Teacher Perception of School Safety Between Mississippi Secondary Schools with School Resource Officers and School Safety Officers

David Audet dit Lapointe
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TEACHER PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL SAFETY BETWEEN MISSISSIPPI SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITH SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AND SCHOOL SAFETY OFFICERS

by

David Audet dit Lapointe

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School of The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2016
ABSTRACT

TEACHER PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL SAFETY BETWEEN
MISSISSIPPI SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITH SCHOOL RESOURCE
OFFICERS AND SCHOOL SAFETY OFFICERS

by David Audet dit Lapointe

May 2016

The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a significant difference in the perception of school safety by teachers between secondary schools that employ School Resource Officers (SROs), who are armed, and School Safety Officers (SSOs), who are unarmed or a combination of SROs and SSOs. The School Resource Officers and School Climate Teacher Survey, created by Dr. Amy Oaks (2001), was utilized to gather data. The 193 participants of the study included certified teachers at secondary schools in the Jackson Public School District, the Jackson County Public School District, and the Ocean Springs School District.

A Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the perception of safety between the two groups. In all items analyzed, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference in the perception of school safety with the SRO group perceiving their schools as being safer than the teachers in the SRO/SSO group. In an environment in which the issue of school safety is becoming an increasingly important topic, the perception of teachers working in these schools is vital.
TEACHER PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL SAFETY BETWEEN MISSISSIPPI SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITH SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AND SCHOOL SAFETY OFFICERS

by

David Audet dit Lapointe

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of Educational Leadership and School Counseling
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2016
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful and loving wife, Jennifer, without whose support I would not have been able to accomplish this goal. Thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to especially thank my committee chair, Dr. David Lee, as well as the other members of my committee, Dr. James Fox, Dr. Ann Blankenship, and Dr. James King. Without your tireless support, this dissertation would have never been possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Ashley Allred for giving me the encouragement to begin the process.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Many school districts in Mississippi have hired fully armed school resource officers (SROs) and school safety officers (SSOs) or a combination of these two in an attempt to mitigate against school violence, or the perception of school violence. In fact, according to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), there were over 400 SROs and SSOs employed by Mississippi public schools during the 2013-2014 school year (“Mississippi student information,” 2014). The MDE report made no differentiation, however it is assumed to include both armed and unarmed security personnel. Even though there are a large number of security personnel working in public schools there has been very little research to determine whether the presence of these guards has actually lowered the amount of discipline referrals; there has been no research found that determines whether or not the presence of an armed SRO would have a greater or lesser impact on school discipline referrals than the presence of an unarmed security guard or school safety officer (SSO) or a combination of these. There has been no research found which determined whether or not the perception of school safety by teachers would be the same whether or not the security personnel were armed SROs or SROs/SSOs.

The decision to hire an SRO to patrol a public school should not be taken lightly. Some have suggested that the presence of an SRO can negatively impact a school’s climate (Theriot, 2009), but more research is needed to determine if hiring SSOs could perhaps be less intrusive in creating a safe and secure public school environment. Furthermore, additional research may determine if hiring an SSO could be just as
effective in reducing student discipline referrals as having an armed SRO and the perceived safety of the school.

Determining if there are differences in discipline in schools with SROs and schools with SSOs could be beneficial to school districts. One of the potential benefits is the lower cost associated with hiring unarmed guards. Hill and Levin (2013) reported that the median annual salary for a police patrol officer is $50,454, while the median annual salary for an unarmed security guard is $28,870. There are potential grants available that can help offset the higher cost of employing an SRO. The Mississippi Community Oriented Policing Services in Schools (MCOPS) (2014) is a grant program administered by the Mississippi Department of Education in which $10,000.00 can be awarded to schools per SRO that it employs. Although this funding is available at this time, it is “contingent upon legislative appropriation” annually (“Mississippi community”, 2014). It has also been suggested that having an SRO in a school may not lower crime but may actually do the opposite (Schlosser, 2014), and other options for keeping schools safe should be considered (Petteruti, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of teachers in Mississippi public secondary schools regarding school safety and if these perceptions differ between teachers working in schools with SROs and those in schools with SSOs. Beneficiaries to this study will be any school district that wishes to determine the most effective means of ensuring that their teachers have a positive perception of school safety. This study should also help determine if teachers perceive school safety differently based on the type of security in place which could also benefit school administrators when
making security decisions. In 2012, James and McCallion offered a report for Congress, which stated:

The body of research on the effectiveness of SRO programs is limited, in both terms of the number of studies published and the methodological rigor of the studies conducted. The research that is available draws conflicting conclusions about whether SRO programs are effective at reducing school violence. Also, the research does not address whether SRO programs deter school shootings, one of the key reasons for renewed congressional interest in these programs. (pp. 10-11)

There are gaps in the current literature regarding the effectiveness of SSOs in schools versus the effectiveness of an SRO on reducing student violence. Available research tends to “be descriptive in nature” and simply tells what the SROs are doing in schools and the “perceptions of people involved with SRO programs” (Raymond, 2010, p. 7).

Other research that has been conducted tends to be conflicting. Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, and Donner (2011) suggested that SROs have a positive impact on lessoning student violence, while Jackson (2002) stated that “their presence may pose a psychological threat to students” (p. 647). Myrstol (2011) asserted that even though it is unclear whether or not SROs are accomplishing their goals (making schools safer), there has been very little resistance to implementing SRO programs. In another study, teachers reported that the most important reason for school safety was the principal (Dickerson, 2005). This study will help address the gaps in literature and add to the current body of knowledge related to the effect of SROs and SSOs in public schools.
Research Question

Is there a difference in teachers’ perception of school safety between Mississippi public high schools and middle schools with SROs from those schools with SSOs?

Null Hypothesis:

H10: There is no significant statistical difference in perceived security of teachers in schools with SROs compared to schools with SSOs.

Definition of Terms

1. School Resource Officer (SRO): “refers to commissioned law-enforcement officers selected, trained, and assigned to protect and serve the education environment” (Canady, James, & Nease, 2012, p. 9). “SROs are sworn law enforcement officers assigned full time to patrol schools” (Theriot, 2009, p. 280). An SRO assigned to Mississippi Public Schools is: 

An officer commissioned by a local law enforcement agency or school district who has at least three years full time commissioned law enforcement service and is a graduate of the Basic Law Enforcement Officer Training Program and the Mississippi Department of Education School Resource Officer Basic Course…SROs are expected to be armed at all times and maintain qualification with their issue weapon every six months. (Laird, 2008, p. 6)

2. School Safety Officer (SSO): refers to “a security and safety specialist employed by the school district to provide routine safety and security duties…the officer does not have authority to carry a weapon or make arrests.” (Laird, 2008, p. 7).
3. **School Security Guard**: “A person who maintains campus security, inspects buildings and grounds, and investigates matters which threaten the safety of staff and students. He/she is usually under the direct supervision of a school principal or building administrator” (Jones, 2002 pp. 5-6). A school security guard: “1) Helps to enforce school rules and policies. 2) Is a classified personnel employee who does not hold a professional credential. 3) Does not carry weapons (i.e. firearms, batons, mace, tazers, etc.). 4) Is not a sworn law enforcement officer” (Jagielski, 2005, pp. 9-10). For the purposes of this research, a security guard is considered unarmed.

**Delimitations**

1. For the purposes of this study, participants will be limited to secondary teachers employed in public schools geographically located in the six southernmost counties in Mississippi that employ full-time SROs or SSOs.

2. The select schools will be limited to middle and high schools serving a range of grades 6-12.

3. The measure of school safety will be limited to participant responses on the School Resource Officers and School Climate Teacher Survey instrument.

**Assumptions**

Several assumptions were made in this study. It is assumed that the participants in the survey provided responses that were truthful and accurately reflect their perceptions. Also, it is assumed that the participants who answered the survey for the SSO group understood that they were being queried only on their perception of safety regarding their respective School Safety Officer. It is further assumed that teachers who
work with School Safety Officers recognize the difference between School Safety Officers and School Resource Officers.

Justification for the Study

Having a safe and orderly environment at a public school is a major responsibility of any school district (Ramey, 2004). Providing security personnel is among the various options available to school leaders to ensure that schools are safe and orderly. However, the potential large financial cost and possible negative implications in having an armed SRO patrol a public school should be considered by school leaders as they consider viable solutions to keeping their schools safe (Petteruti, 2011). More research is needed to help determine if school discipline and a sense of school safety can be achieved through the presence of school security personnel and if there is a difference between the presence of SROs or SSOs at the middle and high school levels. Results of this study can assist school leaders in making cost effective decisions in addressing school safety.

Another potential benefit of this study will be to determine the perception of school safety by teachers in Mississippi public schools and help determine if there is a difference in the perception of school safety by teachers in schools with SROs versus SSOs. If teachers feel safer in schools based on the presences of either type of security personnel provided, then this information must be considered by school administrators while determining the types of security officers needed to be employed. Some school districts may determine that regardless of the cost savings associated with hiring SSOs, it would be more prudent to hire armed SROs if teachers felt safer with armed SROs present.
A final benefit of this study will be to help fill the current gaps in literature regarding SROs. Weiler and Cray (2011) found that placing SROs in schools did not automatically ensure that schools would be safe; however, research in this area has been limited and mixed (Petteruti, 2011). More research is needed to evaluate SRO programs to determine if SROs do indeed make schools safer (Raymond, 2010) and if their presence can reduce school violence (Robers, Kemp, Rathbun, Morgan, & Snyder, 2014).

Summary

Having law enforcement, or SROs, in our public schools is becoming a permanent fixture (Jones, 2014). Despite this, there has been very little research conducted to determine the effectiveness of SRO programs (Cray & Weiler, 2011). No research has been found determining the efficacy of unarmed security guards, or SSOs, on student discipline office referrals. The research found on SROs has been limited and mixed. This research will help determine if there is a difference in the perception of school safety by teachers in schools with SROs and schools with SSOs. Beneficiaries to this study will be school districts that are in need of more information regarding the effectiveness of SRO programs when determining whether or not to hire an SRO or SSO.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

As a response to violent school incidents, such as what occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary, many school districts have hired armed school resource officers (SROs) to not only prevent future violent episodes but to also maintain a safe school environment (Zirkel, 2014). However, there is limited and conflicting available research on the effectiveness of SROs in reducing school violence or future school shootings (Raymond, 2010) and no studies have been found that compared the effectiveness of unarmed guards with SROs. Also, many of the existing studies focused on stakeholder’s “feelings” of safety when an SRO is present and have not relied on outcome-based research (Raymond, 2010).

Examples of the conflicting evidence of the success of SROs in reducing school violence are apparent in literature. Jackson (2002) suggested that while having SROs in school may provide a “psychological benefit” for other stakeholders, their “presence may pose a psychological threat to students, who may view police as a threat to their freedom” (p. 647). Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, and Pollitt (2013), stated that having armed SROs in school may actually cause students to feel less safe and “could undermine the learning environment” (p. 7). Raymond (2010) stated that stakeholders feel safer in schools with an SRO present and Daniels, Royster, Vecchi, and Pshenishny (2010) asserted that an SRO can be an important preventive measure for decreasing violence. This conflict will be expanded on further in this chapter.
This research will attempt to determine if faculty members at schools with an SSO perceive their respective schools to be safe and whether or not their perception of school safety would be increased by having SROs present. This chapter presents a review of existing literature related to school safety and the use of personnel, such as school resource officers (SROs), in public schools.

This chapter will begin by explaining the requirement for safe schools suggested by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and government entities. Next will be a review of Maslow’s 1943 study detailing a hierarchy of needs in which safety is considered one of the basic needs that must be met before an individual can begin to become productive and care about learning. The following section will be a review of school crime, SRO statistics, and a brief history of school security programs followed by a discussion of the effectiveness of SROs and a description of the roles of security in schools. Next will be stated benefits and criticisms of security programs with a section detailing the need for further research. Finally, there will be a review of research regarding whether a school should employ SROs or security guards, perceptions of SROs and information regarding the hiring and training of SROs.

Requirement for Safe Schools

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) published a list of “high-level policy standards” for educational leaders to follow in its report titled Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (“Educational leaders,” 2008). One of the most relevant standards to this research is Standard 3 which states, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning
environment” (p. 14). Furthermore, one of the functions of this standard is to “promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff” (p. 14). Clearly, having a safe and secure school environment is of paramount importance to all public school stakeholders and not just limited to school leaders or administrators. Jagielski (2005) stated that “educational leaders must first work to create a safe environment at their school before they focus on academic achievement and success” (p. 7). As indicated above, school leaders must ensure that they are utilizing their limited resources for ensuring school security in the most efficient manner possible while protecting school personnel and students.

Cobb (2014) suggested that “students who do not feel safe on all levels cannot perform to their highest potential” (p. 14). Cobb (2014) also asserted that feeling safe in school is fundamental and necessary for students to learn. Sadlier (2011) stated that creating safe schools must be a priority for all educators. The importance of having safe schools is not simply academic rhetoric. One of the provisions of No Child Left Behind has a requirement that “students who are in schools which are labeled persistently dangerous must be allowed to transfer to other schools” (Bucher & Manning, 2005, p. 55).

In 2013 The White House offered a plan entitled Now is the Time that outlines steps that should be taken to ensure safer schools. One of the suggestions was to give “$150 million to school districts and law enforcement agencies to hire school resource officers, school psychologists, social workers, and counselors” (“Now is the time,” 2013, p. 11). In fact, on the U.S. Department of Education’s website, President Barack Obama is quoted as saying: “This job of keeping our children safe, and teaching them well, is
something we can only do together, with the help of friends and neighbors, the help of a community, and the help of a nation” (Obama, 2012).

Personal Need for Safety

In a *Theory of Motivation*, published in 1943, Abraham Maslow suggested that there is a hierarchy of needs and that the most basic needs must be met before an individual is able to move on to the next level or need. At the most basic level, an individual has physiological needs, i.e. the need for substance, clothing, shelter, etc. Physiological needs are those needs that must be met in order for the individual to survive. An individual is only able to move to a higher level when the needs at a lower level have been met. For example, not having enough food to eat would consume an individual’s thoughts, and all other activities would be “completely preempted by hunger” (Maslow, 1943, p. 373).

The second level in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is safety. Maslow suggested that an individual’s safety is vitally important. In fact, safety may totally dominate an individual’s consciousness and to the individual, “practically everything looks less important than safety” (Maslow, 1943, p. 376). If an individual feels that he or she is in an unsafe environment, the need for safety will take precedence over all other needs and that the individual is only concerned with attaining safety (Maslow, 1943).

The need that Maslow identifies which is relevant to this study is the need for personal safety. Maslow offered an example of an individual’s need for safety by suggesting that a child who feels unsafe will change the way he or she views the world:

At such a moment of pain, it may be postulated that, for the child, the appearance of the whole world suddenly changes from sunniness to darkness, so to speak, and
becomes a place in which anything at all might happen, in which previously stable things have suddenly become unstable. (Maslow, 1943, p. 377)

Any child who is in an unsafe school environment, especially one in which there is a possibility of acute danger would be unable to attain the next level of needs, such as belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.

Maslow further illustrated the need for safety by suggesting that children prefer a structured routine:

Another indication of the child’s need for safety is his preference for some kind of undisrupted routine or rhythm. He seems to want a predictable, orderly world. For instance, injustice, unfairness, or inconsistency in the parents seems to make a child feel anxious or unsafe. This attitude may be not so much because of the injustice per se or any particular pains involved, but rather because this treatment threatens to make the world look unreliable, or unsafe, or unpredictable. (Maslow, 1943, p. 377)

It is readily evident that in a school environment, the safety of an individual child is of extreme importance and he or she will not be able to concentrate on the next level of needs, which is actually a goal of many public education institutions: a feeling of belonging. Maslow suggests that if an individual does not have a feeling of belonging or love the individual may suffer from maladjustment. Maslow described how important this is to the individual:

Now the person will feel keenly, as never before, the absence of friends, or a sweetheart, or a wife, or children. He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great
intensity to achieve this goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world and may even forget that once, when he was hungry, he sneered at love. (Maslow, 1943, p. 381)

In a school environment, ensuring that children feel that they belong and are cared for is an extremely important and laudable goal and should be at the forefront of any educator’s desires in public education. It should be noted, however, that the safety need must be met before the feeling of belonging can come to fruition.

Once the basic physiological needs, safety needs, and the need for belonging are met, the individual will then have the opportunity to concentrate on the next level of needs: esteem. Maslow describes the esteem need as one in which the individual has “the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom” (Maslow, 1943, p. 381). In an educational setting, the need for achievement is one of the many goals of public education. In fact, many public education institutions have as their vision and mission statements the desire to foster the need for “life-long learning” and creating “productive citizens” (Schafft & Biddle, 2013). According to Maslow (1943), the attaining of self-esteem “leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (p. 382).

Once all of the other needs are met, the individual is then able to focus on the need for self-actualization, which is the need for the individual to become all that he or she is capable of becoming. Self-actualization will vary from each individual. It can be expressed in many forms such as athletically, artistically, or perhaps in invention (Maslow, 1943).
Keeping our schools safe is not just the response to a need identified by Maslow, but a desire by many stakeholders in education, including the federal government. It is incumbent upon all educators to not only keep our students and teachers in a safe environment but to do so within the constraints of available resources. The purpose of this research is to determine if there is a perceived difference in the safety of a school by the teachers with an alternative to armed guards, namely by employing unarmed guards.

School Crime, SRO Statistics and Brief History

Public schools are safe (James & McCallion, 2013). From 1993 to 2008 school crime dropped by 69% (“Justice policy,” 2012). Despite these facts, in-school arrests have increased which may be due to the fact that there are more law enforcement officers involved in school matters (Bracey et al., 2013). In fact, Snyder and Dillow (2012), report that over a quarter of all schools report the presence of school security personnel (including both SSOs and SROs) on a daily basis. Another reason for the increase in severe disciplinary measures is the increase in zero-tolerance policies (Price, 2009) and “exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions, expulsions, and the involvement of law enforcement in school discipline matters” (Bracey et al., 2013, p. 427). Other interesting reported statistics include:

During the 2009-10 school year, 43 percent of public schools reported the presence of one or more security staff at their school once a week during the school year. Twenty-nine percent of schools reported having at least one full-time employed security staff member who was present at least once a week, and 14 percent of schools reported having only part-time staff. Twenty-eight percent
of all schools reported the presence of security staff routinely carrying a firearm at school. (Robers et al., 2014, p. viii)

Although school crime has been on the decline many schools have reported multiple discipline dispositions:

During the 2009-10 school year, 39 percent of public schools (about 32,300 schools) took at least one serious disciplinary action against a student for specific offenses. Of the 433,800 serious disciplinary actions taken during the 2009-2010 school year, 74 percent were suspensions for 5 days or more, 20 percent were transfers to specialized schools, and 6 percent were removals with no services for the remainder of the school year. (Robers et al., 2014, p. viii)

Even though there “exists a lack of meaningful research related to practices and effectiveness of SRO programs” using SROs in schools has gained popularity (Cray & Weiler, 2011, p. 164). Many school stakeholders are responding to the pressure of making their schools safer by hiring SROs and school security guards, although this can be seen as only a “quick-fix strategy” despite the fact that school violence is relatively rare (Beger, 2002) and targeted school violence and school shootings are even rarer still (Stone & Spencer, 2010; Thompson & Alvarez, 2013).

May and Higgins (2011) suggested that:

School violence is a persistent problem across the country. The violence that takes place in schools affects students, teachers, administrators, and parents in physical and emotional ways. Given the media attention that has been paid to school violence since 2000, it can no longer be ignored or denied. (p. 96)
Others have suggested that protecting children while at school is becoming more difficult and that “it is almost impossible for school administrators to do this alone” (Robinson, 2006, p. iv). An example of recent school violence is the 2012 school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in which 26 people were killed (Barron, 2012). This school shooting “represents the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history, far surpassing the number of deaths that occurred at Columbine High in 1999” (Brent & DeAngelis, 2013, p. 8). At the time of the attack, there were both armed guards and unarmed guards in the Newtown School District; however, none were assigned to the elementary school (Hutson, 2014).

Having resource officers in schools can be dated back to the 1950s (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013); however, SRO programs became more prominent in the 1990s as a result of “punitive school discipline policies,” such as arrests, enacted by many schools (Wolf, 2013, p. 137). Since the 1990s, these programs have increased (May & Higgins, 2011) and SROs “have become a fixture in many high schools” (Jones, 2014, p. 4). To some, “the growing number of SRO programs indicates that communities are searching for effective methods to maintain secure schools and curb student violence” (Benigni, 2004, p. 24). Prior to having SROs in schools, most schools used their discretion to discipline student behavior and would only involve law enforcement for the most serious of offenses. Most of the schools relied “on teachers, administrators and counselors to educate and maintain safety” (Petteruti, 2011, p. 1). Regardless, public school stakeholders seem to be supportive of having SROs in public schools:

We cannot guarantee every child’s safety at every moment, but it is a primary responsibility of any school to provide a safe and orderly environment that is
conducive to learning. Parents expect no less-and they have historically supported the efforts of school boards, administrators, teachers, and law enforcement agencies who practice traditional methods of discipline and security. (Ramey, 2004, p. 70)

When law enforcement officers first began to partner with school districts, it was found that not all districts welcomed the officers. One reason for this is that much of the training an officer underwent, which allowed them to work comfortably and efficiently on the streets, did not transcend to a school environment. Furthermore, many officers could not communicate effectively with students and administrators and conflicts began to arise regarding authority and management (Clark, 2011).

Presently, there are three different types of relationships between law enforcement and schools, as identified and described by the Cray and Weiler (2011):

The first type is for a school to have sworn law enforcement officers visit the school. These visits may be formal or informal, planned or spontaneous, but the essential characteristic is that the officers are a visible, though occasional, presence in the school. The second type of relationship is for a school to have security guards on site. This partnership is a constant presence on site with specific responsibilities typically linked to the access and egress patterns of the school. The individuals are not employees of the local law enforcement agency. The third type of partnerships is that of the school-based SRO. The SRO is a sworn law enforcement officer employed by the local law enforcement agency and is assigned to the school or group of schools as the primary responsibility. The individual is housed on school grounds and is a constant presence in the
Among these three partnership options, schools reported the option of security guard as the most common; the SRO option was the second most frequent arrangement and law officers as visitor was identified as the least frequent partnership arrangement (p. 167).

Reasons for Hiring SROs and Security Guards

No discussion regarding the hiring of armed SROs or unarmed guards in our public schools can begin without the mention of the horrific events that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. On December 14, 2012, 20 year old Adam Lanza attacked the elementary school and killed 28 people. Of the people killed in the incident, 20 of them were school children, 6 were teachers or other staff at the school, as well as his mother and himself (Barron, 2012). After this event, the National Rifle Association declared that all schools in the nation should have armed officers (Nakamura & Hamburger, 2012). The National Rifle Association also suggested arming teachers and staff at schools (Moore, 2013).

It appears that many districts embraced the suggestion by the NRA. Zirkel (2014) asserted that the increase in SROs at schools could be attributed to the Sandy Hook tragedy (Zirkel, 2014). Furthermore, “some policy makers have expressed renewed interest in school resource officers as a result of the December 2012 mass shootings that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary” (James & McCallion, 2013, para. 1). It is clear that the unimaginable events at this elementary school has impacted the hiring of SROs in the United States.

According to some, violence in schools is an increasing concern for many public school stakeholders and is one of the most important issues facing the United States
(Jones, 2002; May, Rice, & Minor, 2012; Robinson, 2006). In fact, the hiring of SROs due to national media attention of school violence was cited as one of the most common reasons for the hiring of SROs (Coon & Travis, 2012). These concerns are increasing even though we “live at a time of unprecedented domestic peace” (Domenech, 2013, p. 26). Students and teachers who do not feel safe are unable to perform effectively or to their highest potential (Cobb, 2014). Obviously, school security is an extremely important issue for many:

   Violence and security on high school campuses are paramount issues that many instructional staff and students face in today’s society. A strong, comfortable atmosphere will encourage students to succeed socially and academically, and will enable instructional staff to work in a secure environment producing successful teaching regimens in their classrooms (Sobel, 2009, p. ii).

   In order for a school to be successful, “a safe and disciplined learning environment is essential” (Ramey, 2004, p. 71). In fact, one of the highest priorities for any school is to have schools that are “emotionally, psychologically, and physically safe” (Sadlier, 2011, p. 183). Another author suggested that “school safety should be a priority: it is not only important for protecting the physical safety of students, teachers, and staff, but also for maintaining a productive learning environment” (Petteruti, 2011, p. 1). Due to these considerations, many schools have taken to hiring SROs to protect the “community’s most precious assets; their children” (Moore, 2013, p. 38).

   There is a perception that school violence is on the rise and “parents and administrators feel a need for greater protection in the school setting” (May & Higgins, 2011, p. 105). School violence is a concern for many Americans, even though school
shootings have been described as sporadic (Robinson, 2006). Because of recent school shootings, there has been an increase in what has been described as a “climate of fear,” and one of the responses to this fear is the hiring of SROs and security guards.

Parents and administrators are not the only people who are interested in hiring more SROs and security guards. State legislatures have also enacted laws that make it easier to “punish school children as adults for a wide range of offenses that traditionally have been handled informally by teachers” (Beger, 2002, p. 119). Due to the perception of increased school violence and the “intention of increasing school safety, across the country, law enforcement officers have been deployed to work on school grounds” (Jones, 2014) as well as hiring school security guards who are “involved with administrators, staff, students, and parents on a daily basis” (Jones, 2002, p. 4).

There are other stated benefits of hiring SROs in public schools. Placing an SRO in a school is a significant event because the SRO will represent a new authority figure in the school (Brown, 2006) and, regardless of the intent, is considered to be a relinquishment of school staff handling all discipline issues without law enforcement involvement (Petteruti, 2011). Also, having SROs in the school can improve relations between students and officers as well as improve the image of police officers. Another benefit is to improve the reputation of the local law enforcement agency in the community as well as free up other patrol officers to answer calls for service rather than respond to calls at the schools (Finn, 2006). A well-placed SRO can also be seen as an individual who not only enhances the physical security of a school, but also becomes an important member of the school community who can create beneficial relationships with students and staff (Jones, 2014). By establishing these relationships and acting as a
positive role model, it is possible that many of the personnel who interact with an SRO on a daily basis will report problems and crimes thereby allowing the SRO to share this information with members of a school staff (May et al., 2012).

Herreras (2013) stated that districts should hire full time SROs and allocate available funding to this goal. When hiring security for schools, there are some considerations that have been offered:

Schools should also carefully weigh the unique needs of their communities when determining the need to hire additional security personnel or school resource officers (SROs). It is important to recognize [that] the SROs differ from other school security personnel or armed guards. SROs are commissioned law enforcement officers who are specially trained to work within the school community to help implement school safety initiatives as part of the school safety leadership team. They should be integral participants in school life and student learning. Additionally, if a school determines that it needs to have an armed professional on school grounds, SROs are the only school personnel of any type who should be armed. (Cowan et al., 2013, p. 7)

The ultimate goal of any SRO hired is to make the school that they patrol a safe and secure environment and one that is conducive to the students’ learning goals (Darst, 2010).

Effectiveness of SROs

Most of the literature that discusses the efficacy of school security guards, whether armed or unarmed, can be broken down into five different themes. These themes are: those that are descriptive in nature, literature that touts the benefits of school security
guards, literature that asserts the negative aspects of school security guards, literature that makes the claim that more research is necessary, and a small theme that discusses the differences between armed or unarmed guards. These five themes are presented in the following sections.

Descriptions of the Roles of School Security

Police and law enforcement officers are more present in modern public schools. While this might make schools safer there have been some questions regarding how students may now be exposed to the criminalization of their misconduct instead of having school personnel dealing with student misconduct administratively. Furthermore, civil rights violations by law enforcement on school campuses may increase (Wheeler & Pickrell, 2005) such as “students…being spied on with hidden cameras, searched without suspicion, and subjected to unannounced locker searches by police with drug-sniffing dogs” (Beger, 2002, p. 127). When SROs are on campus, their roles extend far beyond what could be described as traditional police duties; however, the SROs tend to revert to street decision making, although it has been found that they will make some adjustments for the school setting (Wolf, 2013). Weiler and Cray (2011) argued against Wheeler and Pickrell stating that when police officers are in schools they do little to help with school security and only become effective when they have clear direction from schools and law enforcement agencies on how to operate within the school. Thompson and Alvarez (2013) stated that when SROs are limited to only a role of law enforcement, it is a waste of resources and that it may actually be harmful to students and school objectives. Also, the original concept of SROs was to act as community-oriented police; however, many
SROs tend to work more as law enforcement officers instead of working in roles that may actually be problem-solving (“Justice policy,” 2012).

Other descriptions of SROs in schools state that many do work on building a good rapport and relationship with students and that they can often act as liaisons with local law enforcement agencies (May et al., 2012). Some SROs have reported that they do indeed exercise a great deal of discretion in their roles on school campuses, similar to what they do when patrolling on the street. Officers do not have to affect an arrest every time a crime is committed and using this discretion in schools and taking into account other factors can affect the decision to arrest (Wolf, 2013).

It is vitally important for all public school stakeholders to be aware of the impact and consequences that having SROs in schools can have on students and all stakeholders must have an awareness of these issues, especially in light of the fact that SROs have become common in our schools (Wolf, 2013). The presence of SROs in schools may increase the likelihood that a student will be arrested and placed in the juvenile justice system (“Justice policy,” 2012). One study found that when law enforcement was present in schools, juvenile arrests actually increased; however, this is probably due to the fact that since there are more SROs in schools, arrests will naturally increase because of the heightened awareness of crimes occurring and being investigated (Ramey, 2004).

Although arrests appear to have increased because of SROs, an arrest of a student should be the last recourse and should only occur “with the agreement of the teacher and school principal” (Theriot, 2011, p. 61).

Because SROs have become a common presence at schools, many students accept this and tend to view SROs as additional disciplinary staff (Bracy, 2011). Also,
the roles of the SRO can include many differing jobs such as improving “community-law enforcement relations, prevent crime, and educate students on law related issues” (May et al., 2012, p. 2). One possible downside to the increase of SROs is that handling student behavior will shift from a responsibility of teachers and administrators to the involvement of law enforcement (Beger, 2002).

Benefits of SROs

Having SROs in our public schools can have a profound positive impact on the lives of students. Good SRO programs allow the officer to act as an instructor when invited by teachers to come into the classroom and give presentations on specific topics such as gang education and classes on juvenile law (Darst, 2010). Full-time SROs are able to become familiar with students and become dedicated to a specific school. Oftentimes, these officers can fill roles “similar to a staff member, such as coach, mentor, tutor, or group leader” (Herreras, 2013, p. 151).

Having officers in schools may also improve student behavior, which in turn “will improve student safety, which will improve student performance, which will improve the perception of public education which will encourage the overall support of public education” (Ramey, 2004, p. 71). SROs may also help deter student violence by being a visible law enforcement presence in schools. Furthermore, if an SRO has created meaningful relationships with students, the reporting of serious offenses may increase, which will also help with school safety (Theriot, 2011). Stuker (2002) stated that SRO programs can only be effective when the SROs have developed meaningful relationships with students and that this rapport cannot be understated as an important part of school safety. Some students may also be less apt to commit crimes on campus if they are aware
that an SRO is located on the premises and they can be held accountable criminally for their actions (Herreras, 2013).

Another touted benefit to having SROs in public schools is the fact that it can be “an important preventive/mitigating asset” to school safety (Daniels et al., 2010, p. 593) and that effective SRO programs help to ensure that students stay in school (Benigni, 2004). Having an SRO in a school will reduce law enforcement response time during an emergency (Herreras, 2013) and can take the lead if and when additional law enforcement resources are needed (Daniels et al., 2011).

Criticisms of School Security Programs

There have been many criticisms of school security programs. Addington (2009) stated that there is “no clear evidence that indicates that measures such as security cameras or guards are effective in preventing school violence” (p. 1433). Others have stated more boldly that “there is no evidence to suggest the presence of resource officers contributed to the decline in student-reported crime” (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013, p. 132). Furthermore, another study hypothesized that having law enforcement in schools does not only deter school crime and violence but it may also impact school crime and violence negatively (Schlosser, 2014). This can happen because students feel less safe and more fearful due to restrictive measures such as armed guards and that this can have a negative impact on the culture of the school (Cowan et al., 2013) and “previous researchers have suggested that heightened security measures may create increased victimization and disruption at school as well as increased fear among students” (Addington, 2009, p. 1440). Another study found that “school security measures are relatively ineffective, and may be counterproductive to some of these goals. Both parents
and students perceive high security schools as less safe and security has no relationship to teacher ratings of student misbehavior” (Servoss, 2012, p. 63). Further, having SROs in schools increases the reliance on placing students in the juvenile justice system rather than dealing with untoward behaviors through normal school procedures (“Justice policy,” 2012). Some argue, however, that there is a difference between the violations of criminal codes, which can result in arrest, and the violation of school rules, which can be handled administratively, and may not be criminal violations (Clark, 2011).

Having law enforcement in public schools can expose students to the possibility of an arrest. These arrests can have serious consequences for students including keeping the student from gaining employment and having a negative effect on their ability to gain admission into college (Wolf, 2013). Some SROs have reported that the consequence of arresting a student for an offense is not as important a factor in their decision to arrest than other factors such as evidence, seriousness of the offence, and lack of respect toward the officer. This is somewhat disturbing due to the potential long-term negative consequences that an individual may face when arrested (Wolf, 2013). Theriot may describe this best:

When teachers and principals expect a criminal justice intervention like arrest, they ignore the developmental issues related to students’ behavior, miss the teachable moments that come from student misbehavior, and fail to take advantage of opportunities to work with adolescents in need. Given the long-term negative consequences that can follow removing a child from the classroom, denying them educational opportunities, and possibly introducing them to the
juvenile justice system, improved classroom management skills is preferable to arrest and other more punitive outcomes. (Theriot, 2011, p. 61)

Indeed, having a student arrested for an offense “nearly doubles the odds of [the student] dropping out of school, and, if coupled with a court appearance, nearly quadruples the odds of a dropout” (Kim & Geronimo, 2010, p. 29). Other consequences of arrest can be lower standardized test scores, the reduction in the chance for gainful future employment, and the likelihood of recidivism (Kim & Geronimo, 2010). Petteruti (2011) suggested that arresting students can have long term negative effects and even points out that there is an additional burden placed on taxpayers. One unintended consequence of having SROs in public schools is the so called “school-to-prison pipeline” which may occur due to the negative effects of being arrested (Wolf, 2013). Theriot suggests that “given the long-term negative consequences that can follow removing a child from the classroom and denying them educational opportunities, improved management skills and appropriate behavioral training for students would seem preferable to arrest and other more punitive outcomes” (Theriot, 2009, p. 285).

Finally, in 2013, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), made several negative statements regarding the use of armed officers patrolling public schools. The NASP asserted that simply having armed guards in schools gives the students the perception that there is a need for such personnel, even if there is none. Also, they have stated that arming school staff will “undermine the primary mission of schools to ensure learning.” Finally, the NASP suggested that focusing on using armed guards “ignores the fact that efforts to safeguard students must occur long before an individual is on the
premises with the intent to cause harm to others as well as themselves” (NASP, 2013, p. 22)

Research Needed

The next section of this literature review will cover the authors who feel that more research is needed before one can make a determination as to the effectiveness of SRO or security guard programs in public schools. Many schools have implemented security programs; however, many of these programs are not effectively evaluated (Coon & Travis, 2012). There may be negative consequences from security programs and more assessments of these programs are necessary (Addington, 2009). Another author states that it is unclear whether or not the SRO programs are accomplishing its goals, even though the SRO programs are prevalent, and have “met little opposition” (Myrstol, 2011, p. 33). Some have suggested that it would be difficult to prove the effectiveness of SRO programs in a similar manner that it is difficult to prove whether or not a street patrol officer is lowering crime (Clark, 2011).

One of the primary goals of having SRO and security guard programs in public schools is to lower student crime and violence, but there is a need to ascertain whether these programs are effective in meeting this goal (Raymond, 2010). There is an important question that must be answered, which is considered to be a gap in current literature on SRO programs: “Do SROs make the schools to which they are assigned safer than those schools would be without their presence? Until this question is answered, SROs will remain as a controversial solution to school safety problems (May & Higgins, 2011, p. 107). Although there have been some studies which demonstrate that there may be a correlation between having SROs in public schools and the
improvement of students’ behaviors, there are some issues in these studies in which other variables such as “causal factors of behavior and/or attitudinal change” may not have been taken into consideration. This may imply that there have been other factors that have caused improvement in student behavior that may not have been the result of the SRO programs (May et al., 2012). Raymond has also described this gap in the current literature:

In recent years, SROs have become a popular response to perceived school safety needs. Millions of dollars have been spent to hire, train, and implement SRO programs. Evaluations of the effectiveness of this approach, however, have been limited. Few reliable outcome evaluations have been conducted. Often programs are not designed to facilitate assessment; some SRO programs lack clear safety goals and others do not tie SRO activities to desired outcomes. (Raymond, 2010, p. 33)

One of the suggested reasons for hiring law enforcement and security in public schools is to deter violent school events, such as the school shootings at Columbine. These types of attacks at schools are exceedingly rare, and it is extremely difficult, because of the rarity of these attacks, to determine if having law enforcement on schools campus is an actual deterrent. Not having a violent school attack cannot be measured as the result of having SROs or security in a particular school (Addington, 2009). In fact, one report found that there was no research found that assessed how an SRO functioned during a crisis (Daniels et al., 2011). Furthermore, if a campus SRO is misused and is constantly being taken off campus to tend to misdemeanor arrests, it might make it likely that the SRO will not be present during a massacre (Teske, 20013).
What limited research on SRO programs is available tend to be descriptive in nature and focuses on perceptions of stakeholders and what the actual duties of SROs are on a daily basis (Raymond, 2010). Also, the research available on SRO programs tends to be “limited and mixed” (Petteruti, 2011, p. 10). In the current state of fluctuating school budgets, having an evaluation system in place to determine whether or not school safety goals are being met by SRO and security programs cannot be understated. Stakeholders outside of the school setting need to understand the importance of school security programs in order for alternative sources of funding to be explored (May, Hart, & Ruddell, 2011).

Several other authors have also stated the lack of research on the effectiveness of SRO and schools security programs. May and Higgins stated that the goals of SRO programs are to lower school violence; however, “the current state of understanding of SROs has gaps” (May & Higgins, 2011, p. 105). Maskaly suggested that even though security guards in schools have become more common, “there exists limited empirical evidence to suggest that SROs or security guards are effective in reducing crime or increasing school safety” (Maskaly et al., 2011, p. 161). Research is necessary to determine if an SRO or security program has unintended consequences (Addington, 2009). Another author suggested that:

Moreover, despite the increase in the placement of sworn law enforcement officers in schools and despite the millions of tax dollars spent hiring, training, and maintaining police presence in schools, it is not clear whether school police officers enhance student safety and little attention has been afforded to measuring the impact the officers have on the school environment. (Brown, 2006, p. 592)
One suggestion for future research is to measure student behaviors and activities prior to and after the placement of an SRO or security guard and then determine if there are any changes that can be determined to be caused only by the placement of these security personnel, and not by any other variables (Raymond, 2010).

Armed or Unarmed Security in Schools?

What research is available on which type of security personnel in school would be preferable, armed or unarmed, is mixed and limited (Maskaly, Donner, Lanterman, & Jennings, 2011). Some research has suggested that having armed SROs are better in reducing serious violent events than unarmed private security guards (Jennings et al., 2011). There have been some suggestions that in schools with gang activity, an armed SRO can be more effective at reducing gang-related school violence, which has not been seen in schools that have unarmed security guards (Maskaly et al., 2011).

However, other authors stated that, from students’ perspectives, having unarmed security may actually be more effective in improving the perspective of fairness (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008). The NASP has suggested that having SROs in schools may help create a safer environment, but they warn against actually arming them, and they suggest that there may be a financial benefit to having unarmed security (“NASP cautions,” 2013).

Perceptions of Effectiveness of SROs or Armed Security in Public Schools

As in all other areas of this literature review, the perception of the effectiveness of security in schools is mixed. Many teachers felt that an SRO contributed to a positive school climate and “generally promoted a feeling of safety and security,” while at the same time being an effective disciplinarian (Dickerson, 2005, p. 83). In many of our communities, police officers do indeed make the citizens feel safer, and this can be true
in school communities as well; many school stakeholders do feel safer when there is an SRO in the school (Raymond, 2010). They may also provide a “psychological benefit for administrators, staff, parents, and the adult public” (Jackson, 2002, p. 647).

One intriguing study by Dickerson, using a questionnaire survey, found that the perception of the efficacy of an SRO program is contextual in nature. How well the staff interact with the SRO has a great impact on how effective the SRO is perceived within the school. Although Dickerson reported that many of the personnel in SRO staffed schools found them to be effective, SROs were not the most effective means of ensuring school safety:

An interesting finding from the study is that, even though teachers perceive the SRO as effective in supporting the school environment in several important ways, teachers nevertheless report that the support of their building principal is the most important and most frequently given reason that they perceive their school to be safe and orderly. In fact, the presence and work of the SRO was listed as the third most frequently cited reason teachers felt safe and secure, behind principal support and supervision. (Dickerson, 2005, p. 88)

Clearly, having the strong support of school administration is an important aspect of school safety and security.

Some educators might be opposed to having an SRO program in their schools because it gives the appearance of having an unsafe school and that SROs may, in fact, be disruptive (Robers et al., 2014). One study suggested that increasing uniformed security did not increase the perception of safety (Testani-Cafiero, 2003) and that a police presence in schools may actually “pose a psychological threat to students, who may view
police as a threat to their freedom to move about, have open conversations, and experiment in legal activities that may be socially unacceptable to police and administrators” (Jackson, 2002, p. 647). There have been suggestions that students may not be accepting security personnel and they may fear being labeled as “snitches” if they go to the SRO for assistance (“Ten years after,” 2009). Further, Bracy (2011) noted, “Research by scholars in the fields of education, sociology, and criminal justice investigating other side effects of high-security schools raises concerns about the negative impact these security measures may have on students” (p. 369). The NASP (2013) asserted that having armed guards in schools has “non-significant impacts on reducing actual violence while at the same time students report feeling less safe (p. 22).

The perceived best use of an SRO program is when the “SROs are engaged more heavily in teaching and counseling students” (James, Logan, & Davis, 2011, p. 215). Also, the sharing of “knowledge and expertise” between educators and SROs is vitally important and will allow for “students [to] receive the best possible services and strengthen communities” (Benigni, 2004, p. 24). These views can be summed as follows:

Students, teachers, and administrators identify SROs as a viable crime fighting force. In contrast to community police, SROs have a positive proactive role in working with juveniles on a daily basis, not just when youth are in trouble or committing crimes. This daily contact with students normalizes interactions between police officers and students, improves communication, and builds trust. Once a basis of trust and comfort have been established, concerned students are more likely to approach SROs with concerns about potentially dangerous situations. This gives school personnel an opportunity to proactively intervene
prior to incidents escalating into more serious problems. (James et al., 2011, p. 215)

It should be noted that for many students, their “perceptions are their realities.” If they perceive their school as being unsafe, then they will not be able to learn to their full capacities. Schools should make more adults available to discuss students’ concerns regarding their own safety (Testani-Cafiero, 2003). Likewise, if teachers and administrators are concerned for their own safety, then their ability to perform their job will be affected (Brent & DeAngelis, 2013). Another study that suggested the best use of an SRO program is one in which:

The integration of community resources is of benefit to the stability and continuity of expectations surrounding the youth of the community. There is no substitute for the attention of a caring adult in the positive development of a young person. This program, when carefully crafted and implemented, stands to extend the availability of caring adults into the lives of students at risk. (Cray & Weiler, 2011, p. 169)

Hiring and Training

Having a safe learning environment is necessary in schools “before [students] focus on academic achievement and success” (Jagielski, 2005, p. 7). When hiring SROs, attention must be given that these personnel exhibit a strong interest in working with young people and are able to adapt to working in a school environment (Coon & Travis, 2012). One suggestion for the type of person to hire as an SRO is an individual who has recently retired as a shift supervisor from a police force because “most of them have more refined people skills, and their most recent assignment was to make sure the
officers they managed were doing their jobs” (Horse, 2013, p. 19). “There is always inherent liability and danger for those who carry guns as well as those who allow them to be carried” so training and certification in the use of firearms is essential (Crews, Crews, & Burton, 2013, p. 190).

Alternatives to SROs

The NASP (2013) suggested that having safe schools is a priority; however, having more guns in schools may not be the best approach. NASP (2013) warned: The tragic events at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012 further bring to light the imperative for a serious national commitment to ensuring the safety of our school children and staff. However, we must guard against letting our sense of urgency obscure evidence-based school safety initiatives in favor of seemingly obvious and potentially harmful approaches, particularly those that bring more guns into schools. (p. 22)

Having police officers in schools does not necessarily mean that schools will become a safer place or become a better learning environment (Weiler & Cray, 2011) and there is no one policy that will ensure “complete security” (Odendahl, 2013, p. 3).

Also, research on the success of SRO programs has been ambiguous at best: The uneven evidence that SROs make schools safer or improve students’ behavior, together with the risks and drawbacks of having law enforcement in schools that include the financial cost and negative impacts on youth themselves, call into question the value of keeping law enforcement in schools as an easy response to student misbehavior. Schools should be encouraged to explore other
means of keeping schools safe without involving law enforcement. (Petteruti, 2011, p. 11)

Petteruti (2011) continued to state that there may be viable alternatives such to having students become involved in the juvenile justice system that should be explored such as having “rules that are strictly and fairly enforced…and having adults, not necessarily SROs, at the school being supporting, caring, and willing to help. Using these alternatives might “achieve the same outcomes while giving those youths who are exhibiting problematic behavior in school to become successful adults” (p. 18)

One valid consideration for finding alternatives to having officers in schools is one of cost. Adding guards to schools is very expensive (Addington, 2009) and hiring officers to patrol “schools is not the best nor most cost-effective way to achieve those [safety] goals” (Petteruti, 2011, p. 1). Recent budget cuts have forced school administrators to take funds away from school security (Eisele-Dyrli, 2010). Taking funds away from educational needs and placing them in security is an act that many schools cannot afford, especially when the likelihood of a violent event is a rare occurrence (Stone & Spencer, 2010).

There have been additional suggestions for alternatives to having more security guards in schools. One suggestion is that by increasing student achievement at school will become safer because “youth that are in schools are engaged during the day, preventing them from engaging in illegal behaviors” (“Justice Policy,” 2012, p. 4). Another suggestion is for teachers to instruct students in proper conflict resolution without the involvement of law enforcement (Petteruti, 2011).
One of the more profound suggestions for improving school security is the creation of volunteer armed citizen units patrolling schools, such as in Forest Hills, Arizona, where “forty gung-ho Americans are working out with actor-turned-Louisiana sheriff’s deputy Steven Seagal…part of a broader effort to build a national “posse” of armed volunteer school guards to protect America’s children” (Jonsson, 2013, para.1).

Another suggestion, which has not gained much traction, is the arming of teachers (Rostrom, 2014). The Sandy Hook massacre has “intensified the debate over whether teachers or other school personnel should be authorized to carry guns as a means of deterring or resisting armed attackers within schools” (Rostrom, 2014, p. 440).

After reviewing the literature on school security, SROs and security guards there are two things that have become clear. First, what are effective security programs in public schools, especially programs having an armed guard? Second, there is no clear evidence regarding the perception of teachers and students on whether or not an SRO programs actually makes them feel safer, and whether or not they would feel just as safe with an SSO. This research should help to bridge some of these gaps in the current literature.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

There has been a limited amount of research conducted on the effectiveness of SROs and security guards in making schools safer (Maskaly et al., 2011), and no research was found that compared the effectiveness of SROs versus SSOs or in schools with a combination of SROs and SSOs. The primary purpose of this study is to compare the perception of school security by teachers between schools with SROs and schools with SROs and SSOs.

Research Question and Null Hypotheses

RQ1: Is there a difference in teachers’ perception of school security between Mississippi public high schools and middle schools with SROs from schools with SSOs?

H10: There is no significant statistical difference in perceived security of teachers in schools with SROs compared to schools with SSOs.

Research Design

The research design of this study was a quantitative, causal comparative study. A report was received from the Mississippi Department of Education which indicated which schools in Mississippi currently employ security guards. There is no differentiation in whether or not the security guards are armed or unarmed; therefore, contact was made with Mr. Don Criswell, School Safety Specialist with the Mississippi Department of Education Division of School Safety. Mr. Criswell indicated that most schools employ a combination of SROs and SSOs and that there are two Mississippi school districts that employ only SSOs, Humphreys County and West Point School Districts. The superintendents from these school districts were contacted to gain permission to conduct
research at the secondary schools in these districts. Jackson Public Schools did allow for
research to be conducted. The email from Mr. Criswell is attached as Appendix A.

Other school superintendents were contacted at schools that employ only SROs,
which will be a convenience sample of schools located in the southernmost counties in
Mississippi. Only secondary schools were selected. School districts that agreed to
participate in the research were Ocean Springs School District and Jackson County
School District. Both districts employ only SROs.

To determine the perception of school safety by teachers between schools with an
armed or unarmed guard, the School Resource Officers and School Climate Teacher
Survey, developed by Dr. Amy Oaks, were used. Permission from Dr. Oaks to use and
make changes to the survey has been obtained and is found in Appendix B. This survey
determines the impact that an SRO has on the climate of a school, with school safety
being one of the categories impacting school climate.

Participants

To determine the perception of school safety, a convenience sample of
participants was used. The sample consisted of teachers in Mississippi public secondary
schools, grades 6-12. All of the participants were over the age of 18 and were certified
teachers in the state of Mississippi, currently employed as a public school teacher. The
participants were selected from those Mississippi public secondary schools that have
been identified as having SROs and are located in the southernmost counties of
Mississippi. Participants were also selected from the schools that have been identified as
having a combination of SSOs and SROs which were schools within the Jackson Public
Schools District. To determine the number of participants necessary an F-test G-Power
(v3.0.10) analysis was conducted with an effect size of .5, alpha .05, and power .95, two
groups and 30 response variables. The results indicated a total sample size of 166
participants.

Instrumentation

A survey instrument, the School Resource Officers and School Climate Teacher
Survey, was designed by Dr. Amy R. Oaks and is cross sectional in nature (2001).
During the construction of the survey, Oaks identified five key areas that a school
resource officer may impact. According to Oaks, the five areas are:

- an atmosphere of caring, trust, and respect
- open communications between students and adults
- fair rules and clear expectations for students
- teacher morale
- school safety (Oaks, 2001, p. 58)

Oaks stated that:

Six questions were constructed to address each of the five content areas. For
analysis purposes, each set of six questions was combined to form a scale in
which each question carried equal weight. Thus, the thirty questions were
reduced to five scores, as shown in Table 1. (Oaks, 2001, p. 58)
Table 1

*The Relationship of School Climate Area to Survey Question* (Oaks, 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Sub-Question/School Climate Content Area</th>
<th>Corresponding Question</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Chronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. An atmosphere of trust, caring, and respect</td>
<td>1,6,11,16,21,26</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Open communication among students and adults</td>
<td>2,7,12,17,22,27</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clear rules and expectations</td>
<td>3,8,13,18,23,28</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Staff and student morale and satisfaction</td>
<td>4,9,14,19,24,29</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. School Safety</td>
<td>5,10,15,20,25,30</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of this research, the sub-score relating to school safety was used. The questions on the instrument that relates to school safety are numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30. These questions are listed below:

5. I feel safer during the day because our school has a school resource officer.

10. I feel safer at extra-curricular events because our school has a school resource officer.

15. Our school resource officer seems more interested in school safety than in arresting or busting students.

20. I believe that the presence of our school resource officer reduces drugs at school.  

25. I believe that the presence of our school resource officer reduces the likelihood that we will have weapons at school.
30. I believe that the presence of our school resource officer reduces violence at school (Oaks, 2001, pp. 130-132).

Oaks’ survey also included questions that were demographic in nature as well as one question that was included for future research, a summary question suggested by police officers, and two free response questions (Oaks, 2001). According to Oaks’ description of the survey:

The thirty questions that address the five areas of school climate are multiple choice statements using a four-point scale. The four points correspond to the following statements: Disagree, Tend to Disagree, Tend to Agree, and Agree. A five-point scale with a mid-point statement of “Neutral” was not used in order to encourage participants to indicate in which general direction they would tend to fall: in agreement or disagreement. Questions 37 and 38 were included to add texture to the survey results, rather than as a basis for additional analysis (Oaks, 2001, p. 59).

According to Oaks, the survey was analyzed by a panel of experts to address validity, as well as piloted by a group of teachers. A copy of Oaks’ survey is listed in Appendix C. The panel of experts included two police officers, two university employees, and a principal. There were revisions suggested for the survey which included the elimination of questions that were perceived as “forced choice questions” as well as some questions that were perceived as having bias. Oaks also stated that there were suggestions for reordering and clarifying the questions. Once the survey was revised, it was accepted by the participating school districts (Oaks, 2001).
The survey was piloted by teachers in Littleton, Colorado. Oaks stated that the most valuable feedback was regarding what to do in schools that had new school resource officers. This caused a revision of the instructions of the survey as well as a wording revision in one of the questions (Oaks, 2001).

Oaks offered a reliability analysis for the survey. According to Oaks (2001), “In each content area, Cronbach’s alpha exceeded .8 and corrected item total correlations were positive, as shown in table 3.4. Subsequent analysis provided descriptive statistics, including paired t-tests, one-way analysis of variance, and chi-square tests” (p. 65).

There were some changes made to the survey. On the survey that was sent to teachers in schools with a combination of SROs and SSOs, the words School Resource Officer were changed to School Safety Officer. The surveys sent to schools with only SROs were not changed. To obtain the maximum number of participants, an electronic version of the survey was created using Survey Monkey.

Procedures

To obtain the data for this research, surveys were collected from certified teachers at secondary Mississippi public schools in the Jackson Public School District, the Ocean Springs School District, and the Jackson County School District. A request for permission and a draft permission letter were sent to school district superintendents that have been identified as having either SROs or a combination of SROs and SSOs. This letter is listed in Appendix D. Once permission was obtained from the superintendents, approval was requested and gained from the University of Southern Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The approval letter from the IRB as well as the application are listed as Appendix E and F, respectively. Once approval from IRB was
obtained paper copies of the survey as well as informed consent forms were mailed directly to three secondary schools in the Jackson Public School District who responded to requests to conduct research. Due to the low level of response to the paper surveys the researcher was unable to attain the target sample size; therefore, an electronic survey was sent to 500 teachers at secondary schools in the Jackson Public School District. The surveys were not sent to the schools that had already received the paper surveys. This method elicited enough responses to obtain the proper sample size. Due to the success of the electronic surveys, only electronic surveys were sent to teachers at the secondary schools in the Ocean Springs School District and the Jackson County School District.

Analysis of Data

SPSS (v. 22) statistical software was used to determine if there was a significant difference in teacher perception of school safety between schools with SROs and SSOs or a combination of SROs and SSOs. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to analyze the research questions and to determine if there was a significant effect of the presence of an SRO or a combination of SROs and SSOs on the six dependent variables. Descriptive statistics were also reported to include frequencies, median, mode, and standard deviation. If the MANOVA was significant, follow-up tests of separate ANOVAs were conducted on each dependent variable with a Bonferroni correction applied to each ANOVA. It was found while analyzing the results that data assumptions were violated; therefore, a Pearson Chi-Square was conducted and the results were reported. Furthermore, a Mann-Whitney test was conducted to report the mean rank for each question. Finally, histogram bar charts were created for each question and are included.
Limitations

This research was limited by several causes. First, the response rates of the teachers completing the survey were lower than anticipated for the paper survey; therefore, an electronic survey was also conducted. This combination did allow for the target sample size to be obtained. Also, the participants were expected to complete the survey honestly and accurately. Another possible limitation was that the participants in the schools that employ a combination of SROs and SSOs fully understood that the survey was intended to question them only on the SSOs employed at their respective schools; however, it should be noted that in schools with a combination of SROs and SSOs it may be impossible for teachers to isolate their perceptions to only SSOs.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a difference in the teacher perception of school safety by secondary public school teachers in Mississippi between schools with SROs, who are armed, and schools with SROs and SSOs (SRO/SSO), which are unarmed. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), there were over 400 SROs and SSOs employed by Mississippi public schools during the 2013-2014 school year (“Mississippi student,” 2014). This chapter will identify the results of the research and will include a description of the samples and an analysis of the scores of the relevant survey questions to answer the research question including the statistical test for the hypothesis. Also, a brief description of relevant qualitative responses on the surveys will be discussed. The results are listed under headings that state the questions that were analyzed on the survey instrument.

There were two groups of participants in this study: teachers in schools that employ only armed guards (SROs) and teachers in schools that employ a combination of SROs and SSOs. Of the SRO group, 211 surveys were electronically disseminated with a total of 88 surveys returned for a return rate of 42%. For the SRO/SSO group, 150 paper surveys and 500 electronic surveys were disseminated with a total of 105 surveys returned, or 16%. Out of a possible 1158 individual responses there were a total of 19 missing, or 1.7%

Descriptive Analysis

The teachers who participated in the study were employed by secondary schools in Mississippi. The survey instrument collected demographic data that included gender,
ethnicity, number of years in their career, and number of years employed at their respective school. Of the 193 participants, 45 (23.3%) were male and 146 (75.6%) were female. There were two missing responses. The reported ethnicity were 104 (53.9%) White, 2 (1.0%) Hispanic, 68 (35.2%) Black, 1 (0.5%) Asian, 1 (0.5%) Native American, 3 (1.6%) Bi-racial, 2 (1.0%) Other, and 10 (5.2%) preferred not to respond. There were two missing responses. The number of years in their careers as educators were reported as 16 (8.3%) first year, 21 (10.9%) second or third year, 55 (28.5%) fourth through tenth year, 67 (34.7%) eleventh through twentieth year, and 30 (15.5%) twenty-first year or more. There were 4 missing responses. The number of years in their current building were reported as 38 (19.7%) first year, 57 (29.5%) second or third year, 59 (30.6%) fourth through tenth year, 29 (15.0%) eleventh through twentieth year, and 7 (3.6%) twenty-first year or more. There were 3 missing responses. The mean, median, mode and standard deviation for each question are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of participants’ responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statistical Analysis

A Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted for each of the variables, or relevant questions, in the survey instrument that pertained to teachers’ perception regarding school safety. The relevant questions were numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30. The analysis was conducted using SPSS v. 22 and an alpha of .05 was used to measure significance. In this section, each question is stated and the statistical analysis, tables, and figures follow.

Hypothesis testing

H10: There is no significant statistical difference in perceived safety of teachers in schools with SROs compared to schools with SSOs.

This hypothesis was rejected for all variables due to the fact that there was a significant difference between both groups for all variables. After the Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted for each variable it was determined that the perceived security of teachers in schools with SROs compared to schools with SROs/SSOs was statistically significant. The details of each individual test for each variable are listed below as well as a corresponding histogram.

I feel safer during the day because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer

The chi-square test for homogeneity was employed with two independent samples (SRO/SSO and SRO) to assess the participants’ responses with regard to their feeling of safety, measured on four-point Likert-type scale. The chi-square test of homogeneity demonstrated statistically significantly different proportions of participants’ responses on the outcome variable with respect to the two examined groups, \( \chi^2(3) = 77.83, p < .001 \).
Specifically, the SRO group endorsed safety in higher categories as compared to the SRO/SSO group; a mean rank for the SRO group was 132.58 versus 67.18 for the SRO/SSO group. No cells with expected counts of less than five were observed. Table 3, presented below, displays the observed and expected counts of responses for the two groups of interest. The observed counts between the two samples are also visually summarized in Figure 1, as presented below.

Table 3

*Observed and Expected Count of Responses to 5) I feel safer during the day because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SRO</th>
<th>SRO/SSO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed count</td>
<td>Expected count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Observed Frequencies for 5) I feel safer during the day because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer

I feel safer at extra-curricular events because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer

The chi-square test for homogeneity was employed with two independent samples (SRO/SSO and SRO) to assess the participants’ responses with regard to their feeling of safety, measured on four-point Likert-type scale. The chi-square test of homogeneity demonstrated statistically significantly different proportions of participants’ responses on the outcome variable with respect to the two examined groups, $\chi^2(3) = 74.51$, $p < .001$. Specifically, the SRO group endorsed safety at extra-curricular activities in higher categories as compared to the SRO/SSO group; a mean rank for the SRO group was
129.76 versus 66.59 for the SRO/SSO group. No cells with expected counts of less than five were observed. Table 4, presented below, displays the observed and expected counts of responses for the two groups of interest. The observed counts between the two samples are also visually summarized in Figure 2, also presented below.

Table 4

*Observed and Expected Count of Responses to 10) I feel safer at extra-curricular activities because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SRO</th>
<th>SRO/SSO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed count</td>
<td>Expected count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2. Observed Frequencies for 10) I feel safer at extra-curricular activities because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer

Our School resource Officer/School Safety Officer seems more interested in school safety than in arresting or busting students

The chi-square test for homogeneity was employed with two independent samples (SRO/SSO and SRO) to assess the participants’ responses with regard to their feeling of safety, measured on four-point Likert-type scale. The chi-square test of homogeneity demonstrated statistically significantly difference in proportions of participants’ responses on the outcome variable with respect to the two examined groups, $\chi^2(3) = 56.28$, $p < .001$. Specifically, the SRO group endorsed the belief that their SRO seems more interested in school safety than in busting students and this was reported in higher categories as compared to the SRO/SSO group; a mean rank for the SRO group was
123.37 versus 71.96 for the SRO/SSO group. One cell had an expected count of less than 5 with the minimum expected count being 4.58. Table 5, presented below, displays the observed and expected counts of responses for the two groups of interest. The observed counts between the two samples are also visually summarized in Figure 3, also presented below.

Table 5

*Observed and Expected Count of Responses to 15) Our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer seems more interested in school safety than in arresting or busting students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SRO</th>
<th>SRO/SSO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed count</td>
<td>Expected count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Observed Frequencies for 15) Our school Resource Officer/School Safety Officer seems more interested in school safety than in arresting or busting students

*I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces drugs at school.*

The chi-square test for homogeneity was employed with two independent samples (SRO/SSO and SRO) to assess the participants’ responses with regard to their feeling of safety, measured on four-point Likert-type scale. The chi-square test of homogeneity demonstrated statistically significantly difference in proportions of participants’ responses on the outcome variable with respect to the two examined groups, $\chi^2(3) = 60.907, p < .001$. Specifically, the SRO group endorsed the belief that the presence of their school resource officer reduces drugs at school. This was reported in higher categories as compared to the SRO/SSO group; a mean rank for the SRO group was
127.14 versus 68.13 for the SRO/SSO group. No cells with expected counts of less than five were observed. Table 6, presented below, displays the observed and expected counts of responses for the two groups of interest. The observed counts between the two samples are also visually summarized in Figure 4, also presented below.

Table 6

*Observed and Expected Count of Responses to 20) I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces drugs at school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SRO</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>SRO/SSO</th>
<th>Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>count</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4. Observed Frequencies for 20) I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces drugs at school

*I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces the likelihood that we will have weapons at school*

The chi-square test for homogeneity was employed with two independent samples (SRO/SSO and SRO) to assess the participants’ responses with regard to their feeling of safety, measured on four-point Likert-type scale. The chi-square test of homogeneity demonstrated statistically significantly different proportions of participants’ responses on the outcome variable with respect to the two examined groups, $\chi^2(3) = 69.031$, $p < .001$.

Specifically, the SRO group endorsed the belief that the presence of their School Resource officer reduces the likelihood that there will be weapons in their school. This
was reported in higher categories as compared to the SRO/SSO group; a mean rank for the SRO group was 129.00 versus 66.61 for the SRO/SSO group. No cells with expected counts of less than five were observed. Table 7, presented below, displays the observed and expected counts of responses for the two groups of interest. The observed counts between the two samples are also visually summarized in Figure 5, also presented below.

Table 7

*Observed and Expected Count of Responses to 25) I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces the likelihood that we will have weapons at our school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SRO</th>
<th>SRO/SSO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed count</td>
<td>Expected count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5. Observed Frequencies for 25) I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces the likelihood that we will have weapons at our school

*I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces violence at school*

The chi-square test for homogeneity was employed with two independent samples (SRO/SSO and SRO) to assess the participants’ responses with regard to their feeling of safety, measured on four-point Likert-type scale. The chi-square test of homogeneity demonstrated statistically significantly different proportions of participants’ responses on the outcome variable with respect to the two examined groups, $\chi^2(3)= 37.391, p < .001$. Specifically, the SRO group endorsed the belief that their School Resource Officer
reduces violence at their school. This was reported in higher categories as compared to
the SRO/SSO group; a mean rank for the SRO group was 96.06 versus 95.02
for the SRO/SSO group. No cells with expected counts of less than five were observed.
Table 8, presented below, displays the observed and expected counts of responses for the
two groups of interest. The observed counts between the two samples are also visually
summarized in Figure 6, also presented below.

Table 8

*Observed and Expected Count of Responses to)* 30 I believe that the presence of our
School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces violence at school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SRO</th>
<th>SRO/SSO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed count</td>
<td>Expected count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6. Observed frequencies for 30) I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Resource Officer reduces violence at school

Open Ended Responses

There were two open response items on the instrument. They were, 37) “Please explain why you would or would not recommend the [SRO or SRO/SSO] program to another school” and 38) “If you have had any interactions with your School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer that you would like to share…” (Oaks, 2001). As with the quantitative results, the SRO group comments were considerably more positive than the SRO/SSO group; in fact, there were no negative comments associated with the SRO group as opposed to the SRO/SSO group. Listed below are examples of some of the comments made by participants:
SRO group question 37

“The mere presence of a Resource Office[r] promotes safety and respect.”

“I would recommend a School Resource Officer because it makes us all feel safer.”

“The school officer is a good resource for teachers and students.”

“Our school resource officer gives us the ability to have a direct line of communication with law enforcement should a major issue occur.”

“In today’s climate of possible school violence, it makes sense to have a trained, armed law enforcement officer in a school building.”

“I would recommend having a School Resource Officer to every school district to help promote and maintain order and safety.”

“He is a role model to our students and they enjoy talking to him.”

“School resource officers help the school to feel safer and more secure.”

“I believe that it benefits the overall school population with a sense of well-being and protection.”

“A School Resource Officer helps provide a safe climate for both students and faculty and staff.”

“Having a resource officer at our school makes everyone feel safe knowing we have someone looking out for our well-being.”

“I believe that having the School Resource Officer on campus makes students feel safe and reminds them to respect authority.”

“I just feel that having an SRO’s presence in the building and at events sets the precedent that we are here for the safety of our students.”
**SRO group question 38**

“I have had to check video recordings in the past for disciplinary and possible theft reasons in the past, and the Officer has always been helpful and committed to righting the wrongs.”

“We had a situation in the classroom that needed to be investigated using camera feedback. Our SRO made sure that he found the culprits despite the hours of time to search through video footage. This kind of time and dedication was such a huge help, and I am so grateful for our SRO’s commitment to keeping our school safe and consistently ruled.”

“Our officer deals with the students in a respectful way.”

“In talking with our School Resource Officer, I have noticed that he is a genuine role model both in school and out of school.”

“Nice, friendly”

“I have always met with our School Resource Officer many times. He is always interested in supporting the staff in any way possible. He makes himself available as much as possible to help us be effective in our duties.”

“I always see our SRO talking to students, they high five him or tell him how well they played a game the night before the school. When he talks to them, all I see is smiles!”

“Our has been friendly with staff and students.”

“Our School Resource Officer is very approachable and very interactive with students both inside and outside the classroom. The students and staff both respect and appreciate all that he does to provide a safe atmosphere for learning.”
“Our School Resource Officer works to build a trusting relationship with students and staff. He gets to know everyone and encourages the students to stay on the right path.”

“He is a wonderful asset to our school.”

SRO/SSO group question 37

“Yes, I would, [recommend] but our safety officer does not do his job very well.”

“I would recommend the School Safety Officer Program to another school if the program at this school was effective. I only see them sitting at the school’s door entrance. We need them throughout the building.”

“They are security theatre [sic] so that the district can hide crime from official statistics and the media.”

“Our officers rarely get involved with student behavior, mostly monitor attendance and hallways. When they do interact with students it is mostly corrective and negative. Their presence seems to have little effect on the culture of the school.”

“We need armed police officer in our school building not safety officers with little to no power to enforce any kind of law.”

“If a school safety office[r] is doing their job correctly and accurately, I feel that is a great benefit to the school and its environment.”

“I’m not clear on the duties of our officers. I hope they are doing the job correctly.”

“I feel that having a person in uniform promotes a society that needs that type of enforcement. I think there are better ways to make schools safer.”
“Because they are just there to check visitors in the building. They don’t seem to care much about security of the building.”

“I would feel much safer with a law enforcement officer with a firearm in the school.”

“Our security is useless.”

“My experience with district employed safety officers has not been positive. They are not required to have a law enforcement background and as a result, do not enforce the rules as required.”

There were some positive responses regarding the SRO/SSO group:

“Even if the students have a tendency [sic] to fight or do drugs, I believe that the presence of a School officer is very helpful.”

“Their presence is respected as a law enforcing individual.”

“I believe that having Safety Officers in the school setting reduces the likelihood of violence occurring. I feel having officers improves the overall safety of faculty, staff, and students.”

“If a school safety officer[r] is doing their job correctly and accurately, I feel that is a great benefit to the school and it’s [sic] environment.”

SRO/SSO group question 38

“Our safety officer is just very disrespectful to me. I feel that it is a racial issue.”

“I like them personally but we need armed officers as mentioned above otherwise it is just a matter of time until another gang related incident occurs or some student or teacher is hot here on campus.”
“In my building I have witnessed safety officer who do their job well and have a strong relationship with both students and teachers. However I have also witnessed safety officers who just stand by as events go down or completely turn off their walkie when someone is requesting for assistance during a fight.”

“They are very pleasant people but I don’t think they are well trained for their positions.”

“He frequently hits on the female teachers and staff members so he doesn’t make the place feel comfortable or safe.”

“We have 4. There is only one that does her job.”

There were a few positive responses in the SRO/SSO group to question 38.

“Interactions have been good and positive.”

“Our safety officers are nice people.”

“Our officers are friendly.”

After reviewing the responses to the open-ended questions there is a clear discrepancy between the SRO group and the SRO/SSO group. The SRO group had no negative responses regarding their respective SROs. The teachers reported that not only do they feel the SRO has a positive impact on the climate of the school they also reported that they liked them personally. The SRO/SSO group responses were primarily negative. Some of the responses indicated that the SRO/SSO group were not well trained and did not perform their job appropriately. Any interactions with the SRO/SSO group by the teachers that were positive only indicated that the participants felt the members of the SRO/SSO group were nice or friendly and there was no mention that they performed their job adequately.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This research attempted to determine the perception of school safety by teachers in Mississippi Public secondary schools between schools that employ armed School Resource Officers and schools that employ a combination of SROs and SSOs. The research question that was used is as follows:

RQ1: Is there a difference in teachers’ perception of school safety between Mississippi public high schools and middle schools with SROs from those with SSOs?

The survey instrument was the School Resource Officers and School Climate Teacher Survey, which was designed by Dr. Amy R. Oaks (2001). This instrument was sent to teachers in schools that employed only SROs. There were 88 surveys returned for a return rate of 42%. Next, the term “School Resource Officer” was changed to “School Safety Officer” and sent to teachers in schools that employ SROs and SSOs. Of these, 105 surveys were returned for a return rate of 16%. There were 30 questions on the survey and the answers were on a four point Likert-like scale. Of these 30 questions, 6 questions were specific to the topic of school safety. While the participants were given the opportunity to answer all 30 questions, only the questions that dealt with school safety were studied. These questions were as follows:

5. I feel safer during the day because our school has a school resource officer/school safety officer.

10. I feel safer at extra-curricular events because our school has a school resource officer/school safety officer.
15. Our school resource officer/school safety officer seems more interested in school safety than in arresting or busting students.

20. I believe that the presence of our school resource officer/school safety officer reduces drugs at school.

25. I believe that the presence of our school resource officer/school safety officer reduces the likelihood that we will have weapons at school.


On the surveys sent to teachers that employ SROs and SSOs, the term School Resource Officer was changed to School Safety Officer.

Originally, the researcher intended to analyze the responses using SPSS v 22 and conducting a MANOVA analysis. However, due to the violations of data assumptions, it was determined that a better course of action would be to use a Pearson Chi-Square analysis and compare the results of each group individually. This was presented in Chapter 4 for each individual question studied on the survey.

Conclusions

Teachers feel safer at schools with School Resource Officers than at schools with a combination of School Resource Officers and School Safety Officers. Every question analyzed revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the teachers’ feelings of safety, with the SRO group feeling safer than the SRO/SSO group.

On question 5, I feel safer during the day because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer, the teacher’s perception of safety was greater in the SRO group as compared with the SSO group. Of the 88 respondents to the question
in the SRO group 73 participants agreed with the statement opposed to only 24 out of 105 in the SSO group. Question 10, I feel safer at extra-curricular activities because our school has a School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer, the analysis was similar to question 5. Of the 85 responses in the SRO group, 71 agreed with the statement while only 23 out of 104 agreed with the statement in the SRO/SSO group. This analysis indicates that teachers feel safer with SROs as opposed to SROs/SSOs at both the school day environment as well as at extra-curricular activities.

On question 15, Our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer seems more interested in school safety than in arresting or busting students, the overwhelming majority of responses indicate agreement with this statement as opposed to the SRO/SSO group. The responses were 79 out of 87 in the SRO group and 40 out of 103 in the SRO/SSO group. This could be due to the fact that SSOs have no authority to arrest; however the term ‘busting’ could be applied to SSOs.

On question 20, I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces drugs at school, the majority of the response in the SRO group agreed with this statement as opposed to the SRO/SSO group. It should be noted, however, that 25 out of 84 responses in the SRO group indicated that they tend to agree as opposed to 38 tending to agree in the SRO/SSO group. This was particularly interesting because, while the SRO group responses were more likely to agree to this statement, it was not as skewed as in questions 5, 10, and 15. This indicates that while teachers do feel safer with the presence of an SRO at school and at school related events, the participants did not feel as strongly about the ability of the SRO to reduce drugs at their schools.
On question 25, I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces the likelihood that we will have weapons at our school, again, the respondents in the SRO group overwhelmingly selected that they agreed with this statement as opposed to the SRO/SSO group. Out of 86 responses in the SRO group, 62 selected that they agreed with this statement as opposed to 17 out of 103 in the SRO/SSO group. However, when asked question 30, “I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer/School Safety Officer reduces violence at school,” no participants in the SRO group selected that they agreed with this statement, while 14 out of 103 participants in the SRO/SSO group did agree with this statement. 47 out of 87 participants in the SRO group selected that they tend to agree to this statement, and 43 out of 103 in the SRO/SSO group selected that they tend to agree to this statement.

These two questions indicate that while teachers do feel that SROs in schools do lower the likelihood that there will be weapons at school, they do not agree that the presence of lower weapons at school will necessarily lower the incidences of violence at school.

Limitations

This study is limited by several factors. While the researcher was able to attain the recommended sample size, it was relatively small. Caution should be exercised when making generalizations about this study to larger populations. Also, socioeconomic and demographic data were not utilized in this study and taking those variables into account could impact the data. Another possible limitation to this study was that the impact of community safety and crime was not considered in this study. It is possible that teachers working in higher crime districts may perceive their safety differently and possible controls for this data could impact the study. This study was also limited by the
Recommendations for Policy and Practitioners

This study indicates that teachers do feel safer at school with the presence of SROs as opposed to SROs/SSOs. When districts are making decisions as to the type of security personnel they wish to employ in their respective schools, the perceptions of the teachers should be taken into account. Although it may be more cost effective to employ SSOs, careful consideration of the perception of safety by teachers is necessary. If a teacher perceives that their school is safer with an armed SRO, no amount of monetary savings may be worth having teachers in an environment in which they do not feel secure. It should be noted, however, that at this time the Mississippi Community Oriented Policing Services in Schools (MCOPS) Grant is available for school districts to help defray the cost of SROs by $10,000.00 per officer; this funding must be appropriated by the Mississippi Legislature annually (2014). This funding may not be available in the future, and school districts will have to decide if the higher costs associated with employing SROs is wise use of district funds.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study only sought to determine if there was a difference in the perception of safety by teachers in schools with SROs as opposed to schools with SROs/SSOs. Perception can be a fickle thing. A teacher’s perception of their safety may be changed by a single incident in a school, such as threats or violence. This perception could also change in a relatively short time span. If a teacher is involved or witness to a very violent episode, such as a school shooting, then the individual may never feel safe in a school.
environment, regardless of the type of security personnel that are employed. Research on teachers’ perception of safety in schools in which a violent event has occurred would be recommended, even if this sample size is exceedingly small. Research comparing the perception of school safety by teachers versus students could give important insight in the differences in perception between these two groups. Also, it would be interesting to compare the perceptions of the teachers and students of school safety against the reality of violent school incidents.

Furthermore, research is needed to determine if an SRO actually has a statistical impact on safety at school. While this type of research would be extremely valuable, it would be difficult to determine this type of effect due to several causes. To gauge whether or not an SRO has an impact on school safety, a future researcher would need to determine how they would measure the impact. One suggestion would be to compare the number of disciplinary or violent incidents at schools with SROs with schools that have SROs/SSOs. A researcher could use data reported by schools of violent incidences; however, an assumption would have to be made that the data being reported was in fact truthful and honest. A school administrator has a great deal of leeway in deciding what type of disciplinary measures they take for a specific infraction, and their response will also dictate whether or not they must report the incident. Future researchers would have to overcome this potential limitation.

Finally, the data collected in this survey was not used in its entirety. Only five questions out of the 30 total questions were analyzed to determine the perception of school safety between the two groups. Further analysis could reveal if there was a significant difference in the perceptions of teachers between the SRO group and the
SRO/SSO group in the other key areas asked about in the survey instrument. These categories include the following:

- an atmosphere of caring, trust, and respect
- open communications between students and adults
- fair rules and clear expectations for students
- teacher morale (Oaks, 2001, p. 58)

Summary

Making decisions regarding what type of security to implement in any school is a difficult prospect. There are many considerations to take, not the least of which is stakeholder input. Of the various stakeholders in any given school, which include students, parents, and school district taxpayers, the teachers’ perceptions regarding what type of safety is provided by School Resource Officers and School Safety Officers is vital. The intended purpose of this study was to determine if the teachers perceive a difference in the safety of the school between these two types of security personnel and it was found that teachers perceive being more safe in schools with School Resource Officers as opposed to schools with School Resource Officers and School Safety Officers. This perception should be taken into account whenever decisions are being made as to what type of security officers is to be employed.
Good afternoon Mr. Lapointe,

It was a pleasure speaking with you today. Thank you for the clarification pertaining to your request for information. As per our conversation, Humphreys County School District and Westpoint School District are the only two (2) districts that only have School Safety Officers (SSO’s) for security in their schools. Most districts have School Resource Officers (SRO’s) only, or a combination of SRO's and SSO's. Please feel free to contact me if further assistance is required.

thank you,

Don Criswell
School Safety Specialist
MDE Division of School Safety
359 North West St.
Jackson, Mississippi 39205
601-359-1335 office
601-506-1786 cell
APPENDIX B
INSTRUMENT PERMISSION TO USE

MS - Lapointe, David

From: Amy Oaks <aoaks@lps.k12.co.us>
Sent: Tuesday, August 26, 2014 8:54 AM
To: MS - Lapointe, David
Subject: Re: Dissertation Instrument

Go right ahead, and best of luck to you.
Amy Oaks

On Aug 26, 2014, at 7:48 AM, "MS - Lapointe, David" <dlapointe@ossdms.org> wrote:

Dear Dr. Oaks:

I am a doctoral student and would like to potentially use your survey instrument to determine the effect of armed versus unarmed security on student discipline dispositions. Would it be possible to gain permission to use and make changes to your instrument?

Sincerely,

David Lapointe
# APPENDIX C

## SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### School Resource Officers and School Climate Teacher Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey! If you have not signed the informed consent pages at the beginning of this survey, please do that now.

This survey asks about the influence of your School Resource Officer on the climate of your school. If you are at a school with a School Resource Officer who is new to the building this year, you may not know that person well enough to answer. In that case, complete the survey based on the officer who served previously. If you are a first-year teacher, please complete the survey based on the impressions you have formed so far.

Circle the number that best matches your opinion or answers the question. Circle only one answer to each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Our School Resource Officer seems to like and care about students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Our School Resource Officer is approachable.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Our School Resource Officer knows and enforces school rules.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Our School Resource Officer has a positive influence on staff morale.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel safer during the day because our school has a School Resource Officer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Our School Resource Officer helps our school feel like a place where students are treated with dignity and respect.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Our School Resource Officer promotes an open dialogue with students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Our School Resource Officer has high expectations for student behavior.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Our School Resource Officer improves the climate of our building for teachers.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel safer at extra-curricular events because our school has a School Resource Officer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Our School Resource Officer helps our school feel like a place where students are trusted by adults.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Our School Resource Officer promotes an open dialogue with adults.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## School Resource Officers and School Climate
### Teacher Survey · Page 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>tend to disagree</th>
<th>tend to agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Our School Resource Officer is a positive role model.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I believe that our School Resource Officer has a positive influence on student morale.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Our School Resource Officer seems more interested in school safety than in arresting or busting students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Our School Resource Officer acts more like a counselor than like a guard.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. If I had a law- or safety-related question I would feel comfortable asking our School Resource Officer about it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I believe that students are more likely to follow school rules because we have a School Resource Officer in the building.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I feel more positive about school because we have a School Resource Officer in the building.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer reduces drugs at school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Our School Resource Officer helps our school feel like a place where adults are treated with dignity and respect.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Our School Resource Officer seems interested in sharing information about law-related topics.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I believe that our School Resource Officer helps us enforce school rules in a fair and reasonable way.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Our School Resource Officer supports our school’s goals and mission.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer reduces the likelihood that we will have weapons at school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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School Resource Officers and School Climate · Page 3

26. I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer improves the overall atmosphere of our school.
27. I believe that our School Resource Officer improves communications among students and staff in our building.
I feel more confident enforcing school rules because we have a School Resource Officer in the building.
I believe that our School Resource Officer improves the reputation of our school.
30. I believe that the presence of our School Resource Officer reduces violence at school.

31. Your gender is:
   1. male
   2. female

32. You describe your ethnicity as:
   1. White
   2. Hispanic
   3. Black
   4. Asian
   5. Native American
   6. Bi-racial
   7. Other
   8. Prefer not to respond

33. Where are you in your career as an educator?
   1. first year
   2. second or third year
   3. fourth through tenth year
   4. eleventh through twentieth year
   5. twenty first year or more

34. What year is this for you in this building?
   1. first year
   2. second or third year
   3. fourth through tenth year
   4. eleventh through twentieth year
   5. twenty first year or more

35. How well do you feel that you know your School Resource Officer?
   1. not at all
   2. not very well
   3. pretty well
   4. very well

(Please continue on to the next page.)

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36. Would you recommend the School Resource Officer Program to other schools?
   1. yes
   2. no

37. Please explain why you would or would not recommend the program to another school. Please use the space below and the back of the page, if necessary.

38. If you have had any interactions with your School Resource Officer that you would like to share, please use the space below and the back of the page, if necessary.

Thank you!

133
January 29, 2015
Superintendent
Name of School District
School Address
City, MS Zip Code

Dear Superintendent:

I am a doctoral student at The University of Southern Mississippi and am researching teachers’ perception of school safety between schools with an armed guard, or school resource officer, and an unarmed guard. I will be conducting this study using samples of teachers from Mississippi secondary schools. With your permission, I would like to survey teachers in the secondary schools in your district.

If your permission is obtained, I will contact the principals in your district to determine the best way to contact the teachers. Participation in this study will be completely voluntary. All school and other identifying data will remain confidential. The data will be collected using paper surveys and only myself and the research statistician will review the raw data. The data will be kept secure in a locked filing cabinet for one year, at which time the data will be destroyed.

Thank you for your time. If necessary, feel free to contact me and I will be glad to answer any of your questions.
Sincerely,

David A. Lapointe
Doctoral Student
The University of Southern Mississippi
228-249-4164
David.lapointe@eagles.usm.edu

Enc: Draft Permission Letter
Draft Permission Letter

Dear Mr. Lapointe,

Thank you for your interest in conducting research in our school district. Please accept this letter as permission for middle school(s) in _____________School District to participate in your research study on emotional intelligence and school climate. I understand the scope of your research and the data to be collected. All information gathered will be done professionally, appropriately, and confidentially. We are honored to be included in this research and look forward to seeing the results of your study. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Sincerely,
APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5907 | Fax: 601.266.6477 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional_review_board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Event Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.

Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: CH15072801
PROJECT TITLE: Teacher Perception of School Safety Between Mississippi Secondary Schools with School Resource Officers and School Safety Officers
PROJECT TYPE: Change to a Previously Approved Project
RESEARCHER(S): David A. Lapointe
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10/01/2015 to 09/30/2016

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX F

HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH APPLICATION

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH APPLICATION FORM

HUMAN RESEARCH APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Use this form to apply for IRB review. IRB approval is required before human subjects research can begin.

- In order to complete this form you will need both Citi certificates for all investigators, completed consent forms, and any survey instruments and funding permission letters. All of these documents must be attached as icons (see instructions at the bottom of this form) in order for this application to be accepted.
- Before completing this form, review the information included on the sample consent forms and FAQ section of the IRB website: [http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board).
- Student researchers must send the completed form with all attachments to Research Advisors (Honor’s Thesis Advisor, Master’s Thesis Director, or Dissertation Director) for review. Faculty researchers should send the form directly to department chairs.
- Student Research Advisors must review the form, attach their own CITI certifications, and provide authorization where indicated before sending the application to departmental chairs.
- Department chairs must review the completed form, provide authorization where indicated, and submit completed versions of this form and all necessary authorizations to irb@usm.edu using their Southern Miss email address.

SECTION 1: INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

1. Project Title: Teacher Perception of School Safety Between Mississippi Secondary Schools with School Resource Officers and School Safety Officers
2. Principal Investigator: David A. Lapointe
3. Phone: 228-249-4164
4. USM Email: david.lapointe@eagles.usm.edu

5. Campus ID: W114881
6. College: Education and Psychology
7. Department: Educational Leadership and School Counseling
8. Department Phone: 601-266-4579

9. Purpose (check one):
   - Undergraduate project
   - Honors Thesis Project
   - Graduate project
   - Faculty or staff research

   Student Research Advisor (if applicable)
   - Name: Dr. David E. Lee
   - Phone: 601-266-6062
   - USM Email: David.E.Lee@usm.edu

10. Organization:
11. Grant #:

15. Describe your expertise and qualifications related to this research:
I am a doctoral student and have had my proposal approved by my dissertation committee.

16. List other USM affiliated investigators; completion of CITI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Faculty or Staff</th>
<th>Graduate Student</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Project Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. David E. Lee</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Dissertation Chair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Common and Human Subject Research Courses
must be attached.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>University or Institution</th>
<th>Project Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17. List all Non-USM affiliated investigators.

18. If other individuals will be involved in data collection, describe their role and their training. Dr. Lee is my chair and will offer guidance and oversight throughout the project.

### SECTION 2: RESEARCH PROCEDURES

19. Briefly describe the project and its goal(s) in two to three paragraphs.

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a difference in teachers' perception of school safety in Mississippi secondary schools between schools with school resource officers (SROs) or school safety officers (SSOs). SROs are certified police officers who are armed while SSOs are not armed. There has been no research found that compares this perception of school safety, even though there are large numbers of both SROs and SSOs working in Mississippi public schools.

Beneficiaries to this research will be school districts that are making decisions regarding what type of security personnel they wish to employ. Another benefit of this study will be to help fill the sizeable gaps in literature regarding the use of SROs and SSOs in public schools.

20. Are any of the subjects under 18 years of age?

- [ ] Yes  
- [x] No

Note: Parental consent is required for participants under the age of 18.

21. Describe subject population, number of subjects to be included, and criteria for selection.

The subject population will be 186 certified teachers from Mississippi secondary schools currently employed as a public school teacher. The subjects will be selected from schools that have been identified as having only SSOs or SROs. Currently, school districts that have been identified and given permission for research to be conducted are the West Point School District, Ocean Springs School District, and Jackson County School District.

22. How will participants be recruited?

- [ ] Class announcement  
- [ ] Oral Announcement  
- [ ] E-mail announcement  
- [x] Posted campus advertisement  
- [ ] Television, Radio or Newspaper ad  
- [ ] Advertising Agency  
- [ ] Other (explain): Request from superintendents of school districts to survey their teachers.

23. For adult subjects, how will you verify that individuals are over 18?

- [x] Survey or interview  
- [ ] No adults will be participating in this research  
- [ ] Other (explain):

24. Indicate consent procedures (check all that apply):

- [x] Information letter  
- [ ] Oral presentation & Short Consent Form  
- [ ] Long Consent Form  
- [ ] Assent form (children or subjects with disabilities)  
- [ ] Request for waiver of consent  
- [ ] Not applicable

25. Detail procedures for obtaining participants' consent or justify request for waiver.

Permission from superintendents at the selected schools to conduct the research has been obtained. The researcher will either travel to the schools to conduct the surveys or deliver the surveys to the schools for the teachers to take. The teachers will be given an information letter explaining the study. Their participation will be voluntary.
25. How many interactions will be required with each subject?
- [x] 1
- [ ] 2 - 3
- [ ] 4 - 9
- [ ] 10 or more

26. Maximum length of each interaction:
- [ ] Less than 10 minutes
- [ ] Less than an hour
- [ ] Less than three hours
- [ ] Three hours or more
- [ ] No direct interaction with subjects

27. Where will interactions take place? (check all that apply):
- [ ] On campus
- [ ] Off campus
- [x] Online

28. Indicate means of data collection (check all that apply):
- [ ] Personal interview
- [ ] Questionnaire or survey
- [ ] Audio or video recording
- [ ] Behavioral observation
- [ ] Focus group inquiry
- [ ] Other (explain below):

29. Do any of the following apply to your study?
- Use of human biological samples
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No
- Use of physical exercise
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No
- Medical examinations or procedures
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No
- Use of drugs or biological products
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

The human subjects will be given an information letter explaining the survey. The human subjects will be offered the opportunity to take the survey. The researcher will collect the survey from the human subjects for data processing.

31. Does your research involve the collection of anonymous data?
- [x] Yes
- [ ] No

Note: ‘Anonymous’ means that investigators cannot associate the data with individual subjects and vice versa. Electronic surveys must be conducted via websites that do not link responses to email addresses or other identifiers. Personal interviews are not anonymous.

32. Does your research involve sensitive information?
- [ ] Yes
- [x] No

Note: Sensitive information may include (but is not limited to) information about sexual activity, drug usage, criminal behavior, financial or medical data, and religious views.

33. Does your research involve hidden video or audio recordings or deception?
- [ ] Yes
- [x] No

Note: Deception includes any information or procedure that misleads a subject intentionally.

SECTION 3: RISKS AND BENEFITS

35. Indicate all potentially vulnerable subjects involved in the study:
- [ ] Children
- [ ] Nursing home patients
- [ ] Mentally ill patients
- [ ] Pregnant females
- [ ] HIV positive individuals
- [ ] Other
- [ ] Not applicable

36. Detail the methods that will be employed to protect vulnerable subjects.

37. If your research involves prisoners, explain how it is directly relevant to prisoners or the prison system (check all that apply):
- [ ] the causes and/or effects of incarceration
- [ ] the process of incarceration
- [ ] prisons as institutional structures
- [ ] conditions of prisoners or prisons
- [ ] procedures for improving the well-being of prisoners
- [ ] other (explain):

Note: All research involving prisoners requires compliance with federal regulations pertaining to biomedical and behavioral research involving prisoners as listed in 45CFR 200 Subpart C. Research must be directly relevant to prisoners or prisoners (e.g., the effects of incarceration, criminal behavior, prison infrastructures, etc.). Completion of the CITI Research with Prisoners Module is also required.

38. How will you maintain confidentiality?
- [ ] Anonymous data
- [ ] Electronic data will be password protected
- [ ] Physical data will be locked in a file drawer
- [ ] Public/non-confidential data
- [ ] Other (explain):

39. Describe final disposition of data.
Data will be destroyed one year from the acceptance of the dissertation.
40. Risks, inconveniences, or discomforts subjects are likely to experience (check all that apply):

- Physical
- Psychological
- Financial
- Occupational

41. Detail potential risks, inconveniences and discomforts subjects are likely to experience, if any.

- Legal
- Social
- Other
- None

42. Describe the methods that will be employed to mitigate any potential risks, inconveniences or discomforts. Participants will be given an information letter explaining the purpose of the research and survey.

43. Describe any potential benefits subjects may gain as a result of participation.

None

44. List all incentives subjects will receive for their participation.

None

Note: If class credit will be given for participation, describe what other options exist for nonparticipants to receive the same credit.

45. If individuals are unwilling or unable to complete their participation, how will their incentives be distributed?

- Not Applicable (no incentives will be offered)
- They will still receive all incentives.
- They will be informed that they will receive no incentives.
- They will receive partial incentives (explain):

**SECTION 4: CHECKLIST AND AUTHORIZATION**

46. The following documents must be attached to this form:

- CITI Common Course Certificate (mandatory for all investigators and student advisor)
- CITI IRB Course Certificate (mandatory for all investigators and student advisor)
- Research proposal approval from dissertation or master’s thesis committee (if applicable)
- Study recruitment documents (if applicable)
- Survey questions (if applicable)
- Permission letter from external organization participating in the project (if applicable) on official letterhead
- Assent form for minors (if applicable)
- Consent forms (long or short if applicable) and any related documents (mandatory)
- Letter to parents (if applicable)

**Instructions for Attaching Documents:**

1. Place the cursor where you want the attachment to appear.
2. Select the "Insert" tab at the top of MS Word.
3. Select "Object," located on the far right of the tool bar (PC) or the bottom of the list (MAC)
4. Select the "Create from File" tab and check the box that states "Display as Icon." Note: Do not check the box that says "link to file."
5. Browse to the location of your document, and double click on it.
6. Repeat these steps for each document to be attached.

**Note for Mac Users:** Word for MAC is unable to attach .pdf files, so you will have to first save the CITI certificates or any other .pdf files you intend to attach as a .doc or .rtf file before attaching them. There are several ways to accomplish this. You may use Adobe to open the file and then select "File" and "Save as" and change the file type to an .rtf or .doc format. Alternatively, you may also download or create your own .pdf to .doc application or simply save the application and then open the file on a PC to attach them as instructed above.

**Attach all relevant documents in this section:**

- [PDF] CITI Common Course.pdf
- [PDF] CITI Human Subjects.pdf
- [PDF] Ocean Springs Permission Letter.pdf
- [PDF] Proposal acceptance (1).pdf
- [PDF] Jackson County Permission Letter.pdf
47. Instructions for Authorization:

1) Type your name and date in the appropriate box.
2) Students should email the form to their advisors, who should add their name and then send it to department chairs for review. Department chairs should add their name and send the finalized form to irb@usm.edu.

By typing my name below, I acknowledge that I have read, understood, and approve of the information contained herein.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>David A. Lapointe</th>
<th>Dr. David E. Lee</th>
<th>Dr. Lillian Hill, Dr. Tom Lipscomb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Student Research Advisor (if applicable)</td>
<td>Department Chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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</table>
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