakers for students, and mentoring students. The SROs offer learning opportunities for students that can be transferred into skill development; giving students advantages moving forward throughout their time in high school and beyond.

Another way principals helped to provide SROs with access to students was to provide a workspace inside the high school office for SROs. This workspace gave SROs a home base within the school to complete paperwork when necessary rather than creating a need for SROs to return to the police station to complete necessary paperwork. In addition to the workspace, access to the school's network and student information

system gave SROs access to student directory information needed to complete a report. This access eliminated the need for SROs to ask for student information from a staff member. These might seem like minor things, but they did take time away from the student contact needed for SROs to build relationships with students.

The private workspace gave SROs a place to meet with students privately and confidentially. SROs would likely find themselves in situations speaking with students when privacy is necessary. Their own private workspace allowed for confidentiality and added an extra layer of security to students when presented with the need to speak with an SRO about a situation that requires privacy.

### **SROs are not involved in the Student Discipline Process**

The second recurring theme that emerged from the data was about SROs being removed from the discipline process within the school. SROs spoke openly about this as did principals in the interviews. Principals and assistant principals were responsible for student discipline referrals sent to the school's office for intervention. SROs only involved themselves in those referrals if there was a criminal component to the referral, and in most cases, only after the principal or assistant principal completed the preliminary investigation and questioning of the student. SRO 8 talked about minor discipline infractions he witnessed within the school, and rather than making the poor judgment a discipline infraction, he handled it with a conversation. He said:

Number one, it's not my issue to enforce those so every time I see these kids, I'm not like, "Where's your hall pass? Where you going?" If I see they don't have a pass, I might mention to them that they might want to get where they're going so

they don't get jammed up on something stupid like being in the hall without a hall pass.

SROs and principals were on the same page regarding SROs' insertion into the school discipline process. Principals believed that the supervision of school discipline was the school's role and the school principals' role rather than the SRO's. Though presenting this theme with SROs in mind, the researcher found that principals' beliefs were similar to those of SROs. SRO 4 discussed this congruence of belief specifically in his interview by saying:

They [principal and assistant principals] were really, really good about not trying to blur those lines with disciplinary issues. I don't know if that some sort of training they have, or if it's just school district policy. They really looked at us as law enforcement asset and not as a school administrator asset. Which I liked. I could see how that could become a problem for an SRO if they try and put you in an administrative role.

SRO 6 discussed the need for SROs to show some restraint in the issuing of citations to students. His principal shared those beliefs. Their focus on limiting citations to students and replacing intervention in the juvenile justice system with mentoring within the school could prevent future entanglement in the justice system and prevent some students from insertion into the school-to-prison pipeline. SRO 6 said, "I try to keep the kids away from all that going to the juvenile justice system or the magistrate or anything like that. I try to mentor them a little more."

Although all SROs indicated their lack of involvement in the school's discipline process, not all SROs were in agreement about their role in the issuing of citations within

the school. SRO 3 discussed his role within the school district and the district's beliefs and expectations of issuing citations for criminal activity. The decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana possession in Allegheny County in Pennsylvania complicated the expectations of when to issue a citation by the SRO within this school district. SRO 3 said:

This is probably the area where I have the most battles with administration, especially with the marijuana vapes. I don't issue truancy citations, and I don't issue tobacco or vape citations because that's something, number one our magistrate is okay with the school district filing privately, and it happens at so much frequency that I wouldn't get anything else done. I've offered the truancy stuff. I've offered to write the citations, but with different IEP's and different kids with special needs, they don't necessarily want me indiscriminately giving citations kids, which I'm good with that. Say, for example, the THC vapes; I try to explain to the principal, whether it's the juvenile justice system or the adult justice system, specifically in Alleghany County, they don't care if you have weed. They just don't; even though they have pounds of it, they don't care, they don't want these in the justice system.

Within the MOUs of the schools used in this research, MOUs addressed the citations and filing of criminal charges by SROs when warranted. However, the MOU between the school district and municipal police department for SRO 3 did not explicitly address the possession of a controlled substance and subsequent filing of charges within the juvenile justice or adult justice system. The MOU did address the selling of controlled substances, for which the SRO will immediately seek a petition for the juvenile's arrest at

the discretion of the SRO. The lack of language and direction with respect to possession of drugs within the school could contribute to the disconnection between SRO 3 and school administration regarding drug possession.

While only one MOU examined in this research specifically indicates removing SROs from school discipline, principals did keep SROs from participating in the student discipline process. Principals were very open about student discipline being their role. In the interviews, principals mentioned that they preferred student discipline matters within their school be handled without involving the law.

Keeping SROs away from imposing discipline on students allows the SROs to continue to focus their time on building relationships with students and students do not relate the negativity of school discipline back to their SROs. SROs are called to intervene in criminal activity only when the criminal activity occurs inside of the school. The filing of criminal charges often come about from the collaboration between principals and SROs. SROs know families from their work in the community and their family knowledge may influence their judgement in filing criminal charges.

### **SROs Know Families and the Communities of the Schools They Patrol**

SROs indicated their knowledge of the community, and residents of the community helped develop relationships with students within the high school. Only two of the SROs interviewed for this research had only one year of experience as an SRO. Despite only one year of SRO experience, both SROs had multiple years of experience as patrol officers within the community. According to SROs, this experience with family members and the community was invaluable in the SRO role. SRO 2 talked about his

many years of experience on patrol and, as an SRO, helping was in the ability to talk to students. He said:

Hey, give me five minutes. Let me talk to them and see what's going on. Being here 23 years, I may have known their parents when they were that age, grandparents, whatever. I'll take a chance to talk to a kid, or I've known them now for six years. You get a freshman, this kid was in third grade, I remember them at the primary building. I try to maintain that because I will see them in the summertime and now with the Coronavirus, I'm placed back out on patrol.

For some SROs, their knowledge of the community resulted from their work as an SRO and their roles within the police force as a patrol officer when school was not in session. SRO 5 had seven years of experience as an SRO. She used her experience to build relationships and a sense of community within her high school. She began a second-hand clothing shop within the high school at the urging and support from the principal. She said, "When I started the clothes closet, which was another thing that [principal] didn't have the time to involve himself in it. But he definitely supported us wholeheartedly, giving us an entire room to make our closet." Students who needed clothing or personal items could utilize the closet confidentially throughout the school day. SRO 5 kept the closet stocked through donations within the school and donations from the community. Without principal support of endeavors like this, SRO 5 would not have had the ability to build relationships or community through the closet.

In addition to being members of the community, SROs served other functions within the school they patrol. SRO 3 and SRO 9 served as athletic coaches in the school

during evenings and weekends. SRO 3 was a student at the high school he patrolled and built relationships through coaching. He said:

I'm lucky enough that I coach the high school football team, so that's a way for me to get in contact with kids that I probably wouldn't have had contact with until they graduated, and there was an official criminal justice interaction.

Coaching within the school allowed SRO 3 to have built-in opportunities to approach students throughout the day and begin a conversation about sports. Although there was no language in the MOU between the school and police department limiting extra-curricular activities for SROs, there was language promoting their participation. Within schools, coaching opportunities were readily available as they were positions with limited compensation and high amounts of stress from outside influences. Principals permitting and promoting SROs to participate as coaches within their schools created extended opportunities for SROs to build relationships with students outside of the traditional school day.

SROs see their connection to families and communities vital to their role as an SRO. These connections include being members of the communities they serve, participating as coaches in their schools, parents of students in the school, and their police department longevity. These connections to the school and community make SROs excellent candidates for inclusion into school teams.

### **SROs believe they are a Part of the School Team**

The fourth theme related to SROs was their belief they are supported as part of the school team. From their responses, six of the nine SROs interviewed indicated their appreciation and acceptance they received from principals, school counselors, and



teachers. This acceptance into the school community gave these SROs the belief they were contributing members of the school team in meeting students' and families' needs. SROs discussed how the feeling of acceptance from the faculty and staff helped them build relationships with students. SRO 2 spoke of the acceptance from the high school faculty and how he could help in the community when in-person instruction halted due to COVID-19. He said:

The teachers gave me acceptance. Guidance counselors, social workers, we work on a peer level supporting one another. When this hit, we went out and took computers to the kids and took them to them. Who can't get here? We'll take them to them. Who's not checking in? We'll knock on the door and let mom know you have to check-in. With that access and me being accessible to the community it flows both ways.

Five SROs discussed their involvement with the Student Assistance Program (SAP) within the schools they served. SAP teams met weekly or bi-weekly and discussed students in need of additional services outside of the school. Those teams had a mental health liaison from the local community mental health provider to offer technical assistance to the team regarding community services. SROs' inclusion on those teams was a result of the principal's discretion. Each SRO had to attend a mandatory three-day training for permission to serve on the team. SRO 9 mentioned the SAP team membership and PPT (pupil personnel team) membership and said, "Yes, I am on the SAP team. I sit on the PPT meetings every week and assist the team on anything that I can help with resources outside of the community."

Not all SRO memberships on SAP teams had a positive result. SRO 3 had a different experience with his SAP team membership and said:

I am on the SAP team. It's another thing where communication was an issue. I was never really asked, which I don't have a problem being on the SAP team. I'm more than willing to help, in my opinion, that's part of my job here. It was just all of a sudden, I started getting all these meeting invites for the SAP team. I asked the assistant principal, "am I on the SAP team now?"

In addition to being included on student-centered teams, SROs discussed how principals give them the autonomy to run their SRO program in a way they saw fit. SROs found this autonomy and trust from principals further secured their beliefs. They were members of the school team and secured the acceptance of their roles within the organization. SROs appreciated principals' support of their autonomy knowing that principals trusted SROs in developing and implementing the SRO program. SRO 3 mentioned the trust specifically and said, "He (principal) honestly gives me the freedom to structure my day how I want, do what I want. To me, that shows that he has trust in what I'm doing."

SRO 6 discussed the importance of consistent communication between the SRO and principal and how being on the same page allowed the SRO to function independently within the school. He said:

The principal around here, when I came in, we sat down, we had a talk, and from day one we were on the same page. That's always nice, I belong to the organization for the resource officers and many of those guys need to account for every minute of their day.

The acceptance and integration of SROs into schools and onto school teams gave these SROs a sense of belonging within the school. Principals who promoted their SROs and SRO programs to students and teachers gave SROs an added push for acceptance by these populations. SRO 6 and SRO 2 both discussed the importance of walkthroughs with their principals and students to see the positive interactions between the SROs and principals. A walk through is an opportunity for a snapshot of instruction or classroom management by walking into a classroom for a brief period time without interrupting instruction. Both SROs believed these joint walkthroughs led to students understanding the two school leaders were on the same page with respect to student behavior.

Principals supporting SROs by their inclusion into school teams helps give SROs a belief they are a part of the school team and their expertise and input is valued within the school. SROs involvement in SAP teams and PPT teams provide opportunities to share with school faculty information they may know about a student's family situation. Principals' support leads to opportunities for sharing of information that could benefit students.

### **Principals' and SROs' Communication**

SROs were municipal police officers on patrol within a school with a hierarchical chain of command that included their police chief but did not include the school principal. As the school leader, the principal was the school's instructional and cultural leader yet had no standing within the chain of command for the SRO. The importance of regular communication between principals and SROs was vital to the success of the SRO program and critical in the support of the principal in building positive relationships with students by SROs.

SROs discussed in their interviews the importance of good communication between SROs and principals. SROs gave many examples of good communication related to student discipline, school safety, and building positive relationships with students. SROs also freely discussed poor communication with principals and how the lack of communication kept SROs from being effective at their school role. SRO 3 mentioned the lack of communication several times during the interview. SRO 3 detailed the lack of expectations for him in his SRO role as problematic and wished there had been better communication early in his SRO tenure. The lack of communication related to building relationships with students, and he did not believe the principal agrees with his classroom involvement. He said, “we didn’t have that ‘these are your expectations’ at the beginning.” SRO 8 talked similarly about the principal’s lack of communication and how he would have liked to have more communication about expectations within the school. He said:

Like I said my number one I don't really talk to him that much. I see him in the mornings, ”Hey, officer [SRO 8].” ”Hey, Mr. [Principal 8]. How you doing?” We might chit chat a little bit. It would be nice to see him a little more often. As far as the principal, truthfully, the one thing I wish I would have had when I started was to sit down with the principal. How he wants to handle common incidents, we'll have a fight, how he wants that handled, the school's policies and procedures on certain things.

There were many examples of positive communication and how the positive communication related to the support of SROs in building positive relationships with

students. SRO 5 discussed her interactions with the principal and how his interactions positively impact her to interact with students:

I'll use [principal] for example. We talk a lot and he models quite a bit for me. He's the discipline principal so he deals with all discipline and the kids. So, I've learned a lot from him and how to deal with parents. I've learned a lot from him and how to deal with kids.

Contrary, SRO 4 mentioned the positive communication between him and his principal was almost too comprehensive regarding information regarding student behavior within the school. He said:

[Principal], his best asset, I think he's a fantastic communicator. We worked well, and we talked about it. I would say I almost met with the principal daily. If I had something to say on that end as far as principals go, sometimes they kept me in the loop too much.

SRO job descriptions and MOUs between the school and local police department vaguely addressed communication between the SRO and school administration. These loose associations included "establish liaison with school principals, faculty, and staff" and "be a resource to the principal for investigating criminal law violations at the school." They did not address the fundamental need for SROs to build positive relationships with students. The job description of SRO 2 came close to addressing the development of relationships with language including, "work to assure the peaceful operation of school-related programs and build support with students, by participating in or attending school functions."

SROs discussed the autonomy they have to their jobs within the school. Even with this autonomy, SROs still discussed the need for leadership from the principal in regular communication. SRO 5 said,

They support me in the fact that when I have an idea, they sit down and listen to it. My ideas aren't always flawless, so sometimes they'll say, "What if we do this, but change it this way." That helps because their idea is a little bit better then, and it just evolves my idea.

Other SROs discussed principals questioning their methods with filing charges for student crimes or these charges' outcomes. Increased communication and consistent expectations for SROs can eliminate these issues. SRO 3 spoke of this in his interview, "Sometimes that's not the desired outcome that the school wants. So we get into, not necessarily arguments, but disagreements in how we're handling situations. Quite often, the biggest disputes about not feeling supported are when I'm not there."

While the situations described by SRO 5 and SRO 3 are different, their beliefs outline the need for good communication between principals and SROs. Positive and productive communication between SROs can help to positively reinforce and address areas of growth.

Initial and ongoing communication between principals and SROs is vital in the support of SROs. SROs are law enforcement professionals who need the communicative support from principals to help them navigate their school patrol and be a resource for faculty and students. SROs who have positive communication with their principal speak positively while those SROs interviewed who do not, wish they had better communication.

### **Themes from Principals and Document Review**

From the principal interview analysis, four themes emerged after the coding of principal interview data. In addition to the interview data, the document review of MOUs and SRO job descriptions added some information to augment the themes. There was limited information in the reviewed MOUs and SROs job descriptions that focused on SROs building relationships with students. Also, there was limited information related to principals' support in the MOUs and job descriptions. Table 3 contains a summary of these themes emerged from the principals' responses; interview data from the principals contribute to informing the specific themes in this research.

**Table 3***Themes from Principals' Interviews*

Principal	SROs' Visibility within the School	Principal Trust in the SRO	Student and School Safety	SRO as a Resource and Relationship Builder
1	X	X	X	X
2	X	X	X	X
3	X		X	X
4	X	X	X	X
5	X	X	X	X
6	X		X	
7	X	X	X	X
8	X	X	X	
9	X	X	X	X

**SROs' Visibility within the School**

For this research, principals discussed the visibility of SROs and the importance of their visibility in the development of relationships with students. Principals promoted their SROs' visibility in a variety of ways throughout their schools. Various examples were given to the researcher, including SRO presence at assemblies, after school and sporting activities, and hallways. Principals specifically discussed SROs' visibility and how the visibility helps SROs build positive relationships in the schools' specific areas. Although they no longer work together, Principal 1 discussed how SRO 1 had impromptu



meetings with students in the hallway. He said, “He was always visible. He would have his own type of meetings with students. I thought that built some really positive relationships.”

Principals suggested a productive way to promote the visibility of their SRO was the beginning of the school day when students entered the building. The SRO and the building principals together greeted students as they entered the school. Principal 9 said about SRO 9, “Yes, he is everywhere. He is the first person you see in the morning and the last person you see when you leave.” Principal 5 had a similar situation at their school with his SRO. He said, “[The SRO 5] is in the building probably 80% of the day. Every morning [SRO 5] is out in front greeting kids and talking with them. [SRO 5] is out every morning, every morning she greets the kids.” Principal 3 spent time with the SRO greeting students in the morning and used the time with the SRO and safety officer to discuss strategy and the upcoming events of the day. It is common to have additional safety personnel in the school. These individuals assist in monitoring halls and the entrance/exit of visitors. He said:

We have a good relationship. We start out every morning together in the lobby with my assistant principal and my safety officer, and that's our chance to catch up, to talk to students coming in the building.

Principals also discussed the importance of how they modeled students' development and relationship building for their SRO. How to talk to students and build relationships might not be an area of strength for less-experienced SROs who were patrolling in the community a few months ago. All nine principals took the time to model

for SROs to support SROs in their positions and ensured they are using their SRO roles in a positive manner. Principal 4 offered his thoughts on modeling for his SRO and said:

Whereas, I would make it a point to walk around the school with (SRO 4), whether it was during the lunch period. He and I would walk around the cafeteria so that kids saw the principal and the SRO together, and we talk to students.

This finding was similar to what several SROs reported as a valuable experience with walk-throughs together with their principals. Principal 3 used similar ways to model with his SRO. By modelling relationship building with students, he helped his SRO understand that building relationships with students could be more powerful than the law's fear within the school. Principal 3 said:

I think that's really helped (SRO 3) grow as he's took on his role here, and he could talk to students about these things. He doesn't have to be a visible, walking badge around the building. He can actually talk and have relationships with students. I think that modeling when we're together is what I try to do.

Principal 5 talked about the importance of SRO 5 being visible in the school and how presence and visibility positively influenced more than just students in the school. He said:

I think it gives an opportunity for students, teachers, and the adults, for that matter, to interact with a police officer in a proactive way and see them in a different light. See them as a support and a resource rather than a punitive measure.

The importance of SROs' visibility could not be underestimated when using this visibility as a conduit for building relationships with students. Eight of the principals

noted that SROs were a visible presence for school safety but could also use this visibility to interact with and build positive relationships with students. Principals discussed the importance of visibility repeatedly and discussed situations when they worked with previous SROs who were reluctant concerning visibility and talking with students. SROs' discussions with all students were important, and encouraging SROs to talk with some difficult students was vital to the inclusion of these students into the school community.

All nine principals interviewed in this research indicated the importance of visibility of their SRO in helping to build relationships with students. Visibility in classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and greeting students were examples shared by principals. While SROs' visibility can be a proactive approach in deterring misbehavior, principals participating in this research believe in the SROs' visibility and their positive interactions with students.

### **Principals' Trust in SROs**

Principals' trust in the SROs was another ongoing theme in the interviews with principals and SROs. However, principals' trust may not have had a direct impact on support of SROs in building positive relationships with students.

Additionally, SROs discussed similarly how they felt trusted and supported, and that trust and support helped them in their SRO role. SROs discussed the importance of autonomy to function effectively during the school day. This autonomy came to fruition from developing a relationship with the school principal and the resulting trust between principals and SROs. Enhanced by the relationship between SROs and principals, this trust from principals supported SROs in the development of relationships with students.

Principal 2 spoke specifically about putting SRO 2 in a position to be successful with students. He said, “We create a lot of opportunities and invite him to them. For example, the student assistance program. Our student assistance program meets four times a week.” Principal 8 made similar comments regarding SRO 8 requesting opportunities for student programs within the school, specifically a fishing derby in the creek in front of the high school. He said, “As far as the leadership, my role that I see myself in is to make sure that he has the resources that he needs to get up and rolling in any kind of program we start.”

Principal 3 cited trust as a reason he was willing to help SRO 3 with resources to be successful in the SRO role. He said, “I’ll help mobilize resources if we have to, anything I can do to help the guy. Again, that’s just me trusting his judgment and being a professional.” After only one year in the position, SRO 4 made a positive impact on Principal 4 in that he allowed the SRO to have full access to students within the school when needed. SRO 4 spoke about this in his interview, stating that he felt Principal 4 had the confidence in him to be an effective SRO and gave him the autonomy for this position in the high school. Principal 4 spoke about his trust in SRO 4 when asked about giving the SRO access to students to build relationships. He said:

If I had a school resource officer who was not like that, I would answer that question very differently. I would be more intently about how I’m allowing that individual to access the kids under my care. Fortunately for me, like I said, I trust his judgment so much that it’s not an issue.

Principal 5 spoke candidly about his trust in SRO 5 and the trust he had in her to be an effective SRO and integral member of his school leadership team. Principal 5 mentioned

his SRO was a person he called when he was not in the building to gauge how things are going within the school. He said:

Vulnerability, it's a good word. You have to put yourself out there a little bit to get something good to happen. Then what happens, in our case after years of being together and working together, I think if she didn't have her uniform on and somebody came in, they would swear she's the assistant principal and an effective leader in the building.

Principal 2 discussed the importance of his trust in SRO 2 with regards to school safety and the trust needed from students, and SRO. He said:

As a principal, I prepare for the worst, so the worst would be an active school shooter or some act of violence in the building. If something like that were ever to happen, I need the children to trust [SRO 2] I need the children to trust me. They can't hesitate if we give them a directive, or an action, or some sort of guidance during a crisis. They need to just stop and listen, to trust us like they would trust their parents. They need to know that we have their best interest in mind. We are on the same team, and we're there to help them stay safe building those relationships, critical. You have to build those relationships first before any type of critical situation were to happen.

Since all of the SROs interviewed for this research had at least one year of experience with the principals interviewed, some level of trust was expected between the principals and SROs. SRO 3, SRO 4, and SRO 8 each had one year of experience within their high schools. The remaining six SROs have multiple years of experience with the element of trust between these SROs and principals had a greater time period to develop.

Seven principals discussed with the researcher their level of trust in their SRO, and it was the belief of the researcher this trust gave SROs the confidence to build positive relationships with students and perform their role within the school.

The theme of principals' trust in SROs came from the results of seven of the nine principals interviewed. Principals indicated that because they trusted their SROs, the SROs were treated as such and given responsibilities related to school safety and student relationships. Principals also discussed their ability to utilize SROs for various needs based on the trust they had in their SROs.

### **Student and School Safety**

The role of SROs and their impact on school safety was the third theme that emerged from the interviews with principals in this study. Several principals discussed the importance of their SRO's role in school safety and the lead role each took in the development of safety planning for the school, relying on their expertise in public safety and SRO training. All of the principals indicated SROs had a private workspace within their high school. For several SROs, their workspace was located near the front door of the school. In fact, Principal 6 discussed the expectation of him monitoring the school camera system and monitoring people coming into the school. He said:

It used to be a closet, like an old student store. He's in between two bathrooms.

He is right in the front as soon as I see people coming in. He's got the camera, so he can't see them coming in the front of the doorway, but he sees everybody coming through. That's why they put the office there.

Five of the nine schools used in this research have school police, probation officers, and/or security guards in addition to SROs patrolling the school. Principals

viewed their SROs differently than the other school police, security guards, and probation officers who also worked with students inside their schools. From the principals' perspective, SROs received more respect from students, likely because of the relationship building that exists with SROs. High turnover from school police and security guards within the school required SRO 9 to take on a leadership role over the security guards as discussed by Principal 9, who said:

We also have security guards here that I don't have a schedule for or a relationship with because that they have a bit of a revolving door. But I have their expectations very clear, and he helps oversee the expectations of the security guards.

Principal 2 talked candidly about the importance of the SRO's role in crime prevention through developing relationships with students. Principal 2 described how the SRO's perceived role within the school could have a greater importance in the perception of crime prevention over a probation officer's role within their school. Probation officers work only with students adjudicated of a crime while SROs can build relationships with all students. He said:

A probation officer is one thing, monitoring delinquents, someone that has an ankle bracelet. By the time you have gotten to a probation officer, you have broken the law. People don't interact with a probation officer for any other reason than they have violated the law. In the first two years, I moved the probation officer out of the main office. That's not the face I want to present.

Principals discussed the consistency their SROs brought to school safety and security within their schools. Having one person within the school to learn the school's structure, school personnel, students, and teachers helped the principal plan for safety

measures within the school. Having the consistency of an SRO also allowed the principal to help the SRO build relationships with students. SRO consistency and that consistency's impact on school safety was a recurring theme with Principal 9. He said:

So, when you have an incident, and you call, and you have an officer who may not work well with kids, they have different beliefs than you. It was inconsistent and hard to keep track of. So, I would say that the first and most important and most beneficial part of having our SRO is the consistency. First and foremost, ours has been an advocate for school resource officers and getting them into the area since before I knew what SRO stood for.

School safety planning and training were other areas that principals discussed as important roles for their SROs within the school they patrol. Principal 7 talked about their SRO's role in developing the camera system within the new high school, which was currently under construction within the school district. He said, "He's working with me right now. We're building a new high school, and he's working with our tech team on the camera system and all of that." Safety training by the SRO, specifically ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) training for active shooter situations, was another area where principals relied on the expertise and training from the SRO to maintain safety within their schools. Principal 1 talked about his experience with SRO 1 in conducting a training together with staff and students and how it helped build positive relationships. He said:

We actually did an ALICE training together, him and I, for the entire district.

When I was at (redacted) with him it was all about safety. That's when there was that mass shooting in Parkland, Florida. It really struck a nerve with a lot of



people. He was very visible. Like I said, we trained the entire district with ALICE. That built a lot of positive relationships.

Principals discussed the importance of their SROs as a resource in their schools. Many of the principals' comments targeted school safety as the focus of the resource building by their SRO. ALICE trainings, safety planning, student and bus traffic, and school camera monitoring were some of the areas mentioned by principals. Principal 5 used his SRO as a resource for school protocols and learning with their school. He said:

Often, backing up educationally what we do and saying if we're going to talk about independence and the ability to make good choices and those things then we need to allow our children to have a learning opportunity in those ways, within our building. Allowing her to be in those conversations in how that has to work and how that looks can really help her establish those relationships.

The theme of student and school safety came from nine of the nine principals interviewed for this study. Principals used the expertise of their SROs for safety planning, the development of safety training for students and faculty, and school crime prevention. Student and school safety is a key role of all SROs interviewed for this research. Principals and SROs see the connection between student safety and building relationships with students which is the fourth theme from principals' interviews.

### **SROs as Resource and Relationship Builders**

In the interviews with principals, there were discussions about the importance of their SROs as a resource within their school, with much of that resource coming from the relationships SROs built with students during their time within the school. Seven of the nine principals wanted SROs to function as mentors to students within the school.

Principal 1 talked about how SRO 1 balanced his role as law enforcement and teacher within their school. He said:

He went from strictly enforcing laws and enforcing policy, but also teaching students and trying to transform them into better members of society. When they do get out there in the world, we can say we taught them, and this is what will happen.

All of the SROs interviewed for this research discussed the importance of being a community member and how this membership enhanced their ability to build relationships with students. As coaches, parents, and police officers, SROs used their connections built in the community to build relationships with students. Principal 5 spoke about the importance of community connections and his SRO and said:

Putting somebody from the community, in a community role like that, in a building and have them build relationships I think is important because it allows those connections to be made. Have the students view them as a resource. I think the better they are at building relationships, the better they are at making them view them as a resource and therefore would be utilizing them in positive ways.

Principal 8 discussed the SRO as a resource as a point of emphasis within their school as well. He spoke of SRO 8 as an important part of the school's educational programming through classroom lessons and mentorship of students. Principal 2's discussion regarding the SRO's involvement in student discipline asserted that Principal 2 would like SRO 2 to focus his time on building relationships with students. He said, "We'd rather use him here as a resource to help us with student achievement than involved in student discipline."

As a resource, SROs spent time in classrooms connecting with students and building relationships. They also taught lessons related to public safety and the safety of students. Principal 7 talked about how she integrated SRO 7 into student assemblies and classrooms to allow for students to become familiar with their SRO and ultimately open the door for relationship building. The principal said:

I try to include him in the presentations we have with students. For example, when we have our grade level presentations, we introduce him. We've asked him to speak to classes. He'll go in and speak to classes at different times. It could be about anything. We have a driver's education class he goes and talks there, he does it in our health classes, he does it in our government classes. The kids get to see him, and we try and put him in that role so they see him as something other than a disciplinary or somebody who's going to get them in trouble. We have asked him to socialize with kids in the cafeteria and get to know students. We've also included him in part of our Student Assistance Program.

The love for the position and desire to be a part of the school community as an SRO was important to the school principals. From this desire and the relationships with SROs, principals knew they had individuals interested in making a positive impact on children's lives. The data from this research showed that these SROs were satisfied they made the choice to assume their SRO role. Each SRO spoke of positively about building relationships with students within the school. Two SROs discussed their athletic coaching within their schools. The relational nature of these SROs likely contributed to their willingness to build relationships with students and reach out to all students rather than a select few who may be easy students to talk to within the school.

Using the SRO as a resource can have a positive impact on students and faculty. Principals used SROs as experts in their field of law enforcement for classroom presentations or school wide assemblies. This support from the principal allows students to see SROs as a positive person in their school. This helps to facilitate relationship building by the SRO within the school at all times of the school day.

Throughout the interviews with principals, it was clear to the researcher that this group of principals had a positive relationship with their SROs. The principals relied on the SROs for specific functions within the school. Principals trusted the SROs to perform these functions, encouraged SROs to build positive relationships with students, and expected SROs be visible within the school day interacting with students in classrooms and cafeterias, when students entered the school, and during activities. Each principal had positive comments about the SRO program in their school. Principals also discussed areas of improvement within the SRO program, including communication, more specific expectations, creating more opportunities for their SRO, involvement in the school's PBIS program, and including their SRO in diversity and inclusion initiatives within the school. Principals reflected and recognized their leadership could continue to evolve to support their SROs in developing positive relationships with students.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

There is a significant amount of existing research on the use of SROs within schools. Broll and Howells (2019) suggested that school principals' support should function as a partnership with SROs with principals facilitating SROs building relationships with students. Zhang (2019) asserted schools should focus on SROs' role as a mentor and liaison, directing specific emphasis on the development of relationships

with students. Considering the research question of this instrumental case study, how do principals support SROs in building positive relationships with students, findings for this instrumental case study focused on five areas developed from this study's themes:

- Increase SROs access to students during the school day
- Ongoing communication between principals and SROs
- Principals trust their SROs
- Remove SROs in the school discipline process
- Promote SROs' strengths

Past research showed that developing and improving relationships between students and adults in schools positively impacted school safety (King & Bracy, 2019). Additionally, building positive relationships by SROs in schools helped develop SROs' roles within the school (Barnes, 2016). This research found that SROs believed their classroom teaching lessons and interactions with students offered great opportunities to build relationships with students. Principals increasing SROs' access to students through classroom activities helped to build these positive relationships. This was consistent with research from Gottfredson (2016) finding that D.A.R.E. Officers/SROs were able to develop relationships with students in classrooms. SROs in this research were willing to promote the presence of SROs and gave SROs access to classrooms for teaching lessons and interacting with students.

Communication between SROs and principals was an area both parties deemed essential in this research for the successful development of student relationships by SROs. Lopez (2019) determined positive communication between SROs and principals was the link between SROs and principals for successful collaboration. SROs and

principals discussed the importance of communication; those with productive communication talked about daily or weekly meetings between SROs and principals, while those who did not have regular communication talked about the wish or need for better communication. SROs reflecting on their first days as SROs discussed the importance of SRO-principal communication as an area of support SROs in understanding expectations within the school.

SROs indicated principals' trust in SROs to build positive relationships in students and other SRO functions were important to SROs' success within their schools. Harrison et al. (2017) found that SRO and principal relationships could begin through trust, while Theriot and Cueller (2016) found that the development of relationships between principals and SROs helped create a positive school culture. In this research, SROs and principals discussed the importance of trust in one another. From this trust, SROs believed they could work independently within the school, developing relationships with students. As indicated by Barnes (2016), utilizing SROs' expertise in the development of daily prevention can develop SROs into compassionate members of the school team with the ability and willingness to build relationships with students. Relationship-oriented SROs who had connections with the communities and families they served, found effectiveness in building relationships as an integral part of PBIS programs in schools.

This research indicated principals kept SROs removed from the discipline process inside schools. School personnel as disciplinarians allowed SROs to focus their time on building relationships with students. Barnes (2016) asserted that principals should separate SROs from the school discipline process while Bleakley and Bleakley (2018) indicated SROs involved in school discipline increased the criminalization of

misbehavior and added to the existing school-to-prison pipeline that was a criticism of SRO programs in schools.

Strengths of this research included the in-depth analysis of SROs and principals. Of the nine SROs and nine principals interviewed, each offered their independent thoughts and experiences of how principals supported SROs in developing relationships with students. While the bounded case is Western Pennsylvania suburban public schools, each SRO and principal offered their own unique experiences. Subjects came from schools with different demographics and regions with varying socioeconomic statuses within Western Pennsylvania. The subjects offered a broad range of information. Limitations of this research included the use of only suburban schools in Western Pennsylvania. The lack of SROs within the city of Pittsburgh eliminated Pittsburgh City School District as an option in this research.

### **Summary**

The researcher interviewed nine SROs and nine principals and completed a document review. From this data, five themes emerged from the SROs' interviews, and four themes emerged from the principals' interviews. The themes from SROs were building relationships in classrooms, SROs not involved in school discipline, SROs knowing families and communities, SROs as part of the school team, and principal-SRO communication. The themes from principals were SRO visibility within the school, principals' trust in the SRO, student and school safety, and SROs as resource and relationship builders. From these themes, the researcher determined findings and results that answered the research question, how do principals support SROs in building positive

relationships with students. The results of this study show principals support SROs in the following ways:

- Increase SROs access to students during the school day
- Ongoing communication between principals and SROs
- Principals' trust their SROs
- Remove SROs in the school discipline process
- Promote SROs' strengths

In Chapter 5, the researcher will expand on the study results that answer the research question and provide evidence supporting the solution and evidence challenging the solution to the complex, real-world problem of SROs building relationships with students.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Zhang (2019) suggested schools should focus on SROs' role as a mentor and liaison directing specific emphasis on developing relationships with students. The criminalization of student misbehavior in schools could create a school-to-prison pipeline for students resulting in an early criminal record, mistrust in the police, and mistrust in the criminal justice system (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). As trained police officers, SROs could rely on relationships with students and the law to help reduce crime and violence in United States schools (Barnes, 2016). As schools continue to look to new and creative ways to end school crime, the role of SROs could continue to make an impact in positive school culture (Price, 2009). While there was an abundance of research on SROs and their work in schools and the power of building relationships with students, there was a lack of research about principals' support of SROs in building relationships with students. This study examined how school principals supported SROs in building positive relationships with students. This research can impact future training programs for SROs and the development of best practices in building relationships for SROs and school administrators.

**Aim of the Study**

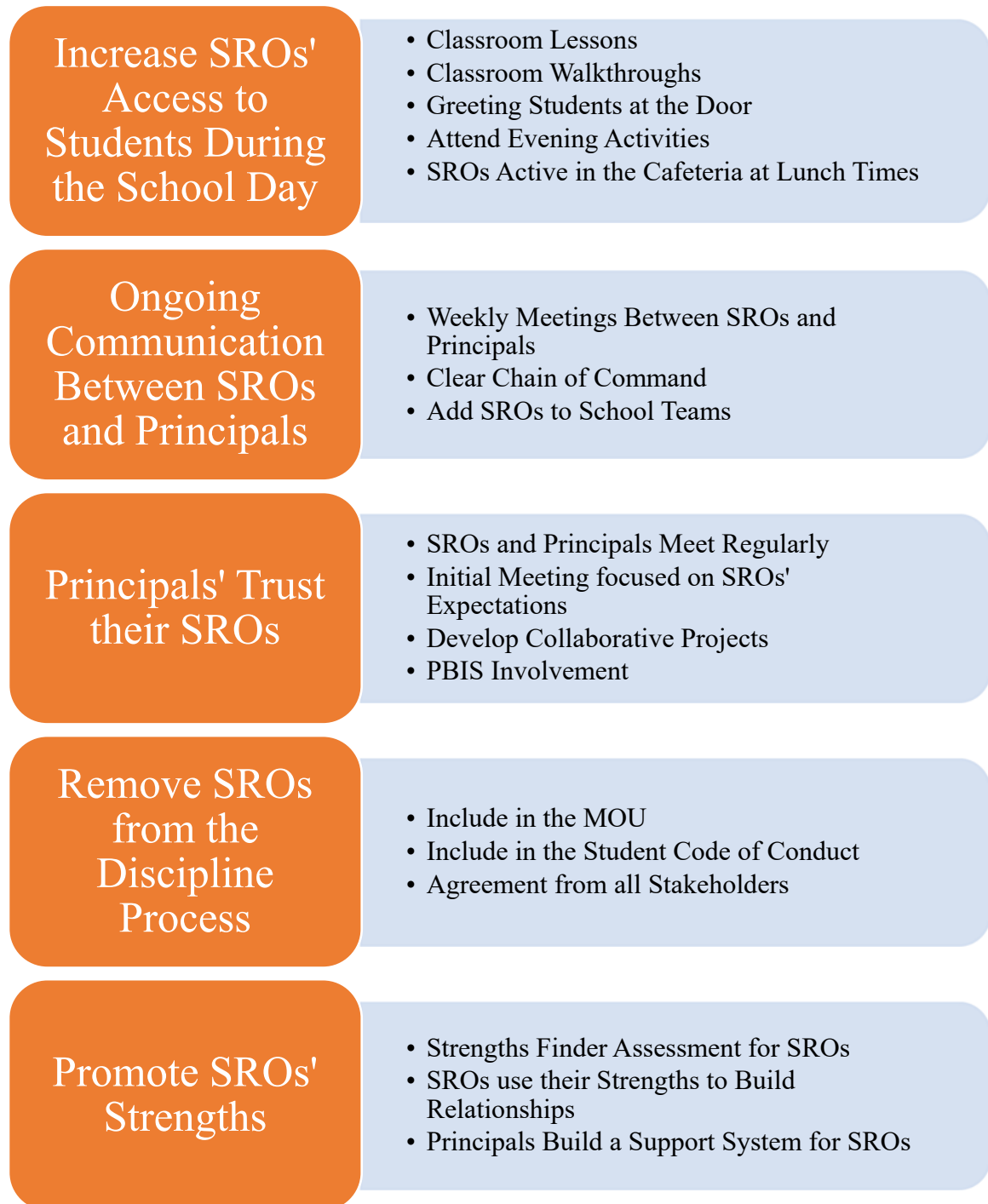
This study aimed to gain information and awareness of how school principals supported SROs in developing positive relationships with students. School principals could benefit from this study by learning from peers and SROs about how principals' support helps SROs build positive relationships with students. The data collected will be presented to school leaders in Western Pennsylvania for future training and implementation for principals.

### **Proposed Solutions**

From the emergent themes of this research, findings pointed to five specific capacities of how principals support SROs in developing relationships with students. Figure 2 outlines the five capacities and proposed solutions for each of the findings in this study.

**Figure 2**

*Proposed Solutions for Principals' Increased Support of SROs.*



**Increase SROs' Access to Students during the School Day**

Principals can provide SROs access to students by permitting and encouraging SROs to lead classroom discussions in their areas of expertise such as health and safety, school safety, law, and crime prevention. Additionally, principals can encourage SROs to attend classes with practical applications such as physical education, arts, practical arts, and vocational training and use this time to interact with students. These classes are less theory and more practical application, allowing SROs opportunities to interact with students during these classes and building relationships with students.

SROs attending evening activities and having a presence in cafeterias and student entrances and exits also offer informal opportunities to interact with students and build relationships. Greeting students at the door of schools and classrooms is common practice within schools. This practice allows educators to help students feel comfortable entering learning spaces. SROs can have the same impact when utilizing this practice.

**Ongoing Communication between SROs and Principals**

Improving communication may prove complicated since we know the SRO does not follow the school chain of command. Rather, as employees of the police department, SROs follow the police departments' chain of command. Communication from principals must be regular and purposeful. Principals can achieve this through regularly scheduled meetings with SROs to discuss progress with initiatives and plans for SROs' activities within the school. Adding SROs to student assistance teams and their regular attendance at these team meetings help SROs connect to students who struggle. It also gives SROs direction with the students who could benefit from mentorship and a relationship with SROs.

The addition of SROs to school teams, including student assistant teams, can increase communication. If included in school teams, SROs have the opportunity to listen and share in their experiences with students. SROs may have information from their community involvement that could be helpful to the school team in the development or implementation of a plan for students.

### **Principals Trust their SROs**

From the themes in this research, there is a relationship between trust and communication of principals and SROs in this study. SROs indicated the need to feel trust from principals, and SROs cited in the interviews the belief that communication from their principal is an area of growth for principals. Principals trust their SROs when they believe SROs make decisions for the school community (Wolfe et al., 2017). Trust can develop between the two from improved communication about the decision for the greater good. In this research, principals indicated their trust in SROs developed through SROs' work within their schools, specifically in the area of student and school safety. Principals talked about the opportunities to work side by side with SROs and seeing the positive impacts SROs make within their schools helped to enhance their level of trust in SROs.

Involvement in a school's PBIS program or other incentivized behavior program for all students can help to integrate SROs into the school community. SROs providing positive reinforcement to students helps to spread their visibility to all students. This visibility combined with the positive interactions between SROs and students can help to bolster the trust of SROs by principals (Wolfe et al., 2017).

**Remove SROs from the School Discipline Process**

As indicated in SROs and principals' interviews, SROs do not participate in the student discipline process within schools. Some SROs become involved at the end of the process only after a crime has been committed within the school. By removing SROs from the discipline process, students may not associate student discipline with the SRO. Students are less likely to have lapses in judgment outlined in the school discipline code criminalized.

Of the MOUs reviewed, only two (Schools Two and Seven) expressly indicated the need to remove the SRO from the school discipline process unless a crime is committed on school property. If schools and police departments believe in removing SROs from the discipline process, the inclusion of this directive in the MOU between schools and police departments is essential. Additionally, student codes of conduct should be void of language that includes SROs in the discipline process. Included in the language of codes of conduct could indicate the role and responsibilities of SROs. Students understanding the role of SROs being a person who supports students and ensures the school's safety and security in many facets can help students see SROs as a positive support in the school. It is important for students to view SROs positively within the school and not an individual perpetuating the criminalization of school misbehavior.

**Promote SROs' Strengths**

Rhodes and Clinkinbeard (2018) completed a qualitative study examining SROs self-concepts in schools. SROs in their research indicated their increased job satisfaction and positive interactions with students energized them throughout their work in schools. Additionally, they saw their work as valuable to the school and community. This energy

and job satisfaction is a strength for principals to build upon. Using the positive energy of SROs to build relationships with students could positively impact the school's culture.

The researcher found that all of the SROs interviewed spoke positively about their role as an SRO and see the position as an opportunity for them as SROs to help students in various ways.

In order to promote SROs' strengths, principals must have an understanding of an SRO's strengths. Learning these strengths could occur over time as SROs and principals work together in a school setting. New SROs and principals who are unfamiliar and working together would benefit from a strengths assessment. There are several strengths assessments available to SROs and principals. Conducting a needs assessment on both parties' needs before committing to one assessment over another is valuable.

Additionally, the opportunity for reflection on the part of SROs can have added benefit.

As principals learn about their SROs' strengths and areas of growth, principals can begin to build a network of support for SROs to support relationship building with students. Supports could include working with school counselors in mentoring students, helping SROs develop classroom lessons, and helping SROs in their communication with faculty, families, and the community they serve.

### **Evidence that Supports the Solution**

#### **Enabling SROs' Access to Students**

SROs indicated an excellent opportunity for them to build relationships with students was interaction within the classroom, whether it be instructing lessons related to police work, law, bullying prevention, health and safety, or classroom walkthroughs with a principal. SROs believe their classroom presence is an integral of their role, enhancing

their ability to build relationships with students. Anderson (2018) asserted that student access to police officers in their classrooms changed the negative student perceptions of police from what students saw on the news, movies, or other media. Students' positive interactions with police open the door to developing positive relationships between students and SROs.

Scheduling SROs to teach lessons or visit classes during the school day should come from the school principal's direction. As mentioned by SRO 4, there is a comfort level within SROs to attend classes with less academic structure, allowing SROs to interact with students while engaging in academic activities. SROs are more likely to have the ability to build student relationships interacting with students in a practical arts class than a math course. For this reason, SROs discussed how they would gravitate toward physical education, health, and practical arts classes.

Cray and Weiler (2011) discussed the importance of the school district and police MOU, and how this document can drive the expectations and activities of SROs within the school they patrol. The development of the MOU between the school and police department should include provisions for SROs' classroom expectations. Identifying classes for SROs to visit and offer lessons in can also be included in the MOU.

### **Ongoing Communication between SROs and Principals**

Several SROs in this research indicated they wished they had better communication with their principals. As a result of poor communication, SROs believed the expectations for them within the school were unclear or non-existent. These same SROs indicated they do not have regular meetings with their principal or never had an initial meeting with the principal when they began their SRO role. Increasing



communication between SROs and principals through initial and regular meetings can increase communication. Determining these meetings' regularity in the MOU between the two entities can increase accountability for both SROs and principals.

Careful consideration on the part of the school district and local police department to make changes in the SRO job description addressing the communication between principal and SRO should be addressed in the future. In addition, having the MOU addressing the additional focus on communication in the development of SRO-student relationships gives SROs needed direction in their roles within schools helps to address this need. Offering the principal the opportunity to support SROs even though the principal has no chain of command responsibilities over SROs is a grey area needing commitment from schools and municipal police departments in the future

### **Principals Trust their SROs**

SROs and principals indicated in the interviews that trust develops in one another over time while working together in various situations within the school. Both parties specifically mentioned aspects of school safety, interactions with students, and principals' new understanding of the role of SROs in schools. Principal 4 discussed candidly he previously believed police had no business being in schools, yet he had a connection to SRO 4 and valued his role within their school. Although the working relationship between Principal 4 and SRO 4 was only one year, the connection between Principal 4 and SRO 4 was strong according to Principal 4. This trust developed through their time together within the school with Principal 4 seeing the positive partnership between the local police/SRO and the high school.

Robbins and Judge (2016) indicated that trust resulted in facilitating information sharing, enhancing productivity, and encouraging risk-taking within the organization. Increased productivity and risk-taking as a result of trust can encourage SROs to develop relationships with students. The trust in SROs by principals in their day-to-day roles within the school helps SROs feel supported in their school role. This helps them to build relationships as indicated by SRO 3 when he said, “There's a ton of ways I feel supported. He honestly gives me the freedom to structure my day how I want, do what I want. To me, that shows that he has trust in what I'm doing.” SROs could be more likely to take the initiative to build relationships in classrooms or other areas of the school, knowing they have the principal's trust to make favorable judgments.

### **Remove SROs from the School Discipline Process**

In this research, principals and SROs indicated the SROs were not directly involved in the discipline process of students. Rather, SROs became involved after completing the school discipline process only if there was the existence of a criminal act and charges for the student requiring SRO intervention. This is consistent with findings in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. One MOU examined in this research expressly indicated the removal of the SRO from the school discipline process.

The support of principals in removing SROs from the discipline process allows students to see SROs as a relational leader. This also allows SROs to build relationships through their day-to-day duties. Some SROs take extra steps in building relationships with students. SRO 5 developed a clothes closet within their school to help students in need of personal items. SRO 3 discussed increased opportunities to connect with students in physical education classes and practical arts classes. SRO 3 and SRO 9 discussed their

roles as athletic coaches within the district and the importance of their roles as coaches in building positive relationships with students. School discipline, depending on the school, can be a full-time focus for assistant principals and deans of students. Involving SROs in this process can take away precious time from building relationships with students.

### **Promote SROs' Strengths**

Rath (2008) asserted that leaders should surround themselves with the right people but understood the leader's choice in individuals might have outside influences. This is the case in schools with SROs as they are employees of the local police department. Depending on the process of choosing an SRO, potential problems exist as indicated by SRO 4 saying, "Sometimes the chief is more likely to offer his least effective officer as the SRO to get him out of the department." Choosing the right individuals as SROs is essential to developing relationships with students and the overall viability of their SRO program.

Page (2017) discusses diversity in the workplace and its importance within the workplace. Utilizing SROs within schools provides diversity within the school organization. Creating an inclusive culture should be the responsibility of principals. Using SROs' strengths as relationship builders in classrooms, on school teams, visible, and working with students helps to include SROs into the school community.

All of the SROs interviewed in this research were patrol officers within the community before their roles as SROs. Their experience as patrol officers offered opportunities for these SROs to learn about their community. This information is invaluable to schools in support of students. SROs may have insights into why specific

students struggle in school based on their family's information. Placing SROs on school support teams can have a positive impact on student support and student achievement.

### **Evidence that Challenges the Solution**

The current view of police within the United States and research that points to SROs as the start of the school-to-prison pipeline can harm SRO programs. Students who have a negative view of police elicited from past experiences or taught to them from parents or relatives or their community will likely behave guarded toward police and feel unsafe with police in schools (May et al., 2016). These are considerations for principals and SROs when implementing an SRO program and charging SROs to build positive relationships with students. Reaching some students who have a genuine fear of police will prove very difficult.

There may be roadblocks in the selection process when choosing the correct SRO for a school. A police department may feel pressure to select an individual to fill the SRO role with more seniority and fewer relationship skills over an individual more suited for the position. There may be provisions within police contracts indicating department seniority as an indicator of positions.

SRO 4 discussed the possibility of a police chief recommending an individual in the SRO role to remove the individual from day-to-day police work. SRO 9 discussed his interview process for his selection as SRO within his school. Individual school districts working with their local police departments in choosing an SRO, the lack of consistency in employment contracts, and local government make uniformity unlikely from community to community.

Funding for SROs is a challenge for local police departments and school districts. More affluent communities have a more substantial tax base to support SROs and sometimes multiple SROs within their schools as well as school security or police who work for the school district. Other schools with a weaker tax base struggle to secure funding for one SRO for all schools within the school district. The trickle-down effect of the lack of school funding impacts staffing patterns within schools. As a result, school principals may have to take on extra roles within the school district, which takes away from their school leadership role. Their support of the SRO also becomes less of a focus as their responsibilities increase within the school district. Implementation of potential changes to support SROs building positive relationships with students will prove difficult when a school principal is overwhelmed.

The MOU is an important document outlining the roles and responsibilities of both the police department and the school district related to the SROs' role and other school safety (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Only one of the MOUs specifically addressed one of the five findings of this research, excluding the SRO in the school discipline process. Without specifically addressing the expectations of SROs in the MOU between schools and police departments, there is a lack of commitment on both organizations to the expectations of their SRO. The MOU should be a working document, revisited at checkpoints during the school year with revisions when necessary. It is the experience of the researcher that this is not the case. When the researcher asked for this document, there was a concern from individuals regarding the location of the document. It appears to the researcher this document is more of a placeholder than a working document.

### **Implementation of the Proposed Solutions**

When a school and the local police department enter into a partnership to implement an SRO program or embarks on a new school year with an existing SRO program in the school, the researcher proposes the following areas added to the framework and implementation within the MOU for new SROs or SRO programs. Additionally, the steps taken for the implementation of new SROs, sans the interview process, should occur for all SROs each school year to ensure they have the support needed to develop positive relationships with students.

The MOU is critical to the SRO program. Provisions in the MOU on how the principal will support the SRO in building positive relationships with students should be integral to the development of the MOU. The role of the principal and identifying the principal's support throughout the MOU will eliminate any question about roles and responsibilities as well as provide necessary direction for the SRO. Finally, goals and objectives of the SRO program will be included in the MOU with the responsibilities of these goals and objectives defined.

The MOU is a fluid document that should change based in the needs of the school and the local police department. The MOU is a working document eligible for revision by both the police department and the school district when needed. If the MOU no longer meets the school district's needs or the police department, revisions within the MOU can follow. Frequent and scheduled checks on the progress of goals within the MOU should be scheduled and met with fidelity. The MOU should not be a document that sits on a shelf or a computer hard drive. Rather, the MOU should drive the work of the school district and local police department of the SRO program within the school.

**Create a Selection Process for SRO Positions**

From the research, current SROs and principals indicate someone entering into an SRO position must have the position's aptitude. The candidate should be energetic, community-minded, and willing to build relationships in the community and with families. The candidate must have the willingness to go beyond the contracted workday by attending extracurricular activities with students. Finally, the SRO must be willing to complete or already successfully complete the 40-hour NASRO training before entering into their new SRO role. The school and police department must engage in a collaborative interview process when choosing the SRO.

The school principal should be present for the selection process or interviews of potential SROs. The principal should communicate to all of the applicants selected for the interview how they intend to support the SRO in successful development of student relationships within the school. It is hopeful that this will create a dialogue between the principal and the SRO applicant with a mutual understanding of the type of support offered and how the SRO can grow from this support.

As mentioned previously, regardless of the tenure of SROs within a school, this initial meeting is necessary for determining expectations for SROs, police departments, and schools/principals engaged in this process together. The meeting should take place several weeks before the start of school each year.

**Ongoing Communication**

After starting the SROs' school year, regular meetings between principals and SROs should occur. These meetings could be weekly or bi-weekly to start and focus on the expectations agreed upon in the MOU and expectations agreed upon in the initial

implementation meeting. During these meetings, the principals' support is vital to the relationship development between SROs and principals. Addressing the level of support from principals at these ongoing meetings helps to ensure the needs of SROs are met within the school. These needs could include access to classrooms, support in understanding the dynamics of public school, and cultural aspects germane to their school.

Principals' insuring positive and ongoing communication with SROs impacts facilities within schools. SROs should have access to technology, school district email, and be included on school email distribution lists. SROs should also have a dedicated phone line with privacy and voicemail. Acquiring these essential tools may come from a school's technology department. Additionally, SROs should have a designated, private workspace within their schools to hold meetings with students, families, and have the ability to complete their assigned tasks. Principals implementing these solutions for SROs will likely require flexibility and creativity by principals. Finding a dedicated workspace for an SRO may be a difficult task in an already crowded school.

### **Cooperative Planning Between Schools and Police Departments**

For a new SRO or SRO program, schools and police departments should consider planning for the new position. After choosing an SRO through the interview or selection process and participation in the NASRO training, an initial meeting to discuss the principal's support and SRO's expectations must occur. At this meeting, the school principal and police department leadership have an opportunity to define expectations for the SRO and the SRO program. The option for attendance by municipality leadership and



school district board members is a consideration. Engaging multiple stakeholders in this meeting will help to achieve transparency in the process.

This meeting's focus is guidelines and expectations for the SRO, and included in these expectations are the expectations for principals in supporting the SRO in their new role and building relationships. Addressing the findings of this research in this initial meeting will help the SRO build relationships with students. Additionally, a discussion about the SRO's job description and the MOU will occur at this time. As mentioned earlier, the MOU is a working document; if MOU changes result from this meeting, the agreed-upon changes should be reflected in the MOU.

Follow-up meetings between the principal and SRO should occur focusing on the integration of the SRO into the school and new position. During these meetings, the principal and SRO should engage in safety planning, SROs integration into the school community by meeting and engaging with teachers, and acclimation with the school's schedule and the schedules of additional schools in the district.

### **Solution Timeline and Evaluation**

As presented in this dissertation in practice, the solution is an ongoing and iterative solution available for revision yearly within schools. At the beginning of each school year, initial meetings between school districts and police departments should include the solutions presented within this dissertation in practice. If school districts encounter a situation when an SRO enters into the position at the beginning of the school year, the implementation of the presented solutions should begin immediately.

Included in the MOU between the school district and the police department are the goals and objectives of the SRO program. The MOU includes goals and objectives

related to principals supporting SROs in building relationships with students. These goals and objectives will relate specifically to the five findings of this DIP.

To collect data on these goals and objectives, both SROs and principals will have an opportunity to assess progress throughout the school year. At the end of the school year, stakeholders from the school district and police department will meet to discuss these goals and objectives. This goal meeting is an opportunity for candid discussions on the SRO program's effectiveness and specifically how principals can support SROs in building relationships with students. The power of gathering together stakeholders for a discussion on program implementation could have a more meaningful impact than completing a survey.

After this goal meeting at the end of the school year, the superintendent of schools and chief of police can discuss these goals and objectives and begin the planning process for the following school year. The information gained from the goal meeting should help inform the goals and objectives for the following school year. From these meetings, the police chiefs can use the information to inform the evaluation of SROs and develop SROs' goals for the following year. If utilized with fidelity, a wealth of information is available from these evaluations.

## **Implications**

### **Practical Implications**

Bleakley and Bleakley (2018) asserted the criminalization of school misbehavior could help to perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline. SROs building positive relationships with students helps increase students' feelings of safety and security within the school (Pentek and Eisenberg, 2018). While some believe police have no place in

schools, research shines a positive light on SROs and the relationships they build with students.

Focusing the roles of SROs on building relationships with students has positive impacts on students. The support of principals can have a lasting impact on the effectiveness of SROs in schools. Stakeholder engagement in the development and evaluation of these processes encourages lasting impact on implementing the solution to the complex real-world problem. With a figurative light shined on police misconduct recently by media and social media, the positive impacts of SROs can have a lasting impact on some students and their future relationships with police officers.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Researching SROs who work for the municipality and patrol schools is a small sample size of police in Western Pennsylvania schools. Due to funding, schools have moved from traditional SROs to school police officers. School police officers are typically retired police officers or Pennsylvania State Troopers who work for and take direction from the school district. Some of the findings of this research can apply to school police working in schools. Similar research on school police support could be an option given the push toward utilizing retired officers to patrol schools at a lower cost.

Due to COVID-19, interviews with principals and SROs occurred through Google Meet or Zoom. The researcher's initial plan was to use SRO observations as a data collection method informed by the same research question. However, also due to COVID-19, Creighton University would not permit SRO observations. The researcher believes much information is available for collection from the observations of SROs and how they build relationships with students. Sharing these best practices with other SROs

is an option for future research in this area. Additionally, the leadership practices of SROs and efficacy of SROs are an area for future research.

### **Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice**

In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed the importance of transcendent leadership in principals as transcendent leadership intends to unite organizations through shared governance. The transcendent leader is value-centered and reflective, thinking globally rather than focusing on day-to-day minutia (Gardiner, 2006). The unification of organizations is vital as SROs are an outside agency with a different chain of command structure. From this research, we see principals' role in supporting SROs in building positive relationships with students. The unification of organizations is a continued need for principals to implement the solution presented in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed servant leadership and the possibility SROs could practice servant leadership within the schools they patrol. Servant leaders think of the organization before themselves (Keith, 2016). Examining the data in this research, parallels with servant leadership are present. SRO 5 and the development of the clothes closet within her school and support from her principal is an example of her servant leadership within the school. SRO 8 sponsors a fishing derby in the creek in front of his high school for students. SRO 8 works in a school classified as economically disadvantaged; offering students an opportunity to learn to fish in their community is another example of servant leadership of SROs. While SRO leadership is not the focus of this research, it is apparent that SROs are leaders within the schools they patrol.

### **Summary of Dissertation in Practice**

There is quantitative evidence that suggests that the absence of SRO-student relationships can undermine the success of the SRO program (Coon & Travis, 2012). Zhang (2019) suggested that schools should focus on SROs' role as a mentor and liaison with specific emphasis on developing relationships with students. Solving student crimes lead to safer schools for the remaining students.

The established importance of building SRO and student relationships is the motivation for this study, specifically, how the school principal supports SROs in building positive relationships with students. Navigation of the public school's discipline systems is different from day-to-day police work. By supporting SROs in building relationships, school principals can serve as mentors to SROs in meeting students' needs through relationship building rather than students' introduction into the juvenile justice system.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore how school principals provide support to SROs in building positive relationships with students within public high schools in Western Pennsylvania. Practical principal support such as providing professional development in building relationships, providing SROs opportunities to participate in school teams, and creating expectations for SROs may reduce role confusion and focus SROs' roles. While other research exists on the effectiveness of SROs, this research focuses on the support of SROs by principals in building positive relationships with students.

Nine themes came forward from the interviews of principals and SROs in this research. Themes for SROs include building relationships in classrooms, not involving

SROs in the discipline process, SROs knowing families and the community, SROs being a part of school teams, and the importance of communication. Four themes emerged from the interviews with principals, including visibility of SROs, principals' trust in SROs, school safety, and principal expectations.

The DIP findings come from the nine themes produced from SROs and principals interviewed for this study. From the research, principals support SROs in building relationships with students by enabling access to students, communicating positively with SROs, trusting in SROs, not involving SROs in the school discipline process, and promoting SROs' strengths.

The recommendations developed from the findings include a protocol for schools and police departments to follow each school year and when hiring a new SRO for the position. The protocol includes an initial meeting of stakeholders at the beginning of the school year to develop the MOU between the school district and police department, discuss expectations and goals for the SRO program, and provide ongoing checkpoints throughout the school year. At the end of the school year, another meeting of stakeholders examines the achievement of the previous year's goals and objectives and considers goals for the next school year.

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**Appendix A****Participation Letter to Principal**

Date

Name, Title

Address

Dear Principal John Doe,

Hello, my name is Jim Croushore and I am the Stewart Elementary Principal in the Burrell School District and a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program at Creighton University. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting research on how principals support school resource officers in building positive relationships with students. I am recruiting high school principals and the SROs within their high schools to participate in my research.

I am asking you and your SRO to participate in separate semi-structured interviews through web conferencing software such as Zoom or Google Meet.

The interviews will take approximately 35-45 minutes. Participation is voluntary and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate. I will keep all participant information confidential. All data will be secure and password protected.

In addition to the interviews, I would appreciate your assistance in obtaining documents from your school related to your SRO program. These documents

include but not limited to, the MOU between the police department and school district, SRO job description, and student codes of conduct.

Please respond to me with any additional questions by email

[jcr03394@creighton.edu](mailto:jcr03394@creighton.edu) or by phone, 724-448-0309. Thank you for your time

and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Jim Croushore

Creighton University

**Appendix B****Participation Letter to SRO**

Date

Name, Title

Address

Dear SRO John Doe,

Hello, my name is Jim Croushore and I am the Stewart Elementary Principal in the Burrell School District and a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program at Creighton University. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting research on how principals support school resource officers (SROs) in building positive relationships with students. I am recruiting high school principals and the SROs within their high schools to participate in my research. I am asking you and your principal to participate in separate, semi-structured interviews through web conferencing software such as Zoom or Google Meet. The interviews will take approximately 35-45 minutes. Participation is voluntary and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate. I will keep all participant information confidential. All data will be secure and password protected.

In addition to the interviews, I would appreciate your assistance in obtaining documents from your school related to your SRO program. These documents

include but not limited to, the MOU between the police department and school district, SRO job description, and student codes of conduct.

Please respond to me with any additional questions by email

[jcr03394@creighton.edu](mailto:jcr03394@creighton.edu) or by phone, 724-448-0309. Thank you for your time

and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Jim Croushore

Creighton University



**Appendix C**  
**Participant Letter**

DATE: 5-1-2020

Dear Participant,

This is an invitation to participate in the research I am conducting; examining how school principals support school resource officers (SROs) in building positive relationships with students. The study will consist of semi-structured interviews of principals, SROs, and document reviews of school district and municipal police department related to the SRO program. The participants will need only to participate in the interviews which expect to last 35-45 minutes each conducted via web-conferencing software such as Zoom or Google Meet. The study is voluntary and the individual can withdraw their participations at any time.

There are no risks or benefits to participating in this research. Each participant's interview will be transcribed and forward to you to confirm the accuracy of your account and correct any misunderstandings. A copy of the participant's bill of rights is included with this letter.

Data from interviews, observations, and document reviews are kept confidential by the researcher. The names of the participants, participants organizations, and information that could be used to identify participants will not be included the written results. All data, will be physically locked in a safe or password protected and stored by the researcher.

There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact Jim Croushore at 724-448-0309 or by email [jcr03394@creighton.edu](mailto:jcr03394@creighton.edu). If you have questions about research participants' rights, the contact must be the Creighton Institutional Review Board at 402-280-2126.

Sincerely,

James R. Croushore

### **Bill of Rights for Research Participants**

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.
2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.
3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.
4. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.
5. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.
6. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.
7. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.
8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research participant.
9. If the study involves treatment or therapy:
  - a. To be told about the other non-research treatment choices you have.

**To be told where treatment is available should you have a research-related injury, and who will pay for research-related treatment.**

**Appendix D**

**Document Review Matrix**

Organization Name:

Document Name/Type	Year Completed	SRO and Principal Implications

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocols for SROs

Interview Protocol: **Principal's support of SROs in building relationships with students**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place/Location:

Interviewer: **Jim Croushore**

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: SRO

My name is Jim Croushore, I am a doctoral student at Creighton University and researching how school the principal supports the SRO in building positive relationships with students. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. This interview will take approximately 35-45 minutes. I have eight questions for you along with possible follow-up questions for you to answer. I will be recording this interview as well as taking handwritten notes.

Please let me know if at any time during the interview you need or would like to take a break from the questions. Please feel free to ask me any questions throughout the interview process. Also, please know your answers will be confidential and anonymous.

#### **Interview questions:**

1. Tell me what it is like being an SRO in this high school.

2. What is it like building relationships with high school students?
3. What types of organizational structures within the school support your ability to build positive relationships with students?
4. Traditional police work is different than an SRO's role. Do these challenges keep you from building relationships with students, and how does the principal support you in facing the challenges of this SRO position?
5. Can you tell me the ways you feel supported by the building principal?
6. How do you not feel supported by the building principal?
7. What expectations does the building principal set for you in building positive relationships with students?
8. How does the principal model building positive relationships with students?

**Appendix F****Interview Protocols for Principals**

Interview Protocol: **Principal's support of SROs in building relationships with students**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place/Location:

Interviewer: **Jim Croushore**

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: Principal

My name is Jim Croushore, I am a doctoral student at Creighton University and researching how the school principal supports the SRO in building positive relationships with students. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. This interview will take approximately 35-45 minutes. I have eight questions for you along with possible follow-up questions for you to answer. I will be recording the interview as well as taking handwritten notes.

Please let me know if at any time during the interview you need or would like to take a break from the questions. Please feel free to ask me any questions throughout the interview process. Also, please know your answers will be confidential and anonymous.

**Interview question:**

1. Please tell me about the benefits to having the SRO build positive relationships with students in your school.

2. How does your leadership support the SRO in their development of student relationships within the school?
3. Please talk about how the SRO builds positive relationships with students during the school day
4. As principal, how do you support the SRO's access to building positive relationships with students within your school?
5. How can your principal leadership could grow in helping the SRO in building positive relationships with students?
6. Do you require the SRO to attend teacher team meetings, faculty meetings, or be a part of the school community, and how does this benefit your SRO in building positive relationships with students?
7. Please tell me about your relationship with your SRO.
8. As the principal, how important is it for you model relationship building for the SRO.



## Appendix G

# Creighton

## UNIVERSITY

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### Office of the Provost

#### Research Compliance

DATE:	15-Jul-2020
TO:	Croushore, Jim
FROM:	Social / Behavioral IRB Board
PROJECT TITLE:	Principals' Support of School Resource Officers
REFERENCE #:	2000932-01
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Initial Application
REVIEW TYPE:	Exempt
ACTION:	APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE:	15-Jul-2020

Thank you for your Initial Application submission materials for this project. The following items were reviewed with this submission:

- Creighton University HS eForm~
  - Instrumental Case Study: School Principals' Support of School Resource Officers
  - Principal invitation letter
  - SRO invitation letter
  - Principal interview protocol
  - Invitation to Participate - changed to minimal risk
  - SRO interview protocol

This project has been determined to be exempt from Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects as per 45CFR46.101 (b) 2.

All protocol amendments and changes are to be submitted to the IRB and may not be implemented until approved by the IRB. Please use the modification form when submitting changes.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 402-280-2126 or [irb@creighton.edu](mailto:irb@creighton.edu). Please include your project title and number in all correspondence with this committee.

**Institutional Review Board**

T 402.280.2126 | T 402.280.3200

Dr. C.C. and Mabel L. Criss Health Sciences Complex I  
2500 California Plaza Omaha, NE 68178

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[creighton.edu/researchservices/rcocommittees/irb](http://creighton.edu/researchservices/rcocommittees/irb)