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Police Presence in Schools:
An Exploratory Study of Teachers' and Staff's Perceptions of School Resource Officers

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Police Presence in Schools: An Exploratory Study of Teachers' and Staff's Perceptions of School Resource Officers

by

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Abstract

Media attention surrounding violence in schools has increased in recent years. As a result, police presence has become common in many schools, especially in urban centers. While the presence of these officers is meant to have positive effects on students' behaviour and attitudes toward the rules of school and society, it is unclear if this is the case.

This study examines the perceptions that teachers and staff have of School Resource Officers in their school environment, and what, if any, differences exist between school personnel's perceptions of SROs and other critical perceptions of police in school. Utilizing a mixed methods approach to data collection, this study examines the police-school relationship in two schools in a large urban area.

This study could contribute to the field of education by adding to the scant body of literature currently existing on the topic of police in Canadian schools.

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Chapter 1: A Review of Literature

"Learning is only possible in an environment that is free of violence and that encourages mutual respect, self-confidence, and cooperation."
(Johnson, 1999, p. 173)

Introduction: Police in Schools

Media attention surrounding violence in schools has increased in recent years. Repeated images, such as those of teenagers fleeing from Columbine High School and the two student gunmen within, have affected public perceptions of violence in schools and influenced school policy (Cartledge, Tillman & Johnson, 2001). Some have argued that such increased media attention has created a wave of fear among the general public, a phenomenon that may not give the true perception of the level of violence actually existing at school. As Kupchik & Monahan (2006) state, "[t]hese fears may not match the statistical reality of school violence" (p. 621). For instance, one study notes that, "there is little evidence that the prevalence of anti-social behaviour is increasing or decreasing in schools" in Canada (Shannon & MacCall, 2000). However, anecdotal reports in the last 20 years reflect the public's perception of increasingly dangerous schools. As one Canadian educator stated, "some staff members will stay in their classrooms because they are afraid to confront [what] they see in the hallways" (Gabor, 1995, p. 4). Though the actual degree of change in the amount of violence in schools is debatable, there exists a definite perception that schools are unsafe and have been unsafe for quite some time. Menacker, Weldon & Hurwitz (1990) cite that in the U.S., over half of middle-school students feel unsafe in their school environment, and, shockingly, a third of these students admitted to transporting weapons to school.

In response to these concerns, police presence in schools has become common in Canada and the U.S., especially in urban centers. One common approach to stemming violent incidences in schools is the School Resource Officer (SRO). Present in the school anywhere from one day a week to five days a week, the SRO serves as a liaison between teachers, students, and parents. While the presence of these officers is meant to produce positive results in student behaviour and pleasant interaction overall, research has yet to determine if this is indeed the case. Because of the afore-mentioned media attention given to school violence, and the varying perceptions of how much violence exists, as well as the debate over what the most "appropriate" response is to these violence concerns, the subject of police in schools is both timely and controversial. This study will examine the many differing perspectives that exist regarding this one aspect of policing in schools - the School Resource Officer.

As a certified teacher with a degree in Criminology, I became interested in this rapidly changing relationship between law enforcement and schools. In this study, I examined the perceptions that teachers and staff have of the police in their school environment in two schools in a large Canadian urban area. The research questions (to be discussed at the end of this chapter) focus on participants` perceptions regarding the presence of an SRO, as well as how their perceptions relate to other popular and critical perceptions of school police in the media, community, and scholarly literature.

In examining police in schools, it is important to understand the historical roots of violence in schools, as well as the responses that have been implemented by schools and policy makers in an attempt to curb school violence. These are all factors that have led up to police presence in schools. The following sections will discuss the literature

available on these subjects in turn, as well as the roles police play in schools. It is important to note that although every attempt has been made to include as much Canadian literature as possible, much of the scholarly literature available on these topics originates in the United States. These two groups of literature indeed present some differences in contexts and in cultures. However, it is nevertheless relevant, especially given the much smaller body of Canadian literature, to discuss research from both countries in order to gain a full picture of school violence, public perceptions, and the roles police play in an educational environment.

Fears of Youth Violence in Schools: An Antecedent to School Police

The study of police presence in schools begins with an examination of violence and safety concerns of teachers, staff, and students. Violence may be defined as "behavior by people against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm" (Harber in Morrell, 2002, p. 38). Violence in schools can encompass anything from petty theft and vandalism, to more serious offences such as weapons possession, assault, or murder. Literature in U.S. and Canadian contexts will be discussed in turn.

U.S. Schools

The 1970's and 1980's saw an increase in both the availability and presence in U.S. schools of weapons such as firearms, which contributed to the potential and severity of violence in schools (Warner et. al., 1999, p. 53). Despite this focus on increased crime in U.S. schools, Hyman and Perone (1998) cite that "current data do not support the claim that there has been a dramatic, overall increase in school-based violence in recent years" (p. 9). For example, a decrease in violent activity was noted in

the period between 1992 and 2002, when school violence rates appeared to drop up to 50% in the United States, and the public's attitude toward schools as safe places for children grew (*Advancement Project*, 2005, p. 15). Despite this drop in school violence rates (and increased public perception of schools as safe places), however, by 2006, statistics in the United States reported that almost half of all police departments had assigned police officers to serve in schools (Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics in Brown, 2006, p. 592). Another U.S. study notes that while in 1999, 54% of students surveyed reported seeing police or security guards in their school, this number increased to 68% in 2005 (Dinkes et al., 2006 in Brady, 2007, p. 459).

Canadian Schools

The debate in Canada over the level of violence in schools is no less conflicted. Statistics Canada reports in 1997 that only 9% of violent incidents committed by youth actually occurred on school property, and less than 7% of these incidents involved a weapon, yet since 1997, police have become much more involved in school incidents (Statistics Canada, 1998, p. 22). In the most recent statistics available, Statistics Canada states that crime at school has risen in the past decade with 13% of Criminal Code violations being committed by youth on school property (Taylor-Butts & Bresson, 2006, p. 4). Although only approximately 7% of these crimes involved a weapon in 2006 (no change from a decade earlier), and less than 1% involved firearms, there is still concern in Canadian communities about violent incidents in schools (Taylor-Butts & Bressan, 2006). Although violence is cited by Jull as one of the most important and significant threats to a sound education in Canadian schools, the data available do not

demonstrate that more students are hurt or killed each year due to increased violence in schools (Jull, 2000).

The evidence over if, and to what degree, violence has increased in North American schools in recent years continues to be confusing and contradictory as academic research, government studies, and professional publications cite conflicting data. Although the evidence for an increase in violence is inconclusive, the public views crime at school as a major concern (Day et.al, 1995, p.1).

Responses to School Violence

Schools have demonstrated a variety of responses to real or perceived violence issues. My study focuses on one of these responses - the School Resource Officer. However, the placement of an SRO is only one response in a number of initiatives that attempt to curb school violence. To better understand teachers' and staff's perceptions of safety and school violence in this study, it is important to first situate the role of the SRO in a broader context of responses to real or perceived school violence as a whole. These reforms include changes in school-safety legislation, "student-friendly' approaches (such as restorative justice, peer-mediation, and the creation of small, caring communities within the schools), Zero Tolerance policies, implementation of technical surveillance in schools, and finally, the school-police relationship.

Legislation

In the wake of a perceived increase in school violence, governments and school boards across North America have implemented a variety of legislative approaches to increase school safety. Most notably in the United States is the implementation of the

Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, legislation which "requires states to enact laws mandating that schools expel any student found on school property with a firearm" (*Advancement Project*, 2005, p. 11). Some Canadian provinces have also followed suit with the introduction of legislation, including the Ontario Safe Schools Act in the year 2000, and the adopting of the Safe Schools Task Force in British Columbia in 2003. Individual cities have also implemented programs such as the Impact School Initiative in New York City, which targets specific high-risk locations and increases police presence in schools deemed dangerous (Brady, 2007, p. 455). Although there seems to be general acceptance from the media and the public for legislation and programs aimed at curbing violence, critics of such initiatives note that the overstatement of delinquency has "result[ed] in reliance on inappropriate or inadequate policies aimed at preventing and remedying the problem" (Hyman & Perone, 1998, p. 7). Examples of those critiqued initiatives include student friendly approaches and Zero Tolerance policies, which are discussed below.

"Student-Friendly" Approaches to Remedying School Violence

Many schools have attempted to deal with violence through a variety of caring, student-centered measures. One such measure is restorative justice, which is a conflict-resolution method in which the offender and victim come together with parents, teachers, and school administrators to discuss the conflict, determine what occurred, and resolve the situation to the satisfaction of the victim. Peer mediation, a process by which trained, school-aged children act as mediators between combatants during conflicts, is another example, as well as the creation of small, caring communities within the schools. Advocates of these approaches cite the focus on the emotions of the

offender and victim as paramount to decreasing further violence. Karp and Breslin (2001) state, "[r]estorative...justice programs in the school setting prioritize activities that try to reduce delinquency and find just solutions to delinquent behavior" (p. 249), while Schellenberg, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss (2007) note that peer mediation, "...has been identified as a resource that promotes positive peer interaction and reduces school violence" (p. 475). In creating a caring relationship in the school community, Daniels et. al. (2007) discuss the importance of trusting relationships between teachers and students in fostering a positive, constructive environment and that "[the] personal, caring relationship with all students and their families... [is] one of, if not the most essential role in facilitating a peaceful resolution" to delinquency in schools (p. 608).

Despite the significant support for these practices, such measures are also often criticized. For example, critics argue that restorative justice is time-consuming, and often "face[s] resistance ...from school district superintendents and juvenile justice professionals," and that peer mediation programs are ineffective and unrealistic in preventing school violence (Karp & Breslin, 2001, p. 269, Casella, 2000, p. 327). In addition, the creation of caring communities within the school is criticized for its student-focused approach, as "pandering to the students by lowering standards and sacrificing rigor for relevance" (Dodd, 2000, p. 27).

Zero Tolerance Policies

Despite the many student-friendly responses to school violence, Zero Tolerance policies have been, by far, the most common policies adopted by school boards across North America (Kaufman et. al in Stader, 2004). These policies are also the most controversial. Although Zero Tolerance policies may vary some among schools, they

share a commitment to "mandate predetermined consequences or punishment for specific offenses, regardless of the circumstances, disciplinary history, or age of the student involved" (Education Commission of the States in Stader, 2004, p. 62). In addition, Zero Tolerance policies, which include immediate punishment for wrongdoing, seek to send a message to other students that certain behaviors are unacceptable and will not be tolerated (Skiba & Peterson, 2000, p. 336). Whether or not this technique is effective as a deterrent is highly debated. Indeed, academic literature is markedly at odds with school policy assumptions and actions. The scholarly literature reviewed for this study was overwhelmingly critical of Zero Tolerance policies. For instance, Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) assert that the interpretation of the policy by principals varies greatly "result[ing] in zero tolerance policies [that] take on a life of their own" in both severity and targeted students (p. 92). Cassidy and Jackson (2005) concur, stating that "schools themselves exhibit different levels of tolerance toward certain behavior depending on the month of the school year" (p. 453). In addition to these issues, Zero Tolerance policies have a marked reputation for disproportionally affecting African American students and other minorities (Cartledge, Tillman & Johnson, 2001, p, 29). Indeed, the focus of Zero Tolerance policies on the severity of the punishment is criticized throughout literature, which argues that there is "very little evidence that such practices actually change or improve the behavior of the offending students" (Noguera, 2003, p. 346).

Despite the rapid initial adoption of Zero Tolerance strategies in Canadian schools, these policies have been discontinued in Ontario as of 2007, due to massive complaints about fairness and effectiveness in treating the problem of violence ("Ontario

to Scrap "Zero Tolerance" School Rules", 2007). This move is in stark contrast to many American school boards, which continue to use Zero Tolerance policies.

Technical Surveillance

In order to enforce Zero Tolerance policies, many schools have elected to include the use of technical surveillance equipment to monitor students on a daily basis (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Similarly to Zero Tolerance policies, surveillance approaches are also highly criticized in scholarly literature. While the utilization of guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras to monitor student behaviour may be aimed at keeping the school population safe as a whole, many assert that these methods of student management "reduce [the school's] image as a place of inquiry and learning and [instead] absorb the ambiance and demeanor of prisons and other places requiring strict security" (Noguera, 2003, p. 345, Menacker, Weldon & Hurwitz, 1990, p. 76). In addition, technical surveillance equipment often "contribute[s] to [a] culture of fear, making people feel that the risks are greater than they really are" (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006, p. 627). This culture of fear, in turn, fuels the public's desire for punishments for offending students, more surveillance equipment, and greater involvement of the police in the school environment. As Noguera (1995) states, "politicians and school officials have pledged to quell the tide of violence by converting schools into prison-like, "lock-down" facilities" (p. 190).

Police in Schools

This study focuses on another response to school violence – actually placing police officers on the school premises. In recent years, due to the increased frustration

and concern over violence in schools, school officials have forged connections with law enforcement by providing uniformed police officers in schools (Brown, 2006). As policing in schools is a fairly new phenomenon, it has not garnered a lot of attention from researchers (Brown, 2006). In the scholarly literature that exists, however, policing in schools has emerged as a highly controversial topic. The roles and critical perspectives of police in schools will be discussed in the next section.

Roles of Police in Schools

Police may play a number of roles in their relationship with staff and students. Amid the wide variety of tasks police may be involved in at school, three main roles arise in the scholarly literature:

a) The Deterrent: police as intimidators solely for the purpose of fighting against school crime (Menacker, Weldon & Hurwitz, 1990). These officers are instructed to keep their distance on everyday school matters (*Advancement Project*, 2005, p. 25). However, their intimidating presence is often criticized for "increas[ing] hostility [in school] because some officers do not respect students," as well as for overreacting in combination with Zero Tolerance policies to "turn a simple act of childishness into crimes punishable by incarceration" (*Advancement Project*, 2005, p. 26; Tuzzolo & Hewitt, 2006, p. 61). This role is most often found in schools throughout the United States.

b) The Lock Down Respondent: police as a response system to the school "lock down" procedure. A "lock down" is a safety procedure where the school population reacts to a real or perceived threat by locking all doors, windows, pulling curtains and blinds to prevent view or entry into the school or classrooms.

Students and staff remain, in effect, quarantined in their classrooms until the threat is terminated (Safe Schools Code of Conduct – Secure School Protocol, 2004, p. 1). This procedure is used "in certain situations [where] student safety is best achieved by locking down the school rather than implementing a general evacuation," and such threats may include drug searches, bomb threats, or intruder threats (Safe Schools Code of Conduct – Secure School Protocol, 2004, p. 1). Although this third role of Lock Down Respondent in schools is difficult to find represented in peer reviewed literature, it is very apparent in recent events in both Ottawa and Toronto. Both Catholic and public school boards in Ottawa experienced a large number of lock downs during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. As this police role often consists of officers in bullet-proof garments with weapons, it may indeed have the most dramatic impact on how the school population perceives the safety of their school environment as a whole. As Brown states, "the perception of danger at school has consistently been shown to negatively impact students' attendance, confidence, and academic performance" (Brown, 2006, p. 598). As one student states in response to lock down situations in the Ottawa area, "I'm getting really sick and tired...I can't learn during a lockdown" ("Twenty School Lockdowns", 2007).

c) The School Resource Officer (SRO): police as friendly, educational mentors for students, liaisons between teachers, parents, and students, and occasional teachers of law-enforcement-related curriculum, such as drug education or anti-crime education (Johnson, 1999, Jackson, 2002). While the SROs' presence is often amicable in nature, they may also be called on to "offer a consistent and

purposeful response to issues through prevention, intervention, and enforcement strategies" (Police Involvement in Schools – Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2003, p. 1). According to Kupchik & Monahan (2006), the role of the SRO, while including a focus on crime prevention as needed, is largely to "enhance perceived safety among students and teachers, build goodwill between students and law enforcement, and teach 'good citizenship'" (p. 621). This study will focus solely on the presence of the School Resource Officer.

The Emergence of Police in Canadian Schools

Though there are many similarities between the participation of police in Canadian and American schools, it is important, given this study's Canadian context, to note research done on police in Canadian schools. With the use of student-centered conflict resolution and a generally positive attitudes toward police presence in schools, Canadian society appears to favour peaceful resolution methods to school violence problems, rather than harsher, authoritarian tactics often used in the United States. It is entirely possible that Canadian culture views police overall as less authoritarian and repressive than Americans do, and it is important to note that for this reason, it may be difficult to truly compare or apply findings in American studies to Canadian schools.

The bulk of information available on the addition of police in Canadian schools comes through federal and provincial studies, policies, and school board documents. Though concern over school violence had escalated in the early 1990s, one 1994 government report notes the skepticism around the concept of police as a solution to these concerns, stating that "some....parents refused to believe [the presence of] a police officer [would] develop a safe and positive learning environment" (Ryan,

Matthews & Banner, 1994, p. 1). At that same time, responding to violence concerns, the Ministry of Education in Ontario began working with school boards on including violence prevention programs within the provincial curriculum, and larger school boards, such as the Toronto District School Board, began forming safe school committees to address concerns (Cole, 1999, p. 1, Lipsett, 1999, p.1). Key problems in Canadian schools were listed as bullying, physical threats, as well as physical and emotional abuse, and 30% of all violent youth acts on school property were listed as assaults (Day & Golench, 1997, p. 332-333, Taylor-Butts & Bressan, 2006, p. 4).

One 1994 government research study examining the effects of a police officer's presence in a Toronto school concluded that the officer's presence was a very positive influence, and "students began to feel more safe as a result" (Ryan, Matthews and Banner, 1994, p. 8-9). In 2003, the Ontario Ministry of Education created guidelines for police interaction in schools, stating that, "a safe school environment promotes respect, responsibility, and civility" and that "police are essential partners in the prevention of crime and violence" in schools ("Provincial Model for Local Police/School Board Protocol", 2003, p. 2-3). Since then, an increasing number of school boards in Ontario urban centers have welcomed police officers into their school on a regular basis as School Resource Officers, considering them members of the staff rather than occasional visitors. Today, the presence of School Resource Officers in Ontario is touted as a beneficial and friendly partnership, one where officers, "work with students to develop action plans and programs aimed at reducing victimization, improving reporting, and preventing crime and violence" (News Release from Toronto Catholic District School Board, 2008).

Critical Perspectives of Police in Schools

Arguments for increased police presence in schools are difficult to find in academic literature, and are most commonly found in principal journals and other non-peer reviewed professional publications. It is important to note that many of these latter publications cite no empirical research evidence of the positive effects of police in schools, rather basing their conclusions on the authors' personal experiences or board mandates. Advocates of placing police officers in school on a regular basis argue that doing so will "develop a more positive orientation towards the police [by youth] and a more 'responsible' understanding of criminal offending" (Hopkins, Hewstone, & Hantzi, 1992, p. 204). One author comments that the success of police officers in schools is characterized not only by their ability to deter delinquent behaviour, but also to calm the students and instill in them a sense of understanding toward one another (Johnson, 1999, p. 177). Advocates also note that the role of police in schools is generally intended to "increase the level of respect that young people may have toward the police and generate a better understanding of the law and role of law enforcement" (Jackson, 2002, p. 632).

However, critics of the police school relationship are much more common in the scholarly literature, and focus heavily on the image of schools as prisons, as well as the criminalization of student behaviour that was once seen as simply childhood mischief. Many argue that schools today continue to serve as instruments of control. Further fuelled by increased safety concerns and a greater number of punishments, schools, critics claim, continue to exhibit a harsh, regimented selection of daily routine and consequence. This critique is evident at least as far back as 1968, when Jackson wrote

of 20th century schools as places of "involuntary attendance [which may be compared to] prisons and mental hospitals" (p. 9). Michel Foucault's theories regarding observation, ranking and normalizing lend themselves to an analysis of police in schools and these, as well as his comparisons of schools to prisons, are discussed later in the literature review.

In addition, critics of police in schools argue that the criminalization of children's behaviour is an attack on students' rights. For instance, it is argued that school staff are more frequently utilizing police intervention to deal with issues such as fighting, petty theft, or other minor, yet common problem behaviors that would have been previously considered "routine" internal disciplinary matters and been dealt with by the school administrators (Hyman & Perone, 1998, p. 11). Because of this, there has been a tendency to pawn off problem children onto law enforcement officials, thus providing school officials with an easy way to "discard students who are perceived as trouble makers" (*Advancement Project*, 2005, p. 13). Some argue that because of this, violence in schools is not curbed, but instead "engender[s] the possibility that [student] delinquency will increase as a response to perceived oppression" (Karp & Breslin, 2001, p. 253). The increased criminalization of student behaviour in both Canada and the U.S., combined with surveillance equipment and police involvement, creates what some call a "prison-like atmosphere [where] discipline policies penalize and remove students instead of providing support and facilitating positive growth" (Tuzzolo & Hewitt, 2006, p. 60). Drawing on these kinds of criticism, some authors even conclude that police officers in schools, rather than promoting a sense of safety by preventing violence, may

instead pose a psychological threat to students by restricting their freedom and fostering a climate of intimidation and fear (Jackson, 2002, p. 631).

School Police As Seen Through a Foucaultian Lens

The media would often have the public believe that police in schools exist simply to provide a positive presence with a stern 'set them straight' attitude toward delinquency. However, much of the scholarly literature available on school police contrasts this notion, instead examining underlying motives and intentions that exist in society as catalysts to more controlling, authoritarian responses to school violence concerns. Because of this, it is relevant to examine this study through the mechanisms of social control. The theories of Michel Foucault in his book Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison will be applied to this study's findings. In addition, the ideas of John Taylor Gatto will be used to augment Foucault's theories. While Foucault largely gives examples based on prisons in his theories, Gatto will add the more contemporary views of an actual classroom teacher to this research.

Central to Foucault's disciplinary technologies is the concept of observation. In his example of prisons, Foucault describes the panopticon style of architecture, in which a guard tower is built with cells surrounding it, making the visibility of inmates possible at all times. In observing every move of an inmate, guards and prison staff are able to, "furnish norms to which individual prisoners could be compared and forced to conform" (Ryan, 1991, p. 108). Foucault's (1979) description of the panopticon style of prisons influences his description of schools. Foucault (1979) compares these two institutions, stating that "[t]he organization of a serial space was one of the great technical mutations of elementary education," acting as the foundation for "supervising, hierarchizing,

rewarding" (p. 147). Schools utilize a method of constant observation of students, including the panopticon style structure with "[t]he inevitable partitioning of internal spaces into [a] series of hallways and rooms...to allow for the division of the student body to make supervision of each student easier" (Ryan, 1991, p. 113).

In Foucault's second disciplinary technology, inmates' behaviour is tested, observed and recorded over time in an effort to establish a means by which they may be sorted and categorized by their potential for conformity and productivity. As Foucault states, "[e]ach individual has his own place; and each place its individual" (1979, p, 143). Ryan (1991) applies Foucault's concepts to the school environment, stating that "school officials apply inducements to students to encourage their conformance to minimal standards. Characterization of students accompanies the identification of deviants" (p. 115). This furthers the control over students criticized in much of the academic literature.

Foucault's third disciplinary technology involves the recording and quantitative analysis of the findings from testing and observation to form what Foucault labeled as normalizing judgment (Roth, 1992). The results are used to create standards by which "the measure of central tendency serves as a norm [which]...both totalizes and individualizes a population... [and is] a move toward homogeneity, pushing to the tails anything idiosyncratic, peculiar and unfamiliar" (Roth, 1992, p. 688). As Gatto (2005) argues, this conformity is based on the rules of the governing body, in that "you know how impossible it is to make self-confident spirits conform [so] I teach that a kid's self-respect should depend on expert opinion" (p. 9).

Gatto (2005) echoes Foucault's cycle of disciplinary technologies, stating that "schools are intended to produce... formulaic human beings whose behavior can be predicted and controlled" (p. 23). An in-depth examination of these theories as related to this study is included in Chapter 4 of this paper.

Gaps in the Literature

Given the media attention and public focus on delinquency and violence in schools, there is a surprisingly small body of literature that focuses specifically on police presence or types of police used in schools. Canadian literature is very scarce, while American literature tends to focus on police as either an intimidating force/ deterrent to school delinquency, or as a participant in truancy programs or educational programs such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) (Rosenbaum, Flewelling, Bailey, Ringwalt & Wilkinson, 1994, White, Fyfe, Campbell & Goldkamp, 2001). There are no studies that compare or contrast the different roles of police in the school setting. As there remains a large gap in literature for many aspects of policing in schools, this study sought to address one main role of police in schools found in a Canadian context, the School Resource Officer.

It should also be noted that many of the references available on the subject of police in schools are from the 1990's and early 2000's. Academic research on police as a response to school violence is still scarce, and as Borum et al. (2010) note, "many of the school safety and security measures deployed in response to school shootings have little research support" (p. 27). Many studies on police in school seem to appear between 1997 and 2002, a period in which the United States experiences many high profile school shootings. This may account for the increased academic interest in this

topic at that time. Despite the lack of recent studies about police in school, many of the police programs studied in the older references (such as SROs in North American studies, or SLOs in British studies such as Nick Hopkins, 1992, 1994, etc.) remain relevant today. In the last 10-20 years, these particular police programs seem to have retained their common goal of having officers act as a positive influence on students while keeping a school safe, and are very comparable to today's SRO programs.

Research Questions

A variety of opinions and perceptions are evident through an examination of the literature available on school police (as discussed above), as well as through media accounts. These differing views can be illuminated by gaining insight into the perceptions of school staff who are employed daily within schools that have police. School Resource Officers, in particular, are relatively new additions to the school environment. Uncovering the perceptions that teachers, administrators, and other school staff have of SROs in their work environment is no doubt essential in augmenting and clarifying our understanding of the different perceptions that exist of police outside schools.

The central research questions for this study are as follows:

- What are the perceptions of school personnel regarding SROs?
- How do these perceptions of school personnel relate to other popular and critical perceptions of police in schools (e.g. media, local community views, scholarly literature)?

Some key definitions in these questions, and for the study as a whole, are as follows:

- *Perception* in this instance is defined as "the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships, and events by means of the senses [including] recognizing, observing, and discriminating." (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2007, p. 683).
- *Learning environment* in this study refers to not only the classroom, but to any part of the school building or grounds, including hallways, gyms, lunchrooms, school yard, etc.
- *School safety* is defined in Brady (2007) as "the creation and development of a school environment in which students have a sense of belonging as well as personal efficacy, use alternatives to violence and feel secure, and in which early warning signs of violence are actively addressed" (p. 456). It should be noted that the term 'safety' is used widely in the scholarly literature without definition, a surprising fact considering the amount of time and money spent each year attempting to make schools 'safer'. For the purposes of this study, *perceptions of safety* refers to the feelings of security, comfort, and personal well-being one experiences when he or she has little or no anxiety about being physically harmed by any current or future threats in their school environment. It should be noted that the term *security* is also used in the questionnaire and refers similarly to similar feelings of personal well-being, and freedom from danger.

- The word *effectiveness* is used in the questionnaire and interviews. While I am aware a body of research exists on the characteristics of effective learning environments and effective schools, the term *effectiveness* in this study is used simply as a general adjective to gauge teachers' and staff's perceptions of their learning environment.
- For the purposes of this study, the term *the media* refers to reports gathered from Canadian newspaper, television, radio, and internet resources. The media examples illustrated in this thesis are composed of both archival and current stories, and focus on the topics of school violence and police in schools in a Canadian context.

The perceptions of teachers, administrators, and staff at two schools were obtained for this thesis . One school had an SRO, and one did not. Methodology will be discussed in the next chapter, followed by a presentation of the findings of the study in Chapter 3, and a discussion in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to address a void in the current literature on one common strategy for involving police in schools: the SRO. This chapter will discuss the purpose of this study, its methodological approach, as well as its participants, the study location, and how data were collected and analyzed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of ethical considerations, and anticipated contributions of this study.

Research Sites

Two schools participated in this study. They will be referred under the pseudonyms Aspen High and Belair Collegiate. Aspen High had an SRO for the 2008-2009 school year, and Belair Collegiate did not. The neighbourhood context of each school will be discussed below.

Aspen High

Aspen High ranges from Grade 9-12, and has an enrollment of approximately 500 students, with approximately 65 teachers and staff. Though this is considered to be a small school in terms of student population, it is still quite ethnically diverse. While 65 questionnaires were sent to the school to fully accommodate all teachers and staff, only 19 were received back. This low return rate (approximately 29%), as discussed in the Limitations section of this paper, is most likely due to another larger study having to do with police in schools being conducted in the school at the same time as this study.

Aspen High is located in a city ward of 4177 people[1]. Of note in this population, there are 200 secondary school-aged children ages 15-19, and this ward also contains a population of 615 people over the age of 65. The ethnic origins of the population living

[1] This section is drawn from 2006 census documents, details confidential

around the school are listed as Greek, Chinese, Canadian and East Indian, with a median income of approximately $62,000/year per household. However, though this area is ethnically diverse, over half (approximately 67%) of residents speak English as their first language at home, and 93% of residents are Canadian citizens. The population consists of 45% visible minorities, and 55% non-visible minorities; 24% of the population are immigrants. Interestingly, the census job categories list educational careers as one of the more common jobs for this ward`s residents.

Current crime rates in this neighbourhood have generally decreased by 15% since 2008 (as of date data were extracted, Dec 2009). Sexual assault, break and enter, and auto theft have dramatically decreased (between 23% and 33% decrease) in the past year, while murders have remained consistent at five each in 2008 and 2009 (crime statistics by police division, Statistics Canada, 2009, confidential).

Belair Collegiate

Belair Collegiate ranges from Grade 7-12, and has an enrollment of approximately 850 students, with approximately 70 teachers and staff. This is a much larger school than Aspen High, and its student population is also quite ethnically diverse. While 70 questionnaires were sent to the school to fully accommodate all teachers and staff, only 23 were received back.

Belair Collegiate is located in a city ward of 4070 people[2]. Of note in this population, there are 340 secondary school-aged children ages 15-19, while this ward contains a population of 400 people over the age of 65. The ethnic origin of over 50% of the population living around the school is listed on city documents as Chinese, followed

[2] This section is drawn from 2006 census documents, details confidential

by East Indian, Sri Lankan and Filipino, with a median income of approximately $45,000/year per household. A large proportion of residents (approximately 71%) do not speak English or French as their first language at home, though 75% of residents are Canadian citizens. The population consists of 87% visible minorities, and 13% non-visible minorities, and 72% of the population are immigrants. The census job categories list sales and service occupations as the most common jobs for this ward's residents.

Current crime rates in this neighbourhood indicate that crimes have decreased overall by 12% since 2008 (as of date data were extracted, Dec 2009). Sexual assault, assault, break and enter, and auto theft have all decreased (between 9% and 31% decrease) in the past year, while murders have taken a dramatic decrease of 90% (crime statistics by police division, Statistics Canada, 2009, confidential).

Participants

Any teacher, administrator or other school staff at Aspen High or Belair Collegiate were eligible to participate in this study. The only criteria given was that they be employed in some capacity at one of the schools. Participants answered a few short questions about their background for this study, and this information is as follows:

Aspen High

The gender split of participants at Aspen High was 74% women respondents and 26% male respondents. Of these participants, all were teachers with the exception of two teaching assistants, two counselors, and the head secretary. Most respondents (52%) were aged 50-59 with over 10 years teaching experience (90%), and the majority (74%) of these respondents were of European descent.

Belair Collegiate

The gender split of participants at Belair Collegiate was 57% women respondents and 43% male respondents, with all being teachers save for one teaching assistant. Most respondents (35%) were aged 50-59 and 40-49 (26%), with 61% having over 10 years teaching experience. As with Aspen High, the majority (92%) of these respondents were of European descent.

Methodological Approach

I chose to use a mixed methods approach to my data collection, using both questionnaire and interview data. I also collected statistics on crime and demographics for each school's neighbourhood, and a variety of Canadian media reports to supplement the questionnaire and interview data. My rationale for choosing a mixed methods approach was that in collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, I was able to triangulate my findings in order to compare, contrast, and better validate the perceptions I received. As Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) state, a mixed methods approach both "demonstrate[s] that a particular variable will have a predicted relationship with another variable [and] answers exploratory questions about how that predicted...relationship actually happens" (p. 15). The quantitative data I collected from the questionnaires and statistics served to enhance and give insight to the qualitative interview data. Media reports added additional perceptions and points of view. All data gathered were compared and contrasted against each other to improve validity and "build a coherent justification for themes" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). The following section will discuss the consideration and thought process behind creating both the

questionnaire and the interview protocol, as well as collecting mainstream news reports for this study.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect data on teachers' and school staff's perceptions of SROs. Because of the scarcity of research literature in the subject of police in schools, and therefore, a lack of appropriate instruments, I developed a unique questionnaire to meet the needs of this study.

There were several considerations that were taken into account while designing this questionnaire. The questionnaire began by asking questions to establish a foundation for perceptions of general safety in the school environment. It then led into asking about the role of School Resource Officers, and related them to the perceived level of safety and perceived effectiveness of the school's learning environment as a whole. Multiple-choice questions were used to efficiently capture important insights from teachers and staff regarding a number of attributes in the limited period of time I had for a Master's thesis study. They also served to maximize the participation of busy staff in this study. The questionnaire attempted to build on current studies of the police-school relationship that deal typically with the link between school police and crime deterrence, as well as youth's image of the police at school and in the community (Hopkins, Hewstone, & Hantzi, 1992, Brady, Balmer & Phenix, 2007, Johnson, 1999). This questionnaire was designed as a supplement to the teacher interviews to better corroborate my results and set my interview data in the broader context of the teachers` and staff`s perceptions. The questionnaire was 18 questions in length, and included some different questions for those with School Resource Officer in their school, and

those without. Some questions were numbered and had a main stem and between two and five response choices, while others made use of Likert-type or graphic scales. The response choices were typically closed-ended with alternate response sets and check-all-that-apply response sets (Colton & Covert, 2007, p. 209, 214).

I attempted to address construct validity in the questionnaire with the use of clear definitions of the term "School Resource Officer" at the appropriate section of the questionnaire. This "ensure[d] that...designers and respondents have a shared definition of the construct" (Colton & Covert, 2007, p. 66). Other terms, such as "safety". "secure", and "school environment" were not defined specifically for participants, but would have been general enough terms so as to hold a similar meaning between respondents.

I also attempted to address content validity by developing the questions based on the findings of the literature review, and around key words in the research question: police (general and specific perceptions), safety, and learning environment. In addition, the questions addressed possible fear and anxiety resulting from police presence.

To avoid 'double-barreled' item stems, questions were written to address a single concept at a time, and in order to avoid the participant "select[ing] one of the fixed responses randomly rather than in a thoughtful fashion", and I also attempted to give a reasonable number of response choices, often including a neutral choice (Colton & Covert, 2007, p. 175, 180, 198, Rea & Parker, 2005, p. 44, 56). I attempted to ensure the language of the questionnaire was direct, clear, and easily understood by teachers and staff (Rea & Parker, 2005, p. 53). The questionnaire is attached as Appendix B.

Interview

The purpose of the interviews was to collect rich, detailed data on teachers' and school staff's perceptions of SROs. The interview protocol used in this study was designed to complement the subject matter in questions posed in the questionnaire, and build on the data gathered, providing "rich description" of the "respondents' thoughts and feelings" on these issues, thus gaining "information above and beyond what can be obtained" through closed-ended responses (Colton & Covert, 2007, p. 133, 228). Interviews also "allow [the] researcher "control" over the line of questioning", which allowed me to elicit further clarification of certain unclear points given by the questionnaire participants (Creswell, 2003, p. 186).

Each question was designed to augment and elucidate a certain section of questions listed on the questionnaire. This helped ensure that the questions specifically targeted the data I was looking to collect. Questions were worded in a neutral manner so to avoid eliciting a certain type of answer (either negative or positive) from the participant (Colton & Covert, 2007, p. 231). This interview was administered in a semi-structured manner, allowing me to direct the questioning, as well as prompt the participant for additional responses. (Warren in Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 86). The final question allowed participants to add anything more they would like to contribute on the subject discussed. Consideration was given to the reliability of the questions to collect similar data should they be used in different schools or geographical areas in further studies. The language of the interview questions was worded with such phrases as "please describe" and "how do you feel about" to minimize the revealing of any potential interviewer bias, or influencing answers (Colton & Covert, 2007, p. 231).

The use of description was used in the final analysis in order to add to the validity of the results and "transport the readers to the setting and give discussion an element of shared experiences" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). I transcribed the interviews myself, then listened to the recordings again while reading the written transcripts, as "the closer one can get to the text itself, the closer one is to its meaning" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 134). Transcribed interviews were sent back to the participant via e-mail for member checks, which allowed participants to "confirm credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). In addition, during data collection, the issue of "asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee" inherent in this process was taken into account and avoided as much as possible through active listening on my part, as well as member checks (Kvale, 2006, p. 484).

Data Collection

School Participants

Before gaining permission to do my study at Aspen High and Belair Collegiate, I was requested by the school board to reduce the number of expected questionnaire respondents from my original 50 to 30, and reduce the number of interviews I would do from my initial 15 down to 10. These were conditions of gaining entry to the schools.

After obtaining permission from each school principal, questionnaires were sent to the schools via mail, with self-addressed stamped envelopes to facilitate their return. Questionnaires were completed by paper/pen format. Teachers and staff were asked for their participation in the interviews with an information letter and consent form in the same questionnaire package, and those willing to participate sent these forms back signed with their completed questionnaire. Respondents were given two weeks to return

the questionnaire and interview consent form (if desired), but in reality, the questionnaires were still being returned the last week of June, 2009. A reminder to staff to return the questionnaires was communicated the second week of May, 2009 by each school's principal. The end of the school year is a busy time for teachers and staff, so this most certainly affected the return rate, and possibly even more questionnaires would have been returned if the school year had been in session a little bit longer.

A total of 135 questionnaires were sent to the schools, and 43 questionnaires were returned back to the university (19 from Aspen High and 23 from Belair Collegiate), though one questionnaire had evidently been answered twice by the same person, and so it was excluded, thus leaving 42 questionnaires. Although the school board stated that I could have only 30 questionnaire participants, I anticipated that it was not likely that even half of my questionnaires would be returned (especially given the separate police study at Aspen High, which will be discussed in the Limitations section below), so I sent a questionnaire for each teacher and staff member in the school. In sending more than was needed, I hoped to get at least 30 responses.

Interviews were conducted upon receipt of a signed consent form. I received 7 requests for interviews, two from Aspen High and five from Belair Collegiate. The interviews were conducted by telephone and tape recorded on speaker phone, and I also took notes during the sessions in case of a problem with the recorder. Although I would have preferred doing interviews in person, tight time constraints at the very end of a school year and the consequent difficulty in getting interview participants for this study made phone interviews the necessary choice. I transcribed each interview and e-mailed them back to each participant for a member check in order to "ensure accuracy

of meaning, to capture the meaning conveyed in the words" of the participant (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 134). This was done within a day of the interview in the hopes that the subject matter would be fresh in the participants` minds, should they want to add anything. I encouraged the participants to contact me if they thought of any other comments that would be relevant to my study. Out of 7 interview transcripts I e-mailed back for member checks, I received 5 responses, all confirming that they were satisfied with their interview comments. From one participant, I also received additional information in an e-mail that had occurred to her after our interview. No participants withdrew from their questionnaires or interviews.

Informal discussions via e-mail occurred throughout the questionnaire and staff interview data collection process. I contacted these administrators on a number of occasions, asking different questions, asking for clarification, and asking for further information about the schools in question, or the presence of SROs. Each time, I received back very helpful and informative responses to my questions. These data have been printed and stored with all other data.

To situate my targeted schools' in a context of community demographics and neighbourhood crime rates, statistics were collected directly from Statistics Canada, and the study area's police website.

Media

Media reports were collected from archived and current news in various forms (e.g. from newspaper, television, radio sources available) online. My search was not limited to any certain forms of media, nor by the location of the stories. Any media dealing with school violence or police in schools in a Canadian context was searched.

Most Canadian reports originated from mainstream sources such as CBC or CTV News, The Ottawa Citizen, Toronto Star or The Globe & Mail. I focused on mainstream media as this is where my participants, as well as the general public, would most likely get their daily news. In targeting what the participants and public reads about school violence and police in schools, I could more effectively compare the media's perception on these topics to those of my participants.

While hundreds of media reports in response to major instances of school violence and the presence of police in schools are available, I have chosen the examples mentioned in this thesis in order to display differing opinions and viewpoints. The articles used here are therefore not exhaustive, but rather illustrative of the mainstream media's response to violent events in schools. I have attempted to offer a selection of both the positive and the negative reports available in the last 5-10 years on this topic.

Data Analysis Procedures

Computer spreadsheet software was used to analyze questionnaire results. Two spreadsheets were created, one for each school. The spreadsheets included all free form comments from each participant. Some questions were answered on a line scale, and to facilitate giving the results numerical values to work with during the analysis phase, the line was divided into segments from 1-10 where five is a neutral response. An average response for each of the line scales was calculated by adding up the numerical response values and dividing them by the number of responses for each school. The data was then examined for trends and converted to percentages and

inserted into charts and tables to better illustrate the findings to the reader (Rea & Parker, 2005, p. 246).

Interview transcripts were first reviewed by school to search for common themes and topics evident in the data (Creswell, 2003, p. 192). Then the transcripts were compared between schools to find any differences in opinion or items of note. Pertinent quotes from all interviews are used in the discussion section to illustrate points.

Media reports gathered on school violence and police in schools were analyzed in a similar fashion to the interviews in that the reports were examined for common general themes and topics (a call for more school police, repetitive reports on school violence, etc). Each report was categorized appropriately, and the themes examined for positive or negative perceptions of school police.

Perceptions evident in the data were compared and contrasted (e.g. in all questionnaires, interviews [formal and informal], and media reports). Perspectives between both schools were first analyzed and compared, and then the data from administrator discussions, as well as media reports, and academic literature, were added to the findings for further investigation. The data were then categorized into two obvious sets - perceptions from 'in school' (data from 'in school' employees from questionnaires and interviews) and perceptions from 'others' (that is, media reports, and school staff's perceptions of what students and the outside community think about SROs). Comparisons between these two sets of data will be presented in Chapter 4, as well as a comparison of school staff's perceptions to that in the academic literature.

Ethical Considerations

This study was sent to the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Committee for approval before data collection took place. At that point, it was subject to the rules and considerations stated within the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans document.

This study ensured confidentiality through complete anonymity of its participants, as was requested as a condition of approval by the school board. No names were needed in the questionnaire. Confidentiality of the identity of the schools studied is also ensured with the use of pseudonyms. Only demographic information on gender, job title, ethnicity, age, and years of working in a school was collected from participants. Participants offering to complete the questionnaire section of the study received an information sheet, outlining the purpose of the study and how their information would be used. Participation was completely voluntary, and only data from those who freely agreed to participate in the questionnaire were used for data analysis. Should anyone have contacted the interviewer to withdraw their questionnaire, their data would have been destroyed.

Similarly, participation in the interview section of the study was completely voluntary. Those who agreed to an interview signed a consent form prior to commencement of the interview. Any indication of participants' real names was replaced with pseudonyms to ensure their complete confidentiality (Creswell, 2003, p. 66).

Anticipated Contributions to the Field of Education

It is understood that with a study of such a small scale, it is difficult for results to have a large impact on society. However, the possible contributions will still be noted.

The impact of police in schools needs to be researched in Canada to determine the validity of this affiliation. A safe school (and perceptions of a safe school) are important prerequisites to a quality education. A study like this one could be used by police to reflect on their role in ensuring safety and in positively affecting staff and students' perceptions of delinquency and crime in schools. This insight would allow the police to shift or improve their methods of interacting with staff and students as needed.

The main contribution of this study, however, is to the small area of research done thus far on this subject, especially in Canada. With such little focus in Canada on this topic, much more research is needed to augment the body of literature available, and enhance our understanding of the school-police relationship.

Chapter 3: Perspectives of School Personnel Regarding SROs: Evidence and Analysis

This chapter is divided into two sections, and each will note the differing perceptions found in the data. The first section will exhibit the perceptions of school personnel as collected in the questionnaires and interview data at Aspen High and Belair Collegiate. The second section will exhibit evidence of "other" perceptions (that is, those in the media, and perceptions of students and the outside community as noted by school staff) and provide insight as to how these compare with the perceptions of school staff. The chapter is organized in this way to respond to both research questions. The questionnaire and interview data will be provided together in each subsection of information for each school.

Section 1: Perceptions of School Personnel

Aspen High

Criteria for Placing an Officer the School

While I was collecting data, two board administrators informed me that the School Resource Officer program had just begun in Aspen High, in other schools in their board, and also in a second board in the same city during the 2008-2009 school year (the same school year as this study). There were several criteria considered when deciding if and why a school received an officer. Once approval and funding for the program was obtained, officers in each city division containing a secondary school were asked if they would like to volunteer to be School Resource Officers. Administrator 2 noted:

> It first starts with monies available. Then it goes to the police for volunteers. No officer can cross police division lines. So it matters how many volunteers [there are] in the divisions. (Administrator 2)

Administrator 1 commented that the program was looking for a successful launch, and so the organizers looked for schools with administrative teams who would welcome the officers, as well as schools that had appropriate facilities to support an extra person full time in the school:

> [The] SRO [program was] looking for a successful launch; [we] looked for admin teams that would welcome and work with SRO to meet specific goals around relationship building. Our school is quite large and was able to provide good host space - office, phone, computer connection.(Administrator 1)

Aspen High also already had a student program where students already worked closely with the police:

> The school has a very strong tie already developed through the work of the [group name withheld for privacy] ([which is a] student group working with police service around positive school initiatives). (Administrator 1)

Officers were divided between the two city school boards, based on number of schools in each board, and number of volunteering officers in each police division. Finally, officers were placed in schools with the closest proximity to each division`s main police station.

Administrator 2 also commented that the decision of which school received an officer had nothing to do whatsoever with crime rate, or whether any given school was considered high risk or having student behavioural problems: "There is no connection between the school [that gets an SRO and one] that may be considered as having

problems." (Administrator 2). Administrator 1 noted that Aspen High is not hosting a School Resource Officer for the 2009-2010 school year:

> This year our [police] division decided that only one officer would be assigned to the SRO program and our school does not host in the 2009-2010 school year. (Administrator 1)

I was informed that all schools in this school board have expressed interest in eventually having an officer full time.

Observing the Police in the School

Aspen High has a full time School Resource Officer. According to the principal of Aspen High, this police officer is considered to be part of the staff, has his/her own office in the school, and is present in the school the majority of any given week (though not all teachers and staff would come into contact with the officer every day). This can be noted in Figure 1 from the divide in how often respondents see police at their school, with 68% saying more than once a week, and 21% saying less than once a month.

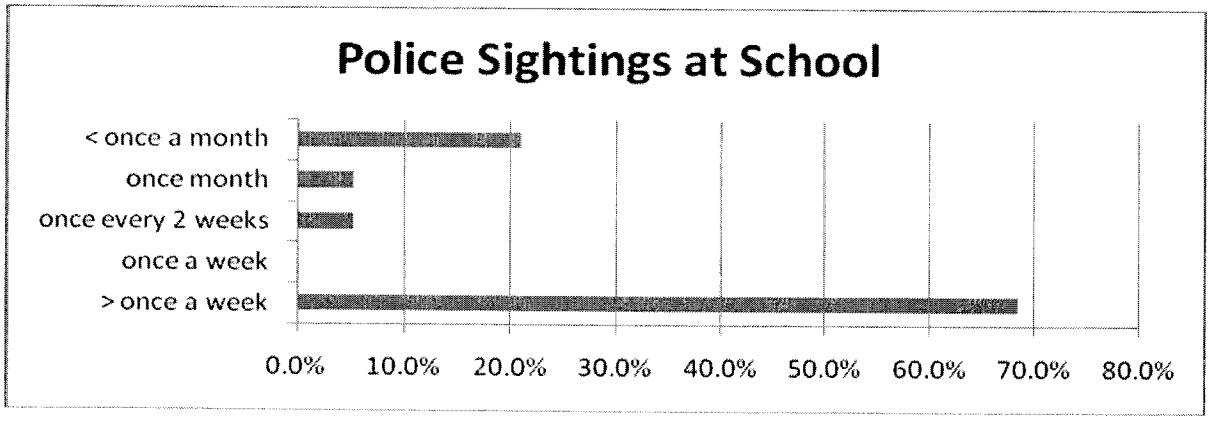


Figure 1: Frequency of Police Sightings at Aspen High

As illustrated on Figure 2, there was an array of responses when asked about the role of police in their school, with "friendly presence" being the top response (95%), followed by a close tie between "teacher of law enforcement curriculum (63%) and "crime deterrent" (58%).

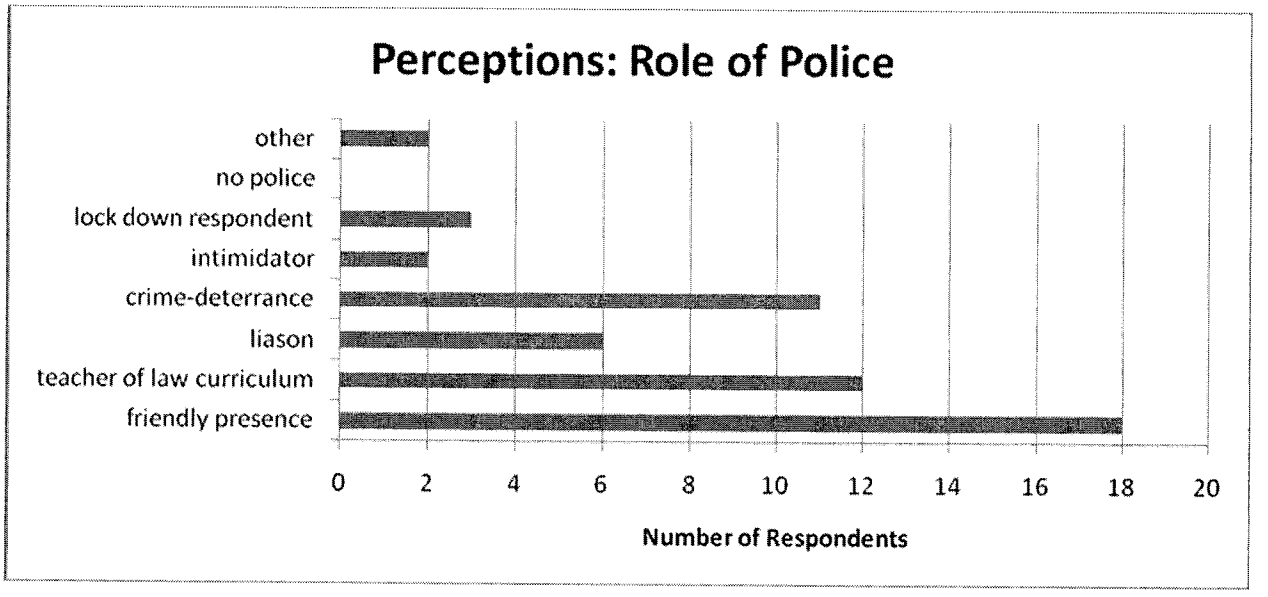


Figure 2: Aspen High Participants' Perceptions of the Roles Police Play in their School

When asked how often they see the officer at their school, one interview participant stated the officer was in the Aspen High at least 2 days a week, while the other suggested 4 days a week:

> Oh, you know what, I really don't know. I think at least a couple of days a week. Our police officer has an office in the school. It's a big school building-wise....so he's never in the basement unless he has to speak to me...so I don't see him every day. (T1A) [3]

When asked about her opinion on having the officer in the building, the same participant reported that, "having him [the officer] there is really nice, you know...it does give a

[3] T1A indicates Teacher #1 from Aspen High.

better feeling of safety" (T1A). Similarly, one participant noted in their questionnaire open ended response that, "[only] a small proportion of our students would even be alerted to police presence" indicating that their School Resource Officer is not always visible to everyone.

Perceptions of SRO Effects on Safety

As noted in Figure 3, the majority of questionnaire respondents at Aspen High (74%) thought their school was very safe.

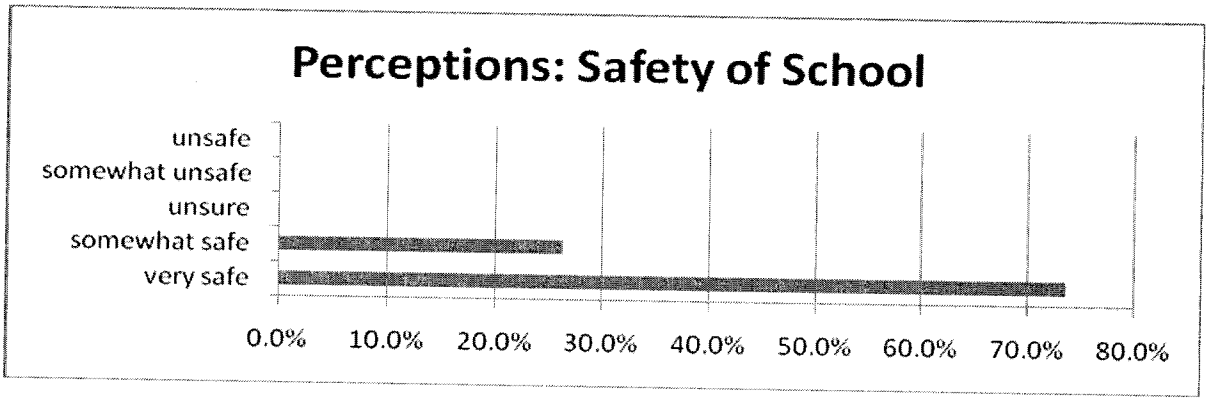


Figure 3: Perceptions of Aspen High Participants Regarding their School's Safety

Aspen High's respondents answered the section of the questionnaire designed for participants who have a School Resource Officer. When asked how much safer their school is with a School Resource Officer present, the average response was 3.3 on the scale, indicating that they perceive police presence to have some positive effect on their and their students' feelings of safety, but not a great effect (Figure 4, 5).

*13. How much safer is your school environment when School Resource Officers **are** present, as opposed to when no officer is present?*

Average Response: 3.3

much safer		no effect		much more unsafe
	X			

Figure 4: Question 13 Text and Average Response (total number of responses is 18)

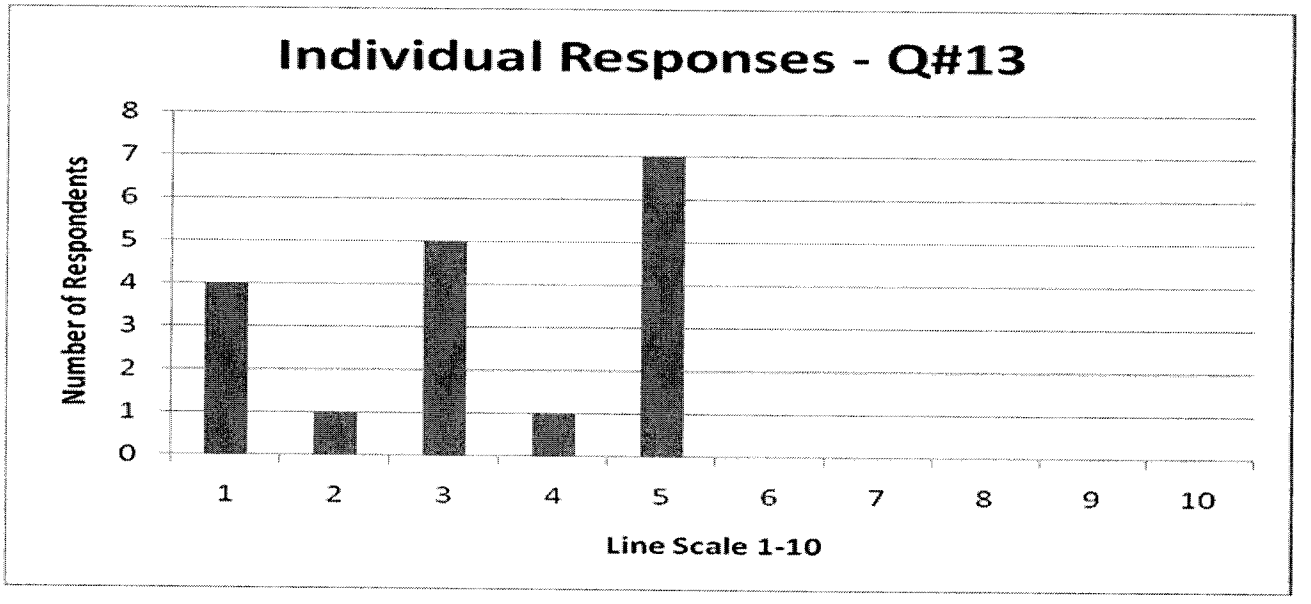


Figure 5: Question 13 Individual Scale Responses (total number of responses is 18)

When asked how much more secure respondents feel in their school with the School Resource Officer present, the average was 3.9 on the scale. This also indicates respondents feel somewhat more secure, but not greatly (Figure 6, 7).

*14. How secure do you <u>feel</u> in your school environment when School Resource Officers **are** present, as opposed to when no officer is present?*

Average Response: 3.89

|_____X___|_____|

much more secure | no effect | much less secure

Figure 6: Question 14 Average Response (total number of responses is 18)

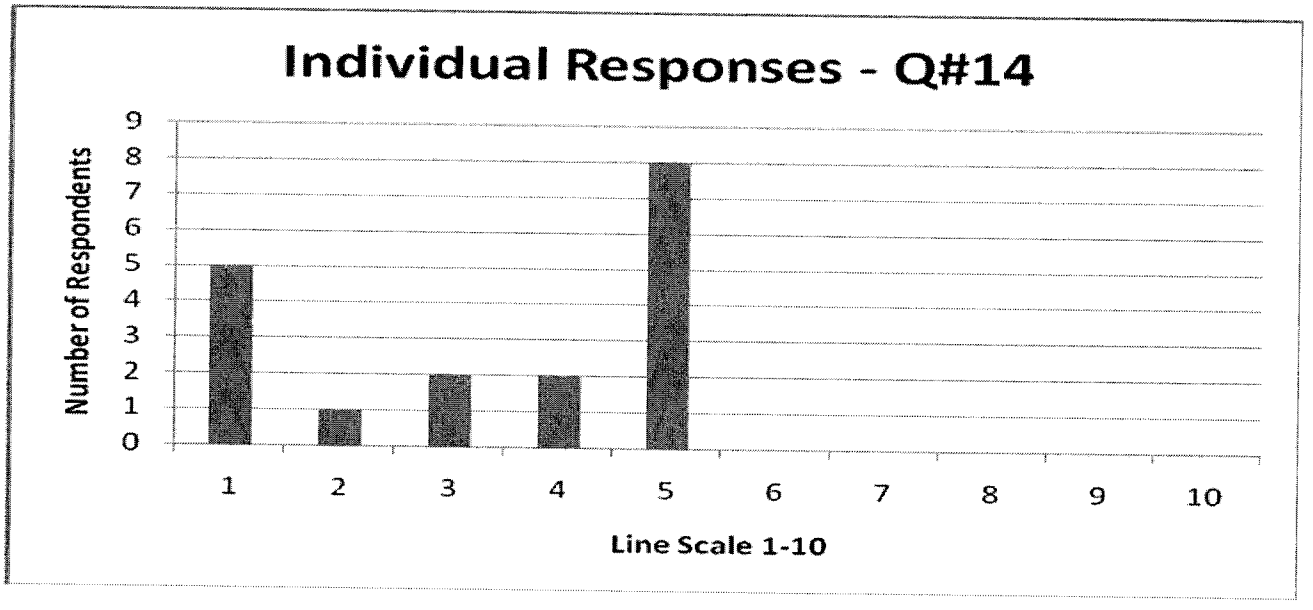


Figure 7: Question 14 Individual Scale Responses (total number of responses is 18)

During interviews, participants at Aspen High also described their school as being very safe. The main reason for this appeared to be the small size of the school's population, and the general good behaviour of the students. As one participant reported:

> We have a small student population, and within that population, there's nobody who is dangerous or threatening in any way. And because the school is small, and you know, I know a lot of the students [and] I can always feel comfortable. (T1A)

One comment noted good school programs and extra staff as helping in keeping their students occupied and therefore, the school safer:

> We have a lot of activities for the kids before school, at lunch, and we have an after school program, so there's activities going on for them....we have some extra staffing [due to a special ed. population] that's able to...keep tabs on kids and follow them academically, as well as behaviourally. (T2A).

These staff members were very firm in the belief that students felt at ease during their school day.

When asked about their School Resource Officer, the two teachers interviewed noted the officer's presence as positive. Each commented that the officer has been very involved in the life of the school community by coaching soccer, and participating in clubs and other activities with the students. By participating in school life, they stated, the officers gain a better understanding of, and a rapport with, the students:

> He attends a lot of school activities as well, even if they're not during the school day, and I think he did...a little bit of coaching.....being inside the school, he has an understanding of the environment and of the culture of the school, and actually knows the kids. (T1A).

Participants continuously described police in a positive light:

> It's been a great experience...it's been very positive. The police are not seen....you know, like you know, the guys coming in uniform and take the kid away or whatever..." (T1A)

As discussed further below, the impression an officer gives to students and staff appeared to be very important to participants.

When asked how the officer affects the general safety of the school, the two teachers interviewed first made it clear that they do not think the school is dangerous or has problems warranting an officer on the premises. However, both were quick to add that they feel the officer's presence does make the school feel safer, especially when something happens that needs police attention and the response is quicker because someone is right there to immediately deal with the issue: "It does give you a better feeling of safety, you know, like if the access is quicker, you know, connected to the school, and that's his [the officer's] priority" (T1A).

Perceptions of SRO Effects on the Learning Environment

As illustrated in Figure 8, the most popular response to describing the participants' school's learning environment was "somewhat effective" (58%).

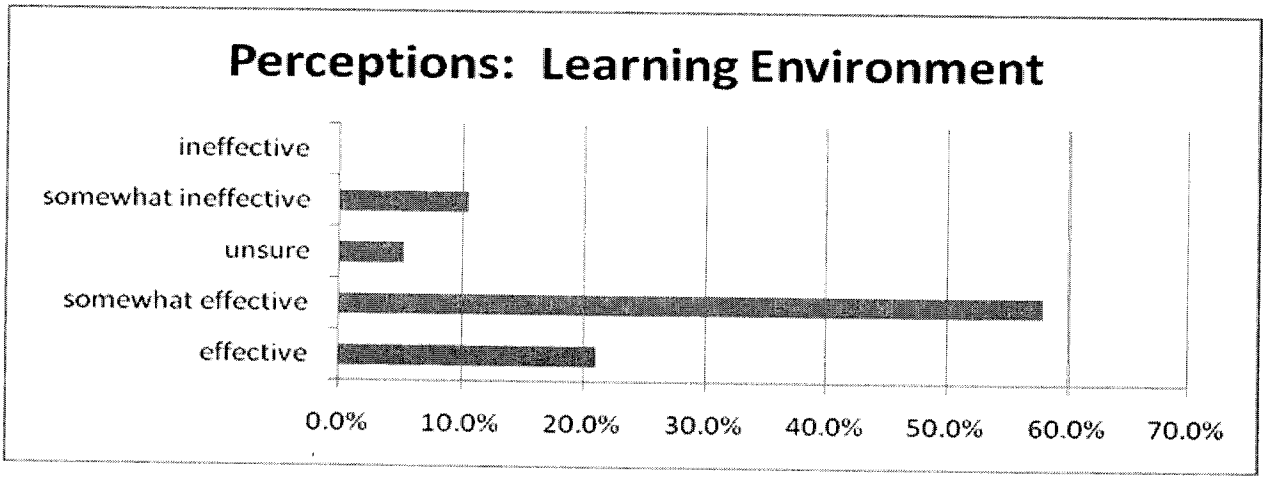


Figure 8: Perceptions of Aspen High Participants Regarding their Learning Environment

When asked how the School Resource Officer affects their students' learning, respondents averaged a 3.89 response on the scale (Figure 9, 10). Again, this indicates respondents thought that School Resource Officers positively affected the school's

learning environment, but not to a great degree. It is important to note here that out of all respondents to the line scale questions at Aspen High, no response was higher than a neutral 5 on the scale (i.e. between 1 and 5), which indicates that no respondent thought the School Resource Officer negatively affected safety, security or their school's learning environment.

*15. How effectively do you feel that students learn when School Resource Officers **are** present, as opposed to when no officer is present?*

Average Response: 3.89

|_____X_____|_____|

much more effectively | no effect | much less effectively

Figure 9: Question 15 Average Response (total number of responses is 18)

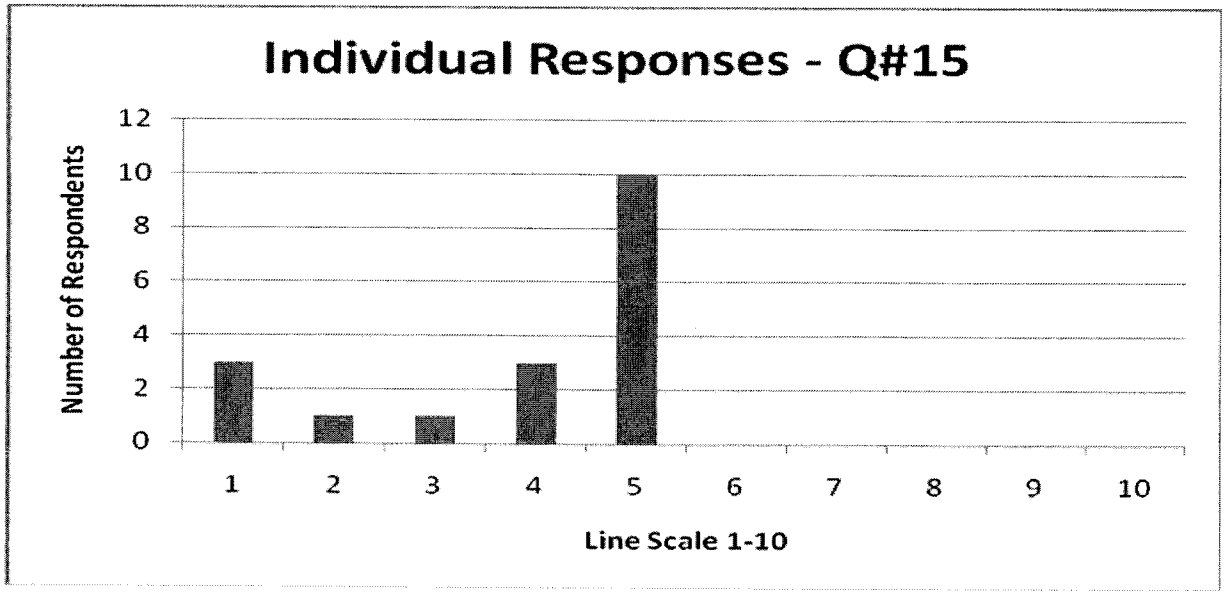


Figure 10: Question 15 Individual Scale Responses (total number of responses is 18)

Participants who answered the written question as to why they chose their ranking regarding effects on their school's learning environment on the scale indicated either that their school was safe and the officer did not really make a difference in that regard, or they thought students did feel safer and more secure with the officer there, and consequently were better able to concentrate on their studies.

When asked during interviews how the School Resource Officer influences the learning environment, the two teachers interviewed indicated that any effects would be seen in the hallways or public school grounds, rather than directly inside the classroom:

> I don't think his presence has an effect on the learning in the classroom. I think it's more in the public space areas, you know? But in terms of actual learning in the classroom, I guess it would translate if there are kids that are upset that have gotten help from him [outside the class]....maybe that would make it better to learn. (T2A)

Open-ended questionnaire responses asking for clarification regarding safety and the school's learning environment re-enforce this point:

> Although the majority of students have good behaviour, the officer has prevented some incidents, which makes the environment safer. A safer environment allows students to focus on learning. (Open-ended response, Aspen High)

Another participant reports:

> I think they [the students] feel safer and secure with an officer on the premises so there is a more positive and relaxed atmosphere in the school, which promotes more effective learning. (Open-ended response, Aspen High)

Perceptions of SROs as Individuals

Although this topic was not included in the interview protocol, one participant at Aspen High noted the importance of the police officer being a good match for the

school, and being someone who wants to make the school his or her priority. This participant commented on the difficulties in dealing with different police officers, and on their School Resource Officer:

> It's hard to deal with different personalities [of officers], especially if they're not very interested in working with teenagers. But obviously he's [our SRO] interested in working with teenagers, right? That's why he was placed in the school, so obviously his attitude is different. He's a great match [for our school]. (T1A)

As also discussed below, the characteristics of officers seemed of great importance to Belair Collegiate's participants as well.

Belair Collegiate

Belair Collegiate did not have a School Resource Officer.

Observing the Police in the School

Even though Belair Collegiate does not have a full time School Resource Officer, teachers reported seeing police officers on the premises when officers were brought in occasionally to deal with more serious criminal offences. This can be noted in Figure 11 from the response to how often participants see police at their school, with 48% saying less than once a month, and 22% saying once a month.

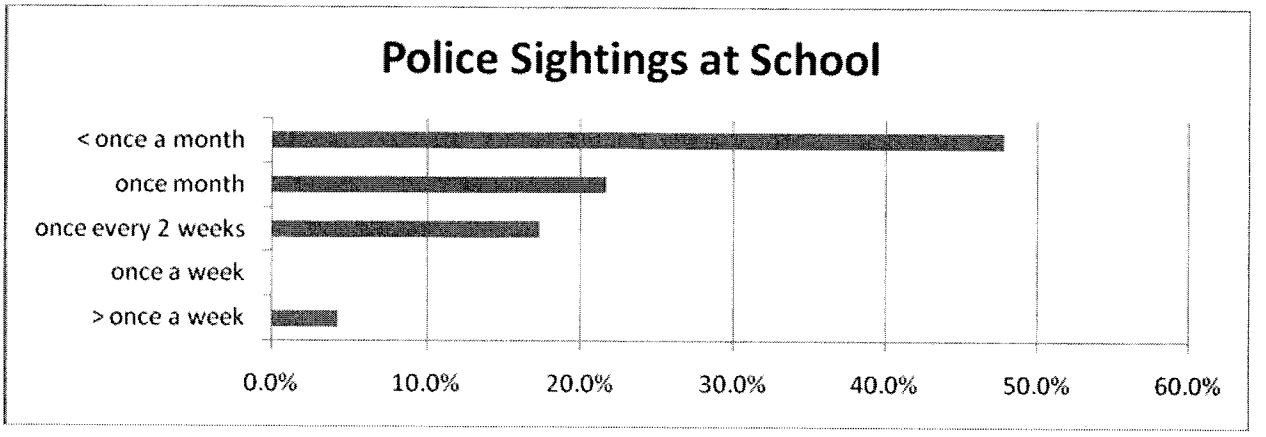


Figure 11: Frequency of Police Sightings at Belair Collegiate

There was an array of responses when asked about the role of police in their school, with "friendly presence" being the top response (43%), followed by a tie between "teacher of law enforcement curriculum (39%) and "other" (39%) (Figure 12). Written responses to explain 'other' in this case all included dealing with criminal offences with officers called into the school on an 'as-needed' basis.

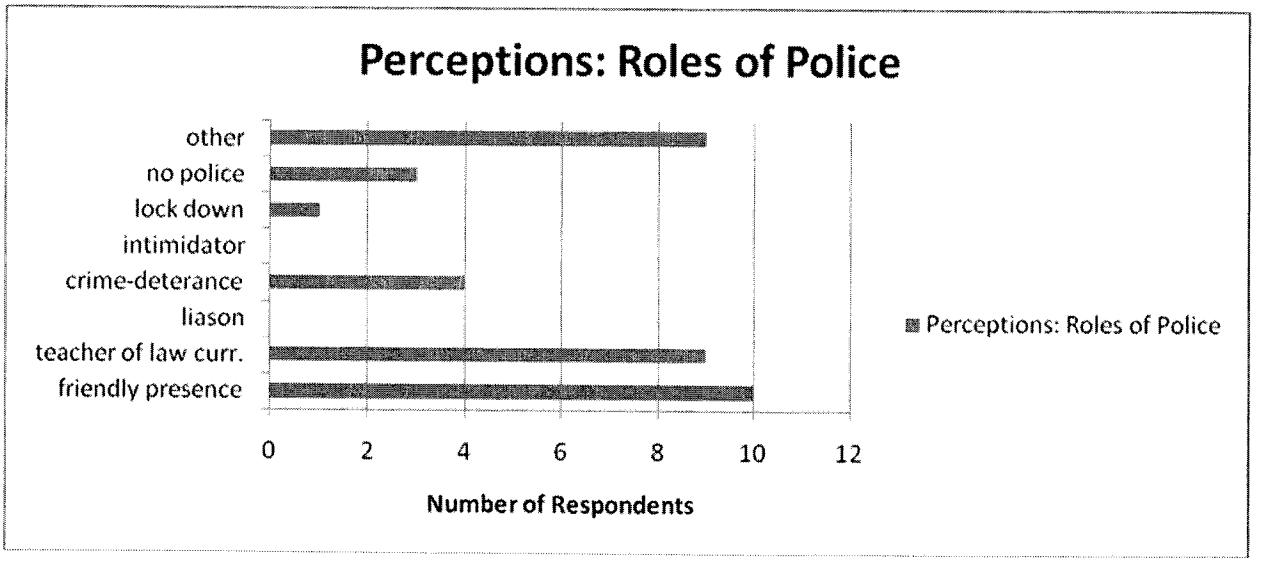


Figure 12: Belair Collegiate Participants' Perceptions of the Roles Police Play in their School

"Other" in this case referred unanimously by those who answered to police being called in to deal with student criminal incidents.

Although Belair Collegiate does not have a School Resource Officer, interview participants noted that the school is next to a police training college, so staff and students see police often nearby the school. They reiterated that officers are called to the school on an 'as-needed' basis, to deal with criminal incidents. The sightings of police officers in the school ranged significantly from seeing them 6 or 7 times in an entire school year, to once every couple of weeks, to one participant who believed the school had some kind of community officer who visited the school every now and then. When told this SRO program existed in other schools in their school board, one participant even expressed shock:

> "I don't think so....in [our city]? Yeah? So...like, they [the police] are in the schools 24/7? Oh, ok....I wasn't aware of that. I didn't think it [a School Resource Officer program] was existing at this point in time. (T3B)

Another participant noted that the police training activities in the field next door to the school are visible from her classroom window, and her students were often fascinated watching the training take place, occasionally breaking their concentration on school work and disrupting class time:

> You see them [the police] training in the...like SWAT tactics and...mounted police on horses in the forest behind us. So...it's crazy when half of my city children have not seen a horse, and they're all out in my portable going, "Oh my God! I've never seen it! Come and look!" But I don't know. I couldn't say whether it [the presence of police next door] does anything, you know what I mean? (T4B)

However, other participants noted that these officers did participate in the school, (though not as frequently as a dedicated School Resource Officer):

> We've had volleyball games with them. We've done community projects with them. So I think...it would affect them [staff and students] in the sense that we have a positive rapport with them [the police] and students might see police in a different way. (T1B)

The officers' sharing in school activities, this teacher felt, clearly did have some effect on the school population.

Perceptions of SRO Effects on Safety

All respondents answered that their school was either very safe (57%) or somewhat safe (43%) (Figure 13).

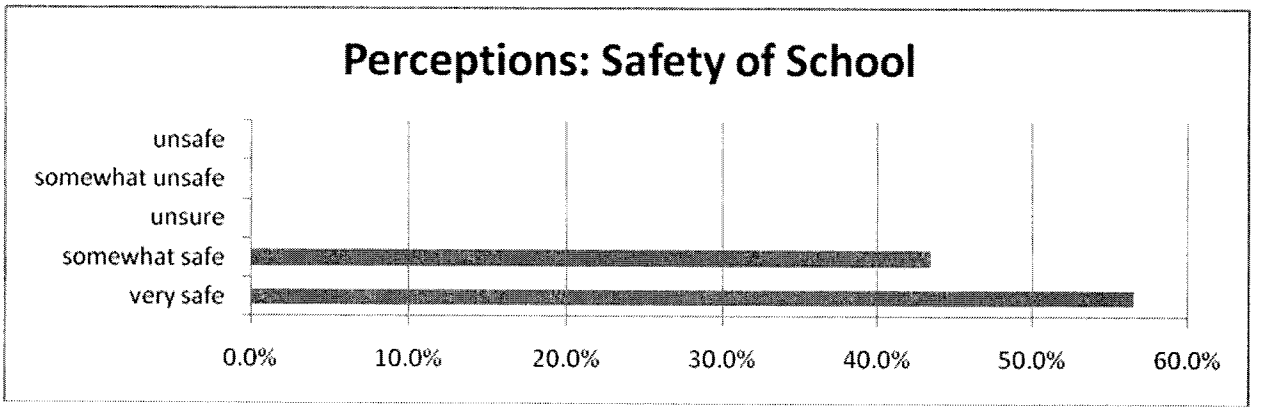


Figure 13: Perceptions of Belair Collegiate Participants Regarding their School's Safety

Belair Collegiate's respondents answered the section of the questionnaire designed for participants who do not have a School Resource Officer. This section asked participants how they thought the presence of a School Resource Officer would affect their school. When asked how much safer their school would be if they had a School Resource Officer present, the average response was 3.7 on the scale, indicating

that respondents thought police presence would have some positive effect on feelings of safety, but not a great effect (Figure 14, 15).

16. How much safer do you think your school environment would be if a School Resource Officer was present in your school, as opposed to if no officer was present?

Average Response: 3.74

|_____X_____|_____|

much safer | no effect | much more unsafe

Figure 14: Question 16 Text and Average Response (the total number of responses is 23)

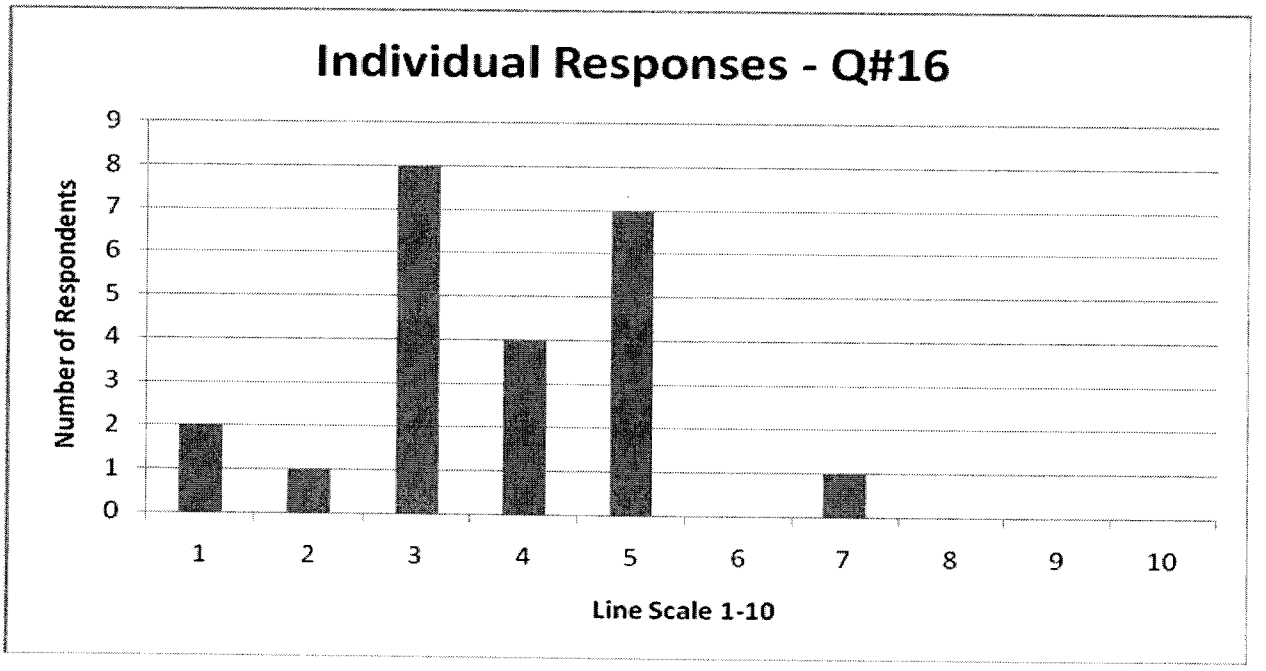


Figure 15: Question 16 Individual Scale Responses

When asked how much more secure respondents would feel in their school if there was a School Resource Officer present, the average was 3.4 on the scale. This also indicates respondents imagine they would feel somewhat more secure, but not to a great degree (Figure 16, 17).

17. Think about how secure you feel generally in your school environment. How secure would you feel in your school environment if a School Resource Officer was present, as opposed to if no officer was present?

Average Response: 3.43

|_____X_____|_____|

much more secure | no effect | much less secure

Figure 16: Question 17 Text and Average Response (the total number of responses is 23)

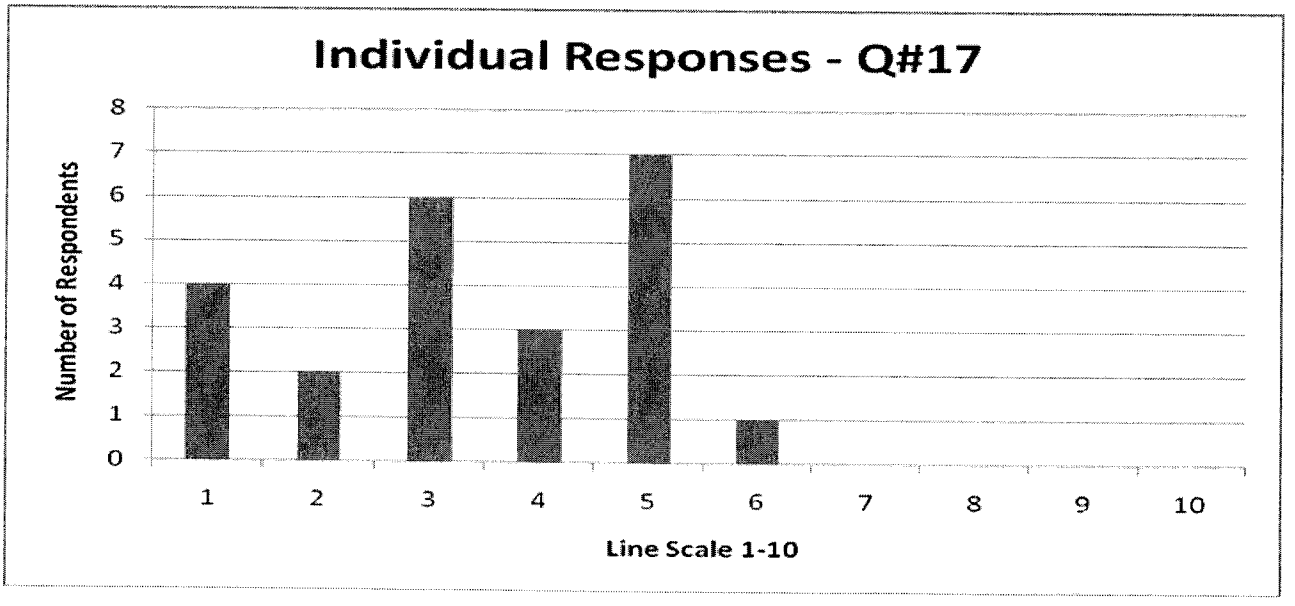


Figure 17: Question 17 Individual Scale Responses

Interview participants gave many different reasons for their feelings of safety, including the small school population (in comparison to other schools, not specifically Aspen High). One participant commented on size, noting, "I think it [the safety of the school] is [due to] the size of the school. I think a smaller school overall – less incidents" (T2B). Other factors mentioned include the full-term school year which allows teachers to get to know students better, strict administration, consistent enforcement of the school rules, and the wearing of uniforms. All these reasons were said to contribute to better behaviour which, in turn, contributed to the overall safety of the school. Teacher 4B illustrates this point:

> I'm pretty happy with the overall safety. [It's because of] our size, and we're full term so you see them [the students] all year, so you have a good chance of getting to know them and people that are around your class and so forth. Like I said, I don't know if I'm naïve, but I feel totally comfortable in my school. (T4B)

Interestingly, this same participant, though initially praising the safety of her school, later in the interview stated instances where she has felt unsafe:

> I've buzzed down [to the office for help] a few times where I've been in jeopardy, more in my first few years, and no one's come. And that feels really crappy, being stranded there with a kid out of control affecting my safety. (T4B)

One participant mentioned the reality of safety concerns in his school and other schools:

> We've had kids who were part of gangs, we've had kids who are dealing drugs. It's in every single school. If anybody thinks there's not a weapon or drugs in their school, I think they're naïve. (T5B)

Despite this comment, this participant also stated he felt safe in his school.

When asked if the presence of a School Resource Officer would have an effect on their feelings of safety, interview participants' answers ranged from an absolute "no", to a very emphatic "yes". Those who answered "yes" thought that, although the majority of students felt at ease during their school day, those students who did feel anxious at school (i.e. those being harassed or bullied) would feel less so with the presence of an officer:

> For those few individuals that may be concerned about something [harassment], I think they would probably feel a bit more at ease that at least, while they're in school, that they're fairly safe [with the presence of an officer]. (T2B)

Those who answered "no" said the current safety of their school was sufficient enough that no presence of a police officer could improve upon it.

Perceptions of SRO Effects on the Learning Environment

As illustrated in Figure 18, the most popular response to describe their school's learning environment was "effective" (65%).

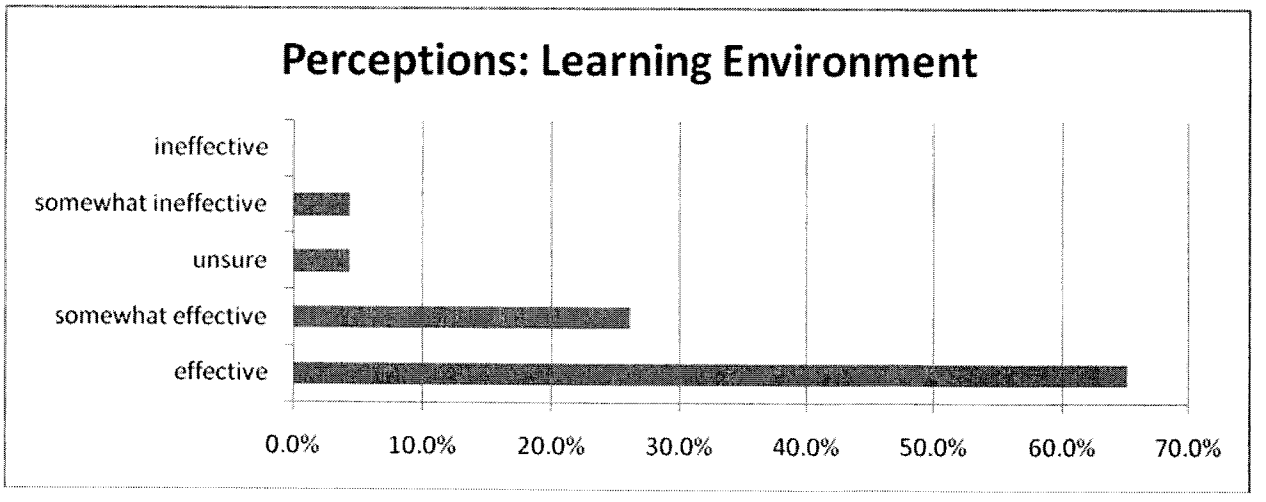
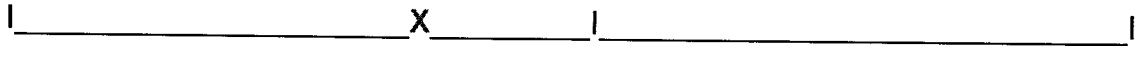


Figure 18: Perceptions of Belair Collegiate Participants Regarding their Learning Environment

When asked if a School Resource Officer would affect their school's learning environment, respondents averaged a 3.9 response on the scale. Again, this indicates that respondents thought that having a School Resource Officer would positively affect the school's learning environment, but not to a great degree (Figure 19, 20). It is important to note here that out of all respondents to the line scale questions from Belair Collegiate, all but one response was lower than a neutral 5 on the scale (i.e. between 1 and 5), which indicates that almost all respondents thought the presence of a School Resource Officer in their school would positively affect safety, security or the school's learning environment.

18. Think about how effectively you feel your students learn on a daily basis. How effectively do you feel that students would learn if a School Resource Officer was present in your school, as opposed to if no officer was present?

Average Response: 3.91



much more effectively | no effect | much less effectively

Figure 19: Question 18 Text and Average Response (the total number of responses is 23)

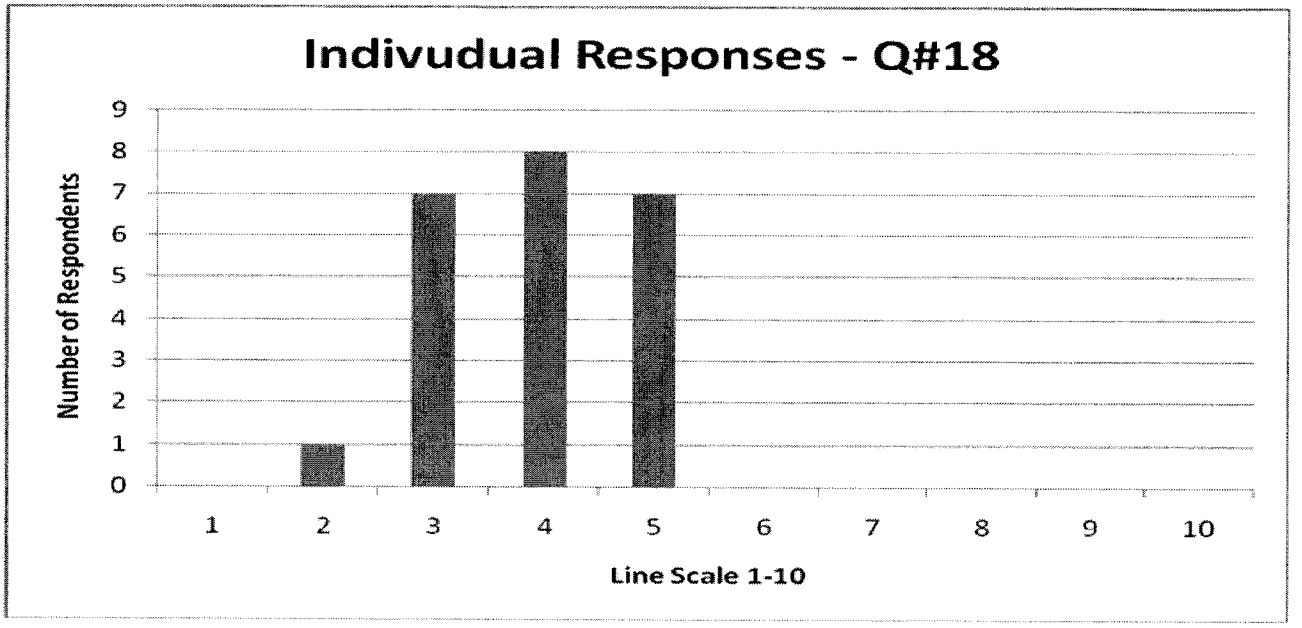


Figure 20: Question 18 Individual Scale Responses

Questionnaire participants who elaborated their answer to Question 18 in a written response indicated that either their school was already safe enough and therefore police presence was not needed, or that police presence would make students generally feel more secure and focused on their schoolwork:

> I feel they [the students] will learn more effectively [in the classroom] because students who are being intimidated in the hallways at school would feel more secure [with a police officer present]. (open-ended response, Belair Collegiate)

Interview participants unanimously agreed that their school's learning environment is effective. Attendance issues and school clubs and activities were mentioned as glitches to effective learning, but overall, participants stated their school's learning environment was generally effective. One participant added that this had something to do with consistency in school rules and the meting out of disciplinary actions by the administration: "It's very effective. The reason it's good at our school is

because [of] a consistent approach [to discipline] and I think it's supported at the administrative level" (T5B)

In general, interview participants believed that a School Resource Officer's effect on the learning environment at the school would be positive, although, like Aspen High, they also noted that most effects would be seen in the hallways and other public areas of the school first, and then consequently be felt the classroom setting. For example, if the officer was present in the hallways and yard to deter harassment and other questionable activities, some students would have less anxiety in general, feel more protected, and be better able to concentrate on their studies inside the classroom. One participant also added that through the officer's interaction with the students, the teachers could in turn learn more about teens in general, their thoughts, feelings, needs, etc,: "You might get fewer kids skipping [and]...there might be a little bit more insight as to what's happening in teenager's lives" (T1B).

Some participants also noted that having officers in the school would also be preventative in that students would perhaps be less likely to sell drugs, skip classes, or get into other types of trouble if they knew they were being monitored by the police. Though the presence of police was viewed as positive inside the school, one participant also noted that the students could not be protected from harassment or other dangers once they leave the school grounds.

Perceptions of SROs as Individuals

Similarly to participants at Aspen High, several participants at Belair Collegiate discussed the type of personality and involvement a School Resource Officer must have to be effective in a school. They stated the school must have the same School

Resource Officer consistently over time in order for that officer to become sufficiently acquainted with the school and for him/her to get to know the students well enough to gain their trust:

> If we had one that only, say, stopped in, you know, twice a semester...I don't think it would change anything. The officer would have to be there every day, and then it would make a difference. (T5B)

The officer's personality was seen as very important by the participants, and it must be of a type that shows interest, caring, and understanding toward teenagers. The officer must be heavily involved in the community around the school, and the school community itself, participating in clubs, sports, and events with the students. These characteristics were seen to positively further the students' views of the officer as both a trusted friend/community figure and authority figure:

> I mean, they [the SROs] have to be hand-picked, right? They have to be the ones that can get right down and talk to the kids and not be intimidating, and, you know, want to establish positive relationships with the kids, you know, some of the kids have a real fear and prejudice about police. (T3B)

The officer's own background must reflect that of the students in order for them to relate to him/her:

> We hope it's someone [an SRO] that represents the ethnicity of our school. To plunk a Caucasian male in my school would not make sense, you know what I mean? I want them [the students] to see someone of their culture who...'cause they probably look at you and don't understand. Like, I'm Italian and half Irish, and I'm with Filipinos, Chinese, black kids, you know what I mean? (T4B)

In addition, the officer must not wear a uniform, as this distances him/her from integration into the school community. One participant noted that the ability for officers to intimidate and control would be detrimental to the success of officers in a school:

> If all I see [as a student] is a uniform, then I can't really approach if I'm, you know, in the midst of something really serious, then why would I ever approach them [the officers]? I'll just keep my distance, and I wouldn't feel comfortable approaching them. I might not want people to see me approach them. It's not like anyone wants it to be a situation you hear about in the States where you're walking through metal detectors and guys are patrolling the halls...and it looks like a jail. (T5B)

In an interesting contrast to the generally positive reaction participants had to SROs in schools, one participant commented on the motives of some officers to take School Resource Officer positions at a school she worked at several years ago when police were just beginning to work in Canadian schools:

> In that other school I did have one. I guess it....I think it [had] something to do with someone wanting to become Sergeant, or moving up or something. I know it did. The initiative was all about that (T3B).

According to participants, a true desire to work with teenagers, an understanding of the students, and a positive attitude would all help to mitigate negative views students might hold toward police officers.

Synopsis

The main themes evident in school personnel's data from both schools deal with SRO observations in the school, perceptions of an SROs effects on safety and the school's learning environment, and perceptions of what personal characteristics

constitute a good SRO. Information was also gathered on Aspen High's SRO program from administrators.

Staff at Aspen High note seeing the police more often in school than those at Belair Collegiate for the obvious reason that Belair Collegiate does not have an SRO. However, participants at Belair Collegiate noted that they still see police now and then at school when police are called in on an as-needed basis for serious offences, and also because of their close proximity to a police training college.

Perceptions of how an SRO does or would affect a school's safety or learning environment were neutral to positive at both schools. All participants felt their schools were already safe, without the addition of an officer. However, SROs and police officers in general were overwhelmingly viewed as positive by participants. Although participants stated their school's learning environments as already effective, personnel at both schools noted that any effect School Resource Officers would have on the learning environment would be in the hallways and school grounds, and would by extension positively affect the classroom's learning environment.

Participants at both schools volunteered the characteristics that they felt a good SRO possesses. These included a willingness to work with teenagers, a caring and kind personality, an interest in being involved in school activities, and if possible, an ethnic background that closely matched the students' ethnic backgrounds.

The following section will consider the perceptions of 'others' - that is, school personnel's perceptions of the opinions of students and the outside community, as well as media accounts of police in schools.

Section 2: Others' Perceptions of Police (including SROs)

Although participants at both schools felt their school was safe, they also discussed some of the negative perceptions they felt the students, as well as the outside community, had towards schools with SROs. These perceptions from each school will be discussed in turn.

Aspen High

Community Perceptions of Police (as Perceived by School Personnel)

Interestingly, the two teachers interviewed made a point of indicating that although having a School Resource Officer in the school was a positive addition, they felt the school's reputation as observed by the outside community was affected in a negative way by the police presence. They indicated that they felt the public's view of their school was affected by negative media reports and there was a fear within the school community that the school would (or already has) become unfairly labeled as "high risk":

> The publicity and the media around it [stories of police in schools] have to make it clear that they're not placed at a particular school because there are issues or problems at that school. And that's, I think, a misconception. You know, oh, they have a police officer there. Well, you know, we didn't have any choice about having an officer here or not. In a recent newspaper is, oh, you know, they're placed at high needs schools or high risk areas, and that's not true" (T2A)

Another participant concurred, reporting that "people are pretty prejudiced against the program because they think the police officers are there because the school is in trouble, and it's a shame that they see it that way" (T1A).

For those teachers who were used to seeing their School Resource Officer at Aspen High, they questioned the need for an officer, quickly defending their school's reputation against other schools in their community, as though having police placed there had been seen as a negative. As one participant at Aspen High notes:

> We were surprised we were going to be one of the schools where the police officers were going to be assigned because there was [sic] a few schools in the area and, you know....'cause they're all....why us, you know? (T1A)

Despite claiming positive results from the presence a School Resource Officer, another participant defends her Aspen Highs not needing an officer:

> I think it's a positive step. I'm not sure that we were one of the higher needs schools in terms of, you know, level of violence or level of gang activity, or level of drugs...but I think it's a good step. (T2A)

Students' Perceptions of Police (as Perceived by School Personnel)

One participant from Aspen High also briefly noted her own perceptions of negative student attitudes toward police. She noted some of the reasons why she felt the students' perceived negative view exists:

> That connection [with the police] is important, especially for some of the kids who are more disadvantaged. They'll have a very negative view of the police because of past experiences, you know, at home or whatever. (T1A)

Although the participants commented positively overall towards the presence of an officer, there was clearly some concern about their school gaining a negative reputation from the perceptions of the outside community and students.

Belair Collegiate

Community Perceptions of Police (as Perceived by School Personnel)

Similarly to Aspen High, many participants at Belair Collegiate pointed out the negative perceptions they felt the outside community has of a school that has an SRO. They mentioned that a school becomes labeled as 'high risk' or 'dangerous' by the public and the media when it is revealed that the school has police presence. One participant illustrated this point when recalling working at a school that had a School Resource Officer in previous years:

> The school was already seen as a microcosm of the community...you know, they've got higher crime....You know, it just...it gave the impression on the outside that, oh my God, this [the school] has got to be a really bad place, that this is even worse that we thought, you know? Unfortunately, from the outside, people [think], 'Oh my God, that school's that bad – you have to have a police officer full time?' (T3B)

Another participant noted the negative view he had of seeing police called to his school, and the appearance of their presence to the outside community:

> For me, I guess, as a teacher, it's disappointing [to see police at school] because I know that something's happened. I guess it just sends a message that, you know, there's...not very good things happening [at our school]. (T2B)

In a mirroring of their thoughts on community perceptions, participants themselves reluctantly admitted to wondering about the reputation and climate of a school, in their community or otherwise, when they discovered it has police presence:

> I suppose when I see/hear the officer in a school, I wonder why they need an officer there? Then I start to question the climate of the school, not so much in terms of the learning environment, but more so in the sense of how safe it is for students. (T1B)

Participants felt the perceptions of those who were on the outside of the school looking in (as opposed to those directly involved in the school) were very negative - not towards the police officers, but towards the school itself.

Students' Perceptions of Police (as Perceived by School Personnel)

Participants also reported they had heard that students have a very negative view of officers. One participant reported that, "some of the kids have a real fear and prejudice about police...they're pigs, or whatever"(T3B) and another added that the presence of police in school might help rid them of this attitude:

> I think an added presence is always good, but what I think it would help is with their [the students'] perception of police, 'cause I have discussions with my kids and they're so against police officers, and they're just out to get us, and stuff.... totally negative on all they see, and obviously [repeating] stereotypes and stories passed on. (T4B)

This same teacher recalled her own experiences in school, stating:

> I had police officers in my school in high school and they were great. They would run basketball programs after school , but they were still...had that friendly rapport with staff, but they know maybe where to draw the line...but I never had this negativity towards police officers as they [the students] do. (T4B)

In addition, participants at Belair Collegiate reported that they felt that some students not only have their own personal negative view of the police, but also tend to look negatively upon other schools that have police officers:

> I hear the kids talk when I speak with them. They say, "Oh, did you know that that school has a police officer? Do you know that school...?" And so they...that school's dangerous. That's what they figure [and] that's what I've been told by the kids. (T2B)

Though students were not studied in this project, teachers and staff were clearly concerned over the students' attitudes toward the police.

Canadian Media Accounts of School Violence and School Police

The media in Canada appears to do little to quell public fear of a rise in school crime. Sensationalism sells, and repetitive media reports on the topic of school violence seem to aid in augmenting the public's false perception of a heightened school crime rate. Across the country, reports focus on incidences of violence, the fearful responses of citizens, and perceived reasons why schools need more police. For example, this tendency to sensationalize stories can be seen with the fatal shooting of a student at a high school in Toronto in May of 2007. The Toronto Star reported this story as its front page headline for 10 out of the 30 days immediately following the shooting (archive search of Toronto Star). In addition, The Toronto Star devoted additional attention to the incident - the grieving of the victim's friends and family, and concern over school violence - with as many as 5 extra news stories throughout the paper per day (in addition to the headline stories) in the month following the shooting (archive search of Toronto Star). The stories' headlines alone were further punctuated with dramatic language to capture the shocked public's attention, with descriptions of children "weeping" in their classrooms, police "roam[ing] the halls with guns and sledgehammers, searching for a killer", and witnesses who pleaded "'Don't die. Stay awake, Jordan'" to the victim ("In a grim first for Toronto, a boy is gunned down inside his school; Inside, students were locked in their classrooms for hours, some weeping, as police roamed the halls with guns and sledgehammers, searching for a killer", 2007, "'Don't die Jordan,' best friend pleaded; Furious mother of slain teenager asks why no

one will let her see son's body", 2007). Indeed, this kind of news story is one that would genuinely interest the public, especially parents, teachers, and others who deal daily with children, and the media surely has a right to report on the high profile events that affect society. However, while this repetitive reporting and use of dramatic language captures the attention and emotions of the public, it also falsely influences their perceptions of the amount or severity of crime in their city's schools.

The public's increased fear due to this incident prompted the organization of a police in schools program in Toronto schools ("50 Toronto high schools to have police presence," 2009). Media reports on violence in schools in the two years after this incident portray this city's schools as frightening places for children, reporting to the public that shockingly, there are even more "unpublicized cases" of violence in schools, and asking readers to wonder if "we should be startled that so many of our children accept violence, sexual harassment, bullying, threats, guns hidden in lockers, numerous knives as part of everyday life?" ("The changing face of innocence," 2008, "Schools fail because we have failed," 2008). Several stories focus on a report by the School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008), an independent report that paints a startling and upsetting picture of the city's school violence levels (Falconer, MacKinnon, Edwards, 2008). This report does list many violent incidences. However, upon closer inspection of the report's "Table of Violent Incidences" over a 2-year period, one sees that included are events such as students bringing replica handguns to school, prank calls, and other incidences that ended in neither discipline/arrests of the culprits, nor resulted in any student being injured or killed (Falconer, MacKinnon, Edwards, 2008, Appendix D). It is important to point out that someone reading a brief media piece that

reports the number of violent events in numerical form only (for example, "100 incidences", as opposed to giving specific details) would not likely take the time to read the entire, full-length source of this information to decide for themselves which incidences actually resulted in physical or emotional harm.

At the same time, contradictory (and significantly fewer, it seems) reports emerge from police and school sources, reassuring the Canadian public that schools are already safe, and that police placed in schools are making them even safer. One media report in Nova Scotia focuses on the positives of a new police officer in school, stating that "[she] is not at the school because [of] criminal activity", rather, that the officer is there to "enhance the safety and security and to have a positive learning environment" ("Constable aims to make high school safe," 2007). The reader has to question why an already safe school needs police to enhance safety and security. Similarly, the Toronto Star (2009) reports that because of increased police in schools, "now our schools are very safe" ("Police in high schools lead to lower crime: chief," 2009). Ironically, even the day after a school stabbing death in Calgary, the media released a story quoting the school superintendant who reassured the public that, "the city's schools are safe, despite the stabbing death" ("Schools safe says superintendant," 2000). While the negative reports on violent incidences in schools appears to increase, the attitude toward police is very positive.

Yet, to add to the confusing and contradictory debate over safety, media all over the country report a call for more police in schools, perhaps a response to violent incidences in larger cities. CBC News in Calgary reports a call for more provincial funding to recruit new police officers for the sole purpose of placing more officers in

schools ("New officers would permit more police in schools, says chief," 2008). This, according to the report, would be a welcome addition to one school that had recently erected "a two-meter iron fence" for security purposes around the school's perimeter ("New officers would permit more police in schools, says chief," 2008). Even smaller cities like Charlottetown, P.E.I. call for more police in one of their high schools because of "students loitering in a nearby church parking lot, and...reports of some of them [doing] drugs" ("Charlottetown school needs police: councilor," 2008). This report does not even focus on illegal activity inside the school, or even on school grounds. It is easy to see how such reports could instill a heightened sense of fear in parents, and the community as a whole, especially given the intense and prolonged focus of the media on exceedingly rare, but shocking events such as school shootings.

And yet, with the added push to put police in schools, media stories surface that report how parents and members of the community continue to voice protests over the placement of police officers in schools. One report in the Globe and Mail (2009) notes that, "parents mounted a campaign [at one school] to block the arrival of a police resource officer, [saying] their children felt school was a place where they should be safe from police harassment, not subject to further scrutiny" ("Teen's arrest in Toronto high-school hallway sparks debate about police program", 2009). Ironically, the article states a student had shouted an insult at the School Resource Officer, and been later arrested for not cooperating with the officer, thus bringing media attention to the school and its SRO program. Another report states that though the city's School Resource Officer program had such positive results that it has recently been expanded, "some [still] doubt the effectiveness, and appropriateness, of posting uniformed officers with

sidearms in public schools, [and are] concern[ed] over the stigma it would cause" ("More police in schools, more debate", 2009). Though media reports over concerns or protesting of police in schools exist, they are not nearly as plentiful as those citing the positive aspects of having police in schools.

While the news reports on a few violent, but rare, events in schools in the last few years seem sensationalized (and often generalized to include all schools as potential targets for youth crime), the perceptions of police officers appears generally positive in the media. They are portrayed as solutions to bad behaviour and school crime, as well as simultaneously being "proactive [and] build[ing] healthy and trusting relationships [with the students]" ("27 Toronto schools to get armed police presence", 2008). The message given generally is that police in schools are a very positive solution to a very negative problem, and that the benefits of having police in schools goes far beyond crime fighting.

Relating Perceptions of School Personnel to Perceptions of "Others"

Perceptions of police by others (the media, and students and the outside community as perceived by school personnel) vary in their agreement or discord with school personnel perceptions in Section 1 of this chapter. While the perceptions school personnel have of police officers is overwhelmingly positive, those same staff feel that students and the outside community have negative perceptions of police in schools. One marked difference between the school personnel's opinions about the perceptions these two groups have is that they feel students focus their negative attitudes directly at the police officers themselves, while they feel the outside community has negative perceptions of the school as a whole, not of the actual School Resource Officer.

While the media casts a generally positive light on the presence of police in schools, there does exist some information on protests and debate on this issue. However, the media seems to have the same general opinion as school personnel - police officers in schools are helpful, constructive, and effective in curbing further school crime. Though the media repeatedly reports on sensational violent events in schools, and how police are put in schools to help alleviate these problems, students (according to school staff's opinions) do not feel as positively about police. In addition, while those on the inside of the school (e.g. teachers and staff) have a positive view of School Resource Officers and his/her potential to positively affect the school, the outside community (according to school staff) form negative impressions of a school that has police present. Finally, while school personnel feel the officers have helpful effects specifically on the school's safety and learning environment, clearly neither the students' nor the community's pessimistic perceptions (according to school personnel) lend themselves to believing that police in schools create safer environments with more effective learning.

Review of Chapter 3

Section 1 of this chapter discussed the perceptions of school staff, while Section 2 noted the perceptions of students and the community (as perceived by school staff), as well as the media's portrayal of violence and police in Canadian schools. As noted in Section 1, school staff at both Aspen High and Belair Collegiate viewed police presence, and specifically School Resource Officers, as a positive addition to a school. While personnel from both schools felt their schools were already safe and effective for learning, they generally felt the presence of an officer was a definite bonus for the

school. Personnel at these schools also agreed on the appropriate individual characteristics (such as personality and ethnic background) of a School Resource Officer.

In Section 2, school personnel's perceptions seemed to coincide with the general outlook of the media towards police presence in schools. School staff's perceptions of the students' and the outside community's opinions, however, contradicted this positive view. Whereas students were seen as having a negative attitude towards police officers, the outside community was seen as having a negative attitude toward any school with police. While school personnel viewed police as potentially benefitting a school's safety and learning environment, students and the outside community (in the opinions of school staff) did now share this optimistic view.

In the next chapter, these findings will be compared to the academic literature available on police in schools. In addition, the findings will be discussed in relation to the theories of Michel Foucault.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and other school staff's perceptions of the effects of SRO presence in Canadian schools, and to compare these findings with other popular or critical perceptions regarding police in schools. The abundance of media attention given to police in schools in Canada makes this a timely and important subject for research.

Despite the methodological challenges encountered in conducting this study (see Chapter 2), questionnaires had a response rate of 31%, and I obtained 7 out of the 10 interviews I hoped to gain. The response rate was greatly affected by the timing of the study at the busy end of a school year. Nonetheless, a close analysis of the data presents a variety of interesting themes/topics for discussion. Access was given to one school with a School Resource Officer, and one without. It is important to note that even though this study focuses on teachers' perceptions, the participants often had much to say about how they thought students viewed police presence.

Limitations of the Study

In an exploratory study of such small proportions, it is important that the reader be aware of its limitations that can and do affect the data outcomes. This study focuses on the perceptions of teachers and staff, and did not explicitly examine other, wider factors such as socio-economic status, racial and/or religious backgrounds as having an impact on school safety or perceptions of safety. In focusing only on teachers and staff, this study does not address the thoughts of students and their perceived feelings on the police-school relationship. Gathering students' opinions in a further study would, no doubt, add scope and breadth of understanding to this phenomenon.

Sample size was very small in this study and therefore, while this study attempted to gain a better insight into police presence in Canadian schools and, in particular, school populations in an urban center, it is not intended to gain an overall assessment of all schools in Canada in all settings. In particular, many more questionnaires and interviews resulted from Belair Collegiate than from Aspen High. While many factors could affect response rate in a study, in this instance the low response rate was certainly due in part to the fact that another police study was occurring at Aspen High. One of the conditions of this thesis study going forward at Aspen High (as required by the school board's ethics department for approval) was that people participating in the other police study could not also participate in this study. This greatly limited the number of potential respondents from Aspen High's staff even before my questionnaires arrived at the school. In addition, another condition of the board allowing me to do this study was cutting my number of desired respondents by one third to try to lessen the time demands on their teachers and staff. These factors, combined with the timing of the study at the busy end of a school year all contributed to a less than ideal sample size and consequently, there is no statistical reliability to these findings and conclusions cannot be generalized.

This study would have benefitted from a wider range of participants. A great percentage of participants in this study were of the same demographic – European descent, ages between 40-59, and teaching for more than 10 years. This resulted in a very homogenous group, which was not expected at all, especially given Canada's multicultural population in large urban cities. It is possible that the schools involved had a large number of staff of European descent, or perhaps employees with more

experience felt more comfortable taking the time during school hours to participate. It is also possible that staff of other ethnic origins did not feel as comfortable participating in a study about police as those of European descent. Whatever the reasons behind the homogenous group of participants, this study has the potential to find many differences in perceptions and opinions with participants of varying backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities.

Perhaps the largest limitation of this study was the need to remove all my original questions pertaining to lock down situations in my questionnaire and interviews due to the unavailability of qualified participants. Having these questions in this study would have given me double the data to work with, as well as many more perceptions, issues to compare between schools, and insight into the effects of the different roles police play in schools. Most importantly, it would have added the element of the 'fear factor' experienced by teachers during lock downs which surely would have resulted in much different perceptions and ideas about police.

Regardless of these limitations, the data collected here illustrate some interesting findings, and is nonetheless sufficient for this thesis.

Placing School Resource Officers

A protocol document dealing with police in schools by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2003) notes that, "in addition to responding to and investigating school-related incidents, police are essential partners in the prevention of crime and violence" (p. 3). However, information obtained from employees in the school board studied show police being placed in schools largely because of administrative or political factors, not to solve or prevent crimes.

According to a media report in 2008 in a large urban Canadian center, an official involved with the inauguration of a school-police initiative states the police will be placed in, "schools who have the highest suspension rate and highest crime rate" ("Police stationed in [name confidential] schools to remain armed, in uniform: chief," 2008). But the plight of high-risk schools notwithstanding, the data gathered from administrators on why officers are placed in certain schools clearly show reasons other than school crime. As noted by administrators in Aspen High's data, police were placed in schools where the initiative was most likely to succeed. Clearly, this initiative has more hope of a good reception and success rate in a well established, middle to upper class community like Aspen High's community. In addition, as previous noted, Aspen High already has a student program where students work positively with the police on a regular basis. What better place to begin a School Resource Officer program than at a school with students who are already friendly with the police? This is one more reason to guarantee a positive reception, officer acceptance in the school, and a general program success story to relate to the public .

It also appears that the information given to the media on this topic was not always the full story. Perhaps being tough on crime is what the public wants to hear to quell their fears of their perception of a rise in school violence. It is possible that they do not want to hear that schools are chosen to receive School Resource Officers based on administrative requirements like a free office and computer, or probability of positive program reception and success. It could be a more important agenda for the public to perceive success of the police program, than for the crime in problem schools to be dealt with in reality. Indeed, the school staff themselves expressed confusion as to why

officers are placed at their schools and not other 'high risk' locations, asserting that their schools are already safe. This begs the question - is the goal of this program to actually address problems in schools, or is the goal to create a successful initiative incapable of failing that gives a sense of security to concerned citizens?

As noted in Chapter 3, Aspen High is not hosting a School Resource Officer for the 2009-2010 school year. This shifting of the SRO from Aspen High after just one year makes it difficult to measure the value of the officer for that year, and impossible to measure his/her value over multiple years in the same environment. This quick shift makes it impossible to measure any change in school or community crime rates over several school years, or any trends or changes in attitudes toward police in the school due to the officer's presence. It appears from the data as though the success and public's acceptance of the program was the drive behind which school was chosen to receive an officer. If the program's target, according to statements in the media, were schools that were high risk and suspect, then why not begin the program in those schools? Why not test the success of the partnership between schools and the police in those schools that desperately need that attention? It appears only logical that initiating a program in an environment that truly needs the program will be the only way to fairly measure its success.

Comparative Perceptions - Agreements and Conflicts

As noted in Chapter 3, school staff at both schools agreed on most topics concerning safety and SROs. The following section will discuss their agreements, some conflicting opinions, give an analysis at the close of each topic on the root of these

perceptions, and then relate these perceptions to those of students and the outside community, as well as to the opinions expressed in the media.

Agreements Between Schools

Safety and SROs

One main topic participants seemed to agree on was the extent to which an SROs presence affects perceptions of safety on the school premises. School staff at both schools agreed that an officer's general presence is beneficial to perceptions of safety - on school grounds, in the hallways, and in the classroom learning environment.

Staff also indicated that the SRO did not have to be present in all these places for heightened safety to be perceived. In fact, the data collected in this study seem to indicate that the knowledge that police are present in the school positively affects participants' perceptions of their safety even when they cannot physically see the officer. Participants mentioned that they felt safe in the school, even though they may or may not see an officer, nor even know if the officer is present on any given day. They simply know in the back of their minds that they have a School Resource Officer on the premises most of the time. It appears from this data that just as a perception of higher crime makes people more fearful, the perception of higher security makes teachers feel they are safe. One does not have to actually witness a robbery in progress to be wary about the crime in a certain community, and clearly, teachers and staff do not have to physically see the police officer each day for his/her presence to help make them feel more secure. As will be discussed in the section on Foucault at the end of this chapter, this 'blind' perception of safety may in part be due to the fact that teachers are aware of the additional observation provided by the SRO, and how the implications of that

observation on school safety make them feel inherently more secure without physically seeing an officer. This also raises puzzling implications for policy: To make a school population feel safe, is it enough just to have the *perception* that there are police officers on the school premises?

Participants at both schools also unanimously stated that they consider their schools to be safe. Data gathered from Aspen High and Belair Collegiate reveal a number of factors that teachers and staff agree contribute to the perceptions of safety, including good student behaviour, consistency in rules by the administration, and wearing uniforms. However, the most frequently mentioned factor in feelings of safety and security was the small size of the schools. This is one area where participant perceptions supported those in the academic literature (see Comparisons of Perceptions to that of Scholarly Literature section below). While the benefits of small schools in teachers' and staff's perceptions of safety are numerous, the issue to note here does not have to do with what participants reported, but what they *didn't* report. Ironically, although this questionnaire and interview protocol inquired about police in schools, not one participant in Aspen High, when asked why their school is safe, cited the presence of their School Resource Officer as a factor. Similarly, not one participant in Belair Collegiate noted a desire for a more frequent police presence in their Aspen Highs potentially adding to its safety. However, participants also made a note of reporting instances where they felt unsafe. It appears from these findings that participants had sufficient knowledge about the amount of violence in their schools, but the addition of police did not seem to be of major concern.

So why, then, if some teachers have had concrete instances of feeling unsafe, of facing violence in their school, do they report their schools being completely safe? Surely if participants have experienced times being uncertain of their own security, many other teachers and staff have also felt this way? Yet, overwhelmingly, the perception of safety in these schools was positive. The nature of Canadian culture affects perceptions of safety. As Jull (1996) states, "fundamental Canadian values [are] peace, order, and respect for all diversity. [These] are understood by the Canadian public to be the fundamental framework of safe and caring schools and a just society" (p. 2). It is possible that rather than concentrating on the negative, such as violence and the risks of unpredictable teenage behaviour that can happen in school, many Canadian teachers inherently choose to focus on the positive, to defend their schools and students, and to view isolated violent incidents as separate from their everyday lives at school. Throughout this study, participants generally viewed their school environments with pride, as a place they strive each day to make pleasant and safe for their students. Their main agendas of protecting and defending their schools may account for why their perceptions of safety are so total, and why they downplay times when they felt less than safe. They may have also felt uncomfortable admitting cases of fear, when they work so diligently to create a favourable environment for learning.

Surely each person's definition of 'safety' is different, depending on his or her community, school, and student population. Clearly, violent incidents occur in Canadian schools, and even in these participants' schools. However, it appears that the preferred method of dealing with these incidents does not include the tremendous focus on authority and control that is often the case in U.S. schools.

Suspicions about Police in Schools

Oddly, teachers and staff at both schools often agreed on their suspicions about school with police. These suspicions were not toward the police themselves, but towards the circumstances/climate of schools that seemingly "needed" police. The participants' viewpoints were twofold: the first was their suspicion about a school's climate upon discovery of police presence, and the second was their confusion as to why a police officer was placed at their own school. Participants at Aspen High expressed bewilderment at why their school, which was already safe according to them, had been graced with the presence of a School Resource Officer. In addition, despite many teachers from Belair Collegiate noting its location beside the police training facility, and how these police have also contributed to the school community by participating in school BBQs and sports, they still held these suspicious views towards police presence at their own school, and at other schools.

No matter which situation teachers are in, these findings from participants at both Aspen High and Belair Collegiate indicate a pre-existing perception of the roles police play in society. That is, rather than viewing officers as a proactive step to creating a beneficial liaison between students, the police, and the school (as well as preventing crime), participants in this study seem to believe that police presence is reactive, an indication of something negative that has already happened. Participants therefore exhibited a dichotomy in their outlook toward police, accepting having police involvement in schools, but with the attitude of "well, we have an officer, and he/she is very good for our school…but I still don't know why we need one."

It is interesting to speculate as to why these contradictory perceptions exist. Participants seem to have a fear of their school's gaining a bad reputation with parents and the general public because of the officers, and there also seems to be just a natural need for teachers and staff to be loyal and defend their school's climate, reassuring themselves (and a guest researcher) of their part in creating and maintaining a good environment for students. Why are there such pre-conceived negative views about police and officers' roles in the community? There may be a lack of information given to the general public about tasks police officers can have other than the roles of crime-fighters repeatedly portrayed in the news and other popular media. If the public is given the image of the typical police officer as the "'rough and tumble' cop on the beat", then this is the image they will associate with police the majority of the time, unless otherwise informed by the government, or community organizations, or by the police themselves. In any case, the impression of police presence in schools as reactive to the negative rather than proactive for the positive seems to be difficult to change.

Individual Characteristics of SROs

Finally, school staff agreed on the varying characteristics needed for a police officer to become a good SRO. Though this topic was not included in the questionnaire or interview protocol for this study, it is nonetheless one that surfaced repeatedly during the interview discussions of the school-police relationship. Teachers and staff at both schools were adamant about the traits an appropriate officer would have to have to be an effective School Resource Officer. That is, officers should want to work with teenagers, be supportive, kind, and understanding, become involved in the school community and have a vested interest in their role in the school. Positivity with a focus

on the students, as well as the ability to relate to an ethnically diverse school population, appears to be essential qualities in an officer in order for a school and its students to receive optimum benefit from his/her presence. Clearly, it's not only the fact of physically having police in a school that makes a difference, but the kind of police. More importantly, when intimidation is not the focus of police in schools, then it appears to become much more complicated to find someone with a suitable personality, attitude and dedication, who can relate to an ethnically diverse student population.

Without a doubt, dealing with teenagers is not always an easy job, but as the police-school relationship has progressed, those involved have discovered what qualities of an officer work best with the students. Indeed, the subject of ideal SRO characteristics would benefit from future research to facilitate the determination of which officers are best suited to work with students, and what personality characteristics, backgrounds, etc. would make the best match with different school populations.

Conflicting Perceptions Between Schools

Despite Aspen High having an SRO, and Belair Collegiate being without an SRO, very little conflict is evident in the perceptions of safety or SROs between these two schools. Perceptions of safety and of the school's learning environment as related to SROs were overwhelmingly reported with responses between neutral (no effect) and some positive effect. Marginally, more people at Aspen High said they felt "very safe" as opposed to "somewhat safe" at Belair Collegiate (an average safety perception of 3.3 on the linear scale given, as opposed to an average safety perception of 3.7 from Belair Collegiate). However, given the variety of reasons participants gave for why their

schools were safe in the first place, it is inconclusive if the elevated perception of safety at Aspen High are due to having an officer in the school.

One conflict to note were the roles of police in schools identified by participants. Participants at Aspen High cited 'intimidator' and 'liaison between teachers and students', whereas nobody at Belair Collegiate chose these as roles for police, and instead were more likely to choose 'friendly presence' or 'other' (which they clarified in an open-ended response to mean when police are called in to deal with individual problems on an 'as-needs' basis). While the main role chosen by those at Aspen High was 'friendly presence', it is interesting to hypothesize why 'intimidator' and 'liaison' roles never occurred to Belair Collegiate participants as viable roles in the school. Given the Canadian culture's preference for peaceful alternatives for dealing with adverse situations, it is possible that police in Canada are not seen to be as authoritarian and forceful as those in the U.S. 'Liaison' could be missing from Belair Collegiate's answers because of a lack of information about what school police actually do. In fact, some participants at Belair Collegiate seemed completely unaware that a School Resource Officer program even existed in other schools in their board.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2003) states that "at the root of effective police-school partnerships is a common understanding of each partner's roles and responsibilities" (p. 3). Certainly, when teachers are unaware of the program as a whole, they will certainly be unaware of the roles police can play in schools, and their perceptions of those participants in schools with police may differ. Informing teachers and staff about initiatives throughout the board, as well as informing them of the different tasks and responsibilities police can have in a school could very well have an

effect on their perceptions of safety in their school and perceptions of the police-school relationship in general.

Perceptions of Students, the Community, and Media as Compared to Those of School Personnel

Schools and school boards reiterate that police are in schools for the purpose of being a positive influence on the students and school environment. The data gathered from teachers and staff indicated that while these positive aspects were recognized as the purpose of the school-police relationship, participants felt that students and the community often harbored negative attitudes toward the presence of police in schools.

Students

Participants gave many of their own perceptions of how students' view the police in a negative light, a stark contrast to their own positive perceptions. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 3, teacher T4B discussed her perceptions of her students' negative attitudes toward the police (based on what she had heard), and also recalled her own positive attitude toward police when she was in high school. She questioned why the attitudes she hears from students today are not as positive as when she was younger. This teacher stated that her background was Italian and Irish. It is entirely possible that her childhood experiences differed greatly from that of ethnic minority students, or those of lower socio-economic status, or limited educational background, which would have given her a different overall perception in her youth of the police than her students' perceptions. However, it is worthwhile noting the difference in attitudes of teachers and perceived attitudes of students to consider the questions it presents. From what teachers hear at school, are students' attitudes toward the police generally more

negative today than in previous generations? If, in fact, students truly harbour the negative perceptions their teachers indicate, are these perceptions affected not only through personal interaction with them outside the school, but also through rumours and hearsay?

Hopkins (1994) notes, "the relationship between young people and the police is often poor and one of misunderstanding" (p. 189). Why could students have a negative impression of police? Teenagers are not always focused on understanding the underlying purpose of authority figures, such as police. They may simply feel that their freedom is threatened by the presence of an SRO, that they are being subjected to excessive observation in order to control their behaviour (to be discussed in the Foucault section at the end of this chapter), or may equate their officer with ones they have seen in television or in the movies, giving way to a generally negative outlook on police. As mentioned above, students also may have had negative experiences with police in the past (either in Canada, or in other countries, given the multicultural characteristics of the schools studied), or had family or friends who have been negatively affected by police. I will reiterate that students' perceptions were not researched in this study, and it was unclear from teacher and staff perceptions as to whether the presence of School Resource Officers actually diminishes students' negative views. However, from the school staff's perceptions gathered, it appeared that police presence in schools raises (according to teachers) an opportunity to shed a positive light on law enforcement for students who had previously held a critical view of police.

The Outside Community

Another group of people who were perceived by teachers and staff as having a negative view of police in schools was the surrounding community. According to participants, the community's negative view was a function of pre-determined ideas about the roles of police (such as that they only deal with crime, they must be responding to a negative situation at school, etc.), ideas which participants felt community members also applied to any school that has police. This perceived view of community opinions interestingly both agreed and conflicted with school personnel's views. As discussed earlier in this section, teachers and staff often had their own suspicions about other schools with police presence. These suspicions closely mirror what school personnel felt the community perceived about schools with police. However, the school personnel's generally positive attitude toward police in their own schools also contrasted with the community's perceived ideas.

The perceived negativity in the community presents an interesting dilemma. There is public concern over violence in schools that the public wants remedied, but the public (according to school personnel) continues to regard schools with police as troubled or high risk. As noted previously, administrators say that police are not always put into schools because of crime or behavioural problems. If this is true, how can school boards maintain a school's positive reputation in its community while at the same time curbing any school crime it has? Perhaps, as discussed above, just as students could perhaps misunderstand the intentions and role of police in schools, so too could members of the community misinterpret the presence of officers.

As Ryan, Matthews and Banner (1994) report, "what is important for communities to understand is that any partnership between police and schools will be uniquely their own" (p. 3). It does not seem as though the outside community would have any particular agenda in viewing a neighbourhood school as troubled, but what they do have a vested interest in is their home's safety, and the reputation of their home and community in the city as a whole. While participants may feel safe in their schools because they have a hands-on glimpse of what SROs do day to day, members of the surrounding neighbourhood do not have the benefit of that same daily experience. Without proper information on the roles and responsibilities of SROs, some misinterpretation upon seeing police at a neighbourhood school may occur. In the interest of eradicating any public fears caused by misinformation, or high profile media reports, the public needs to be clearly informed of the purpose and roles of School Resource Officers in their local schools.

Media

As discussed in Chapter 3, the media's portrayal of police in schools is generally positive. News reports reiterate how police officers in schools are beneficial in both fighting and curbing school crime, as well as forming a bond of mutual respect with students. The media's portrayal of rare, but violent events in schools does tend to become sensationalized, with multiple reports over long periods of time repeatedly reminding readers and viewers how emotional and awful the incident in question was. These reports tend to magnify an event at one school into a larger concern that every school in the area must worry about. In addition, news stories repeat a call for police officers in all schools, which no doubt must add to the public's perception of heightened

school crime. However, despite the sensationalizing of shocking events, the media tends to reflect the same general perceptions of school personnel in this study - that placing SROs in schools is valuable to students and the school in general, and that SROs are an appropriate response to the threat of school crime.

The media does present a contrasting view to school personnel's perceptions in reports about parents and community protesting police in schools. While school personnel viewed police as nothing but positive additions to their schools, clearly others in the community do not. These objectionable views reported in the media appear to agree more with students' and the outside community's perceptions (according to school staff) than the teachers and staff's perceptions. These stories of protest, however, are very limited in number. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the contrasting positive and negative aspects of SROs reported in the news.

The public consults the media to keep informed about their community and the world, but it is important to note that the media could have their own agenda in choosing which perceptions, what material, and how much of each to report. For instance, in repeatedly reporting on high profile events, Burns & Crawford (1999) note that the media "seize[s] upon the opportunity to cover a story that will pique the public's interest...arguably with the underlying intention of increasing their customer base" (p. 159). This creates a cycle of fear, where high-profile stories receive " intense publicity, and are such inherently disturbing events that they generate an inflated perception of danger" (Borum et. al., 2010, p. 27). The fearful public keeps accessing media for information on these shocking events, and as a result, the media earns more revenue. Indeed, the media's positivity toward the addition of police in schools gives (at least) the

impression to the public that their fears are being addressed. Interestingly, while the media initially plays a role in elevating public fear, they also later serve as a means by which the public's fears are then legitimized and somewhat quelled (such as with positive reports on school police and how they will address the public's concerns over school violence).

In addition, Burns & Crawford (1999) note the role of politicians in the content of news stories. Media reports (such as those examples given in this study) highlight social issues that are of concern to the public, and by responding to these issues, "in return, politicians provide the media with a sense of legitimization" in the eyes of the public (Burns & Crawford, 1999, p. 159). Politicians are consequently directed by the public's fears to the issues they should address to keep the public happy, and eventually gain re-election (Burns & Crawford, 1999, p. 160). In the Canadian media in this study, one can apply this theory to the media's positive perception of school police. Media reports generated public concern over the perceived increase in school violence in the past decade, which has brought about not only the implementation of the SRO program studied, but legislation such as Bill 81 in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario addressing these specific issues.

The next section will relate perceptions in the data to those in the academic literature noted in Chapter 1.

Comparisons of Perceptions to that of Scholarly Literature

As discussed in Chapter 1, much of the academic literature available on police in schools casts a negative light over the increased monitoring of students by law enforcement. Few advocates are found in academic literature, and often emerge

instead from non peer-reviewed articles from school boards, or principal journals. These publications generally tout police as helpful, peaceful additions to schools capable of accomplishing a two-in-one goal of creating a positive relationship with students while at the same time dealing with behavioural problems and more serious school crime. In Ontario, school boards report similar motivations for utilizing police in their schools. For example, The Ottawa Carleton District School Board (2003) notes that, "Ottawa Police Service in schools [are] in support of a safe learning and work environment" (PR.533.SCO). Similarly, the Toronto Catholic District School Board notes that, "the central objective of the School Resource Officer initiative is to enhance safe and caring school relationships and programs with students, school staff, parents, and partnership membership" (2008, News Release). These ideas reflect perfectly those positive views of school personnel participating in this study, which are, in general, to "increase the level of respect that young people may have toward the police and generate a better understanding of law and the role of law enforcement" (p. 189, Jackson, 2002, p. 632).

It is interesting to consider the root of the overwhelmingly positive perceptions that emerge from people in the same type of workplace - the schools and their school boards (that is, participants in this study, and school board publications). No doubt when an SRO is being placed in their school, teachers and staff are informed by their board of the benefits of this addition, and the goals this initiative hopes to accomplish. This raises an intriguing question: Is it possible that school personnel's positive perceptions are encouraged/influenced by their school boards' positive attitude toward SROs? In the same vein, it is also interesting to note that much of what is reported on police in schools in the media (quotes, figures, etc) originates from school board officials, or

school board documents. This suggests that the general positivity toward SROs in the media is influenced by their source of information - school boards and their publications. This may account for the differences seen in the media's perceptions and those in the scholarly literature, where the former gathers a lot of its information from sources that already exhibit a positive attitude toward police, and the latter gathers its information from empirical research and lines of critical thought.

Critics of police in schools in academic literature promote skepticism of the relationship between police presence and individual perceptions of safety, often comparing increased police in schools as a move toward a prison atmosphere. For example, Dodd (2000) notes that, "locked doors and uniformed officers may make the school more secure, but will probably do little to make individual students feel safe" (p. 26). Brown (2006) concurs that "it is not clear whether school police officers enhance student safety" (p. 592). However, these ideas appear to be in stark contrast to the opinions of school personnel. In fact, as noted above, school personnel seem to feel that police, even when they are not physically seen, give students and the school environment as a whole a heightened perception of safety.

While the academic literature often presents increased police presence as one more step toward schools becoming like prisons, the participants in this study did not appear to hold this same view. It should be noted that undoubtedly, school staff and academics have very different agendas when dealing with the topic of police in school, and these agendas influence their perceptions. While the school staff's perception is influenced by the day to day interactions with SROs, and their experience with, and knowledge of, their particular school environments (their safety, general security, etc.),

academics do not always have this first-hand, day to day experience. Researchers and academics, by training, analyze their studies critically in order to gain insight on their given research topic. This could surely account for the focus in the academic literature on critiquing police in schools. In contrast, as mentioned above, Canadian culture focuses on police first as positive, helpful figures in society, and only second as authoritarian crime fighters who have the potential to abuse their power. Members of any society are affected by that society's cultural narratives, and this viewpoint of positivity first - criticism second - was mirrored with the staff's opinions in this study. Whatever the rationale behind school personnel's positive perceptions of police, they conflicted greatly with the opinions in the academic literature.

Participants' views did agree with the academic literature on two counts. Firstly, school personnel often mentioned a school being small (in population) as a great benefit to their school's safety. Indeed, this praise of a small school is shared in the academic literature. For example, this finding is supported by Antrop-Gonzalez and De Jesus (2006), who reports that "the size and scale of [a] school is an important condition for success" (p. 410). Hindie and Sedo (2000) concur, noting, "the advantages of small schools: less violence; higher academic performance; attendance; student participation; lower drop out rates" (p. 40). The participants' and literature's joint praise of smaller student population numbers also suggests that this situation facilitates the observation of students and their behaviour to help curb undesirable incidences from occurring at school.

Secondly, with even the limited number of studies done on police in school, the characteristics that police officers require to be effective in dealing with school children

was also supported in the academic literature. For instance, Johnson (1999) notes the success of a School Resource Officer is heightened when are "sensitive to the needs of the student population, and...the racial make-up of the officer should be matched with the real racial make-up of the student population" (Johnson, 1999, p. 186). Brown adds that officers act as role models to students, and "must always be aware of their visibility to the students and constantly strive to present an image of responsibility" (Brown, 2006, p. 595). Teachers and staff at both schools agreed with these authors, noting that SROs needed to be respectful, kind, interested in working with teenagers, and be of an appropriate ethnic background closely matching that of the students. As mentioned in the literature, they emphasized that these characteristics would make SROs all the more effective to helping students and the school in general. As teachers participating in any study will generally have their students' best interests at heart. It is therefore not difficult to see why there is such an agreement in perceptions between this study's data and data in other academic research over characteristics such as officers' kindness or sensitivity toward children being required in an SRO program.

The Foucaultian Lens

Inherent in any examination of police influence is the issue of control. Though the teachers and staff in this study did not appear to view the presence of police as overtly controlling or authoritarian, it is nonetheless valuable, given the historic role and reputation of police as a dominating presence in the community, to view the results of this study through a lens of power and influence. Michel Foucault's notions of observation, ranking, and normalization leading to control lend an alternate perspective to the idea of police in schools as simply a friendly, helpful presence. In addition,

several of John Taylor Gatto's ideas will illuminate and elucidate Foucault's views and bring them into a modern classroom setting.

Observation and Control

As noted in the Literature Review section, Foucault's disciplinary technologies include observation. Indeed, the presence of police in schools adds to the observation of students. Not only do teachers closely watch student behaviour to make sure it adheres to the guidelines of what is considered acceptable, but students are further watched by the police. It is interesting to note that, as discussed above, many teachers seldom actually see police presence on school property. The mere knowledge that police could be present appeared to have the effect in heightening their perceptions of safety. Foucault notes this effect of constant surveillance, stating that "surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should render its actual exercise unnecessary...for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed" (Foucault, 1979, p. 201). John Taylor Gatto (2005) expresses this notion in the words of a schoolteacher, stating, "I teach students that they are always watched, that each is under constant surveillance by me and my colleagues...children must be closely watched if you want to keep a society under tight central control" (p. 10-11). In these participants' case, their attitudes toward police focused more on the goal of creating a connection between teenagers and law enforcement than crime fighting. However, participants did perceive themselves and the students to be at least marginally safer with police around the school, and while SROs' presence is meant to focus on this positive connection with the students, preventing/ dealing with crime by being there to observe behaviour is clearly a convenient

secondary benefit. It appears that school staff's perceptions of safety in their schools are affected by the promise of extra student observation by the School Resource Officer (or even the police at the training college beside Belair Collegiate); that is, the more the students' behaviour is observed, the safer teachers feel. This extra observation, while friendly and respectful, still acts as a means of catching and controlling dangers in the school environment.

Ranking

Ranking is the second of Foucault's disciplinary technologies. Gatto (2005) applies this idea in his classroom setting, noting that ranking students allows for a "power to control what children will think [which] lets me separate successful students from the failures very quickly" (p. 7). Foucault's ideas of testing and ranking (i.e. the students, in this case) does not appear to be central to these participants' perceptions. While police clearly do aid in distinguishing those individuals (through monitoring behaviour in the school) who are "non-conforming" and in need of discipline, the comments gathered in the data show that participants felt that police were present to positively interact with the students, not to rank or categorize their behaviour in the way Foucault describes.

Normalization and De-institutionalization

Foucault's third disciplinary technology is normalization. Police, who are enforcers of what is considered proper social behaviour according to the government, aid daily in keeping citizens' actions within the confines of what is considered 'normal', and therefore 'safe'. That is, according to Foucault, observations of behaviour are

turned into ranks and categorizations of normal and abnormal, which in turn, helps to obtain an ideal setting (for example, in prisons, or society as a whole) where everyone behaves in the 'proper' way.

While, as with ranking, school personnel's perceptions do not include normalization as a role or goal of SROs, it is worthwhile to note the faith participants in this study have in the police in their effects schools. An overall positive rating of police in schools by participants perhaps suggests that they have so much faith in society's systems of control that the system itself makes them feel safer. Foucault (1979) notes how any institution of social control can become 'de-institutionalized' in that they can "emerge from the closed fortress in which they functioned and circulate in the 'free' state...massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted" (p. 211). The police is an example of an institution of social control that has been adapted recently to function in schools. Given participants' overwhelmingly positive assessment of police in schools, is it possible that they are so used to the police as an acceptable means of control in society that police are also seen as completely normal and acceptable in a school setting? That is, is it possible that the police, a disciplinary control having been adapted from dealing only with traditional community control to dealing with schools, is so widely accepted and trusted by the school's employees that the control actually gives the employees the perception of feeling safer?

If we examine the participants' positive view of police through Foucault's lens of observation and control, there appear segments of his theory that apply to the data and those that do not. Participants certainly did not consider their schools to be comparable

to prisons, as is the example Foucault uses (and as is the comparison made in much of the academic literature).While the concepts of ranking and normalization seem to be at odds with school personnel's perceptions of SROs and their roles in schools, the concept of increased observation seems inherent in any association that involves police. In addition, Foucault's notion of de-institutionalization surely accurately reflects the movement of police into the school system. Indeed, police in schools is one dominating social institution working inside another, using observation to reach a shared goal of safety, "a faceless gaze that transform[s] the whole social body into a field of perception, a thousand eyes posted everywhere" (Foucault, 1979, p. 214).

Future Directions

The potential for additional studies on the police-school relationship are endless. Very little focus has been placed on this phenomenon in a Canadian setting by anyone other than government agencies gathering statistics and the often sensationalized reports in the media. Many topics in the discussion of this study could be expanded into studies of their own. For example, research on matching police officers' backgrounds and personalities with different school populations may make it easier to assign officers to schools where they will best fit. Larger studies focusing on school violence/crime or perceptions of safety as related to police presence would shed light on the effectiveness of police presence. Gathering data on students' views of the police would be invaluable to understanding the dynamics of that relationship, discovering improvements that could be made, etc. Finally, a larger, more extensive version of this current study would certainly add statistical reliability and a heightened understanding of the topic of teacher and staff perceptions of police in school.

Concluding Remarks

The study of the police-school relationship is complicated and multifaceted. The relationship between safety, security, a school's environment and SRO presence is complex, and there exist an abundance of conflicting perceptions about police in schools. Factors such as pre-conceived notions of police roles, police officer suitability and frequency of their presence need to be considered when studying the success of SROs in making schools safer in reality or in perception.

This study has attempted to gather data on one small aspect of this association in a Canadian setting – the perceptions school personnel have regarding SROs and how these perceptions relate to popular and critical perceptions, such as those in the media or academic literature. Whether the general positive attitudes towards the school safety revealed in this study are due to police presence is inconclusive, and little evidence was found of notable differences in attitudes between schools with regular police presence and schools without. Nevertheless, in comparing these perceptions to those in the media and academic literature, many intriguing and potentially useful insights were discovered in the data. As this study is exploratory in nature, a larger study that takes into account a wider demographic of teachers, and the views of students would enhance this study's findings. As the concern over violence in schools continues to grow, it is essential that the affiliation of law enforcement and education be examined as frequently and as diligently in Canada as it is in other countries. It is disturbing that Canadian policy decisions regarding school safety are often based on little more than public perceptions and anecdotal reports from school staff. It is important to conduct rigorous research in this area to add to the understanding of the police-school relationship. As The Safe Schools Action Team for Ontario (2006) notes,

"school safety is a fundamental prerequisite for student success and academic achievement" and research is an imperative step towards ensuring correct measures are taken to create a safe school environment for teachers and students alike.

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Appendix A - Questionnaire

Questionnaire on Police Presence in Schools

This is a questionnaire for teachers and staff. It asks you about your perceptions of safety in relation to the presence of police officers in your school environment.

This data will be used for a Master's thesis on the relationship between policing and schools. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please do not write your name on this paper, as the questionnaire is anonymous. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Please read each question carefully and check ONE choice that best describes your answer, **unless otherwise stated**. When you are finished, please return this questionnaire to the researcher. I thank you for your participation in this study.

1. What is your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female

2. What is your age?

☐ 20-29
☐ 30-39
☐ 40-49
☐ 50-59
☐ 60+

3. What is your heritage/ethnicity?

☐ European descent
☐ African descent
☐ Asian descent
☐ North American Indian
☐ East Indian
☐ Middle Eastern
☐ Other (please specify): _____

4. Identify your position (check all that apply):

☐ Teacher
☐ Teacher's Aide
☐ Administrator
☐ Counselor

Other Staff (please identify): _____

5. How many years have you been working in a school environment?

□ less than 1 year
□ between 1and 5 years
□ between 5 and 10 years
□ more than 10 years.

6. What grade level of students do you work with? (check all that apply)

□ Kindergarten-Grade 6
□ Grade 7-8
□ Grade 9-12

General Policing

7. Have you seen police at your school?

□ Yes
□ No (please skip to question #9)

8. About how often do you see police at your school?

□ More than once a week
□ Once a week
□ Once every two weeks
□ Once a month
□ Less than once a month

9. Generally, I think my school is:

□ very safe □ somewhat safe □ unsure □ somewhat unsafe □ very unsafe

10. For the purposes of this study, an effective learning environment is defined as one in which students can learn the lessons given to them to the best of their abilities, and teachers can teach the required curriculum to the best of their abilities.

Generally, I think the learning environment at my school is:

□ very effective □ somewhat effective □ unsure □ somewhat ineffective □ very ineffective

11. In what ways have police interacted with students and/or staff at your school (check all that apply):

- ☐ As a friendly presence interacting with students
- ☐ As teachers of law enforcement curriculum (such as drug programs, any-crime programs, etc.)
- ☐ As liaisons between teachers and students
- ☐ As crime-deterrents
- ☐ As intimidators
- ☐ As response officers to a lock-down situation
- ☐ We do not have police at my school
- ☐ Other (please specify):

_____

School Resource Officers

12. School Resource Officers are police officers whose aim it is to interact in a friendly yet professional manner with teachers and students, and/or to occasionally teach students some curriculum related to law enforcement (such as drug education, anti-crime education, etc.) These officers may appear in the school once, occasionally, weekly or daily.

Does you school have a School Resource Officer?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No **(skip to question 16)**

For the following questions, please mark an "x" on the line in the position that best describes your answer.

13. How much safer is your school environment when School Resource Officers **are** present, as opposed to when no officer is present?

|_____|_____|

much safer | no effect | much more unsafe

14. How secure do you feel in your school environment when School Resource Officers **are** present, as opposed to when no officer is present?

|_____|_____|

much more secure | no effect | much less secure

15.a. How effectively do you feel that students learn when School Resource Officers **are** present, as opposed to when no officer is present?

|_____|_____|

much more effectively | no effect | much less effectively

15.b. Please explain in detail your choice of answer in the above question (that is, why do you feel they would learn more effectively, less effectively or with the same effectiveness):

_____

_____

If you answered yes to question #12, you are now finished. Thank you for your time!

For the following questions, please mark an "x" on the line in the position that best describes your answer.

16. How much safer do you think your school environment would be if a School Resource Officer was present in your school, as opposed to if no officer was present?

|_____|_____|

much safer | no effect | much more unsafe

17. Think about how secure you feel generally in your school environment. How secure would you feel in your school environment if a School Resource Officer was present, as opposed to if no officer was present?

|_____|_____|

much more secure | no effect | much less secure

18.a. Think about how effectively you feel your students learn on a daily basis. How effectively do you feel that students would learn if a School Resource Officer was present in your school, as opposed to if no officer was present?

|_____|_____|

much more effectively | no effect | much less effectively

18.b. Please explain in detail your choice of answer in the above question (that is, why do you feel they would learn more effectively, less effectively or with the same effectiveness):

_____

_____

Thank you for your time!

Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Teachers and Staff

Police Presence in Schools: Teachers' and Staff's Perceptions of Safety and Effectiveness

The purpose of this conversation is simply to gather information about your feelings about police at your school, and how they affect your perceptions of safety and effectiveness of your school's learning environment. I encourage you to feel at ease, and I thank you in advance for helping me with my research.

1. Please tell me your general impressions about the overall safety at your school.

    Prompt: Do you feel your school is generally safe or unsafe? Why?

2. For the purposes of this study, an effective learning environment is defined as one in which students can learn the lessons given to them to the best of their abilities, and teachers can teach the required curriculum to the best of their abilities. Thinking about the atmosphere at your school, please tell me your general impressions about the effectiveness of the learning environment at your school.

    Prompt: Do you feel students can learn effectively in your school? Do they feel at ease during their school day? Why/why not?

3. Do you have police presence at your school? How often are police at your school? What do you think about the police being at your school? **(if there are no police at participant's school, skip to question #6)**

4. How do you feel the School Resource Officers affect the general safety at your school?

    Prompt: Do School Resource Officers positively or negatively affect the safety of your school? Why?

5. How do you feel the School Resource Officers affect the learning environment at your school?

    Prompt: Do the School Resource Officers make the school environment more or less effective for learning? Why/why not?

Skip to question #8

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6. School Resource Officers are police officers whose aim it is to interact in a friendly yet professional manner with teachers and students, and/or to occasionally teach students some curriculum related to law enforcement (such as drug education, anti-crime education, etc.) These officers may appear in the school once, occasionally, weekly or daily. Suppose you had School Resource Officers present in your school. How do you feel the SROs would affect the general safety at your school?

Prompt: Do you feel that the presence of School Resource Officers would positively or negatively affect the safety of your school? Why?

7. Suppose you had School Resource Officers present in your school. How do you feel the School Resource Officers would affect the learning environment at your school?

Prompt: Do you feel that the presence of School Resource Officers would make the school environment more or less effective for learning? Why/why not?

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8. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding police presence in your school?

Thank you very much for this interview.