

# School Policing: What the Research Shows

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# Research on SROs

- School shootings
- Student crime
- Student fear
- Arrests of students
- Exclusionary discipline
- Racial equity
- School climate
- Mentoring

# School Shootings

- Rare events: 35 student homicides in 2017-2018 (NCES);
  - 18 each of the prior two years
  - Little empirical analysis available
- Some shootings at schools with SROs (Columbine, Parkland, Santa Fe); others without (Newtown)
- SROs have intervened (Dixon, IL; St. Mary County, MD); but uncommon
- No sound empirical evidence showing SROs deter attacks

# School Shootings: What Does Work?

- Trusted adults
- Madfis (2014) studied 11 averted shootings
  - Students report if they feel supported, respected, valued (inclusive climate)
  - SROs informed in 2 of 11
- National Police Foundation's Averted School Violence Project:
  - Students, parents, teachers need to remain aware, watch for warning signs
- About trust, support, bonds – not law enforcement

# Student Crime

- Research is inconsistent
  - Difficult to study:
    - Causal effects uncertain
    - Interaction quantity and quality differs across students and SROs
  - Majority of studies show no effect or more crime after adding SROs
- Can vary based on what SROs do
  - Law enforcement only vs mentoring

# Student Fear

- Inconclusive results
  - Some studies find SROs reduce fear; others find increased fear
  - Likely varies based on student trust in SROs
  - Recent study: less stated fear, but more sense of risk

# Arrests of Students

- Arrests higher in schools with SROs
  - Particularly minor crimes, e.g., simple assault, disorderly conduct
  - Particularly for Black students
  - Despite efforts to teach de-escalation
- Causes
  - Detection
  - Escalation
  - Shift of focus: behaviors become legal issues, not social/mental health issues

# Exclusionary Discipline

- NASRO: SROs should not discipline
  - 63% secondary school admin report SROs participate in discipline
  - “Doing discipline” ambiguous
- Suspension rates higher in schools with SROs
  - High-quality research, consistent
  - Particularly Black youth

# Racial Equity

- Youth of color, particularly Black students, disproportionately punished and arrested
  - Behaviors do not account for discrepancies
  - Implicit bias: seen as threatening
  - Long-term effects are consequential
- Greater surveillance from SROs

# School Climate

- Can make climate less inclusive
  - Despite good intentions
  - Reduce trust, bonds
  - Undermine effective behavior management
- Greater risk in neighborhoods where police are distrusted; following acts of police violence

# SROs as Mentors/Informal Counselors

- Part of the “Triad model” (law enforcement/educator/informal counselor)
  - More caring adults is beneficial
- But research raises concerns about SROs in this role
  - Potential for additional surveillance
  - Students may unintentionally implicate themselves or others
  - SROs lack sufficient training

# Conclusion

- NASRO training seeks to redress some harms (de-escalation, trauma-informed care, students with disabilities)
  - Little evidence about effectiveness
- But evidence points to more potential harms than benefits
- Decisions about SROs should be based on evidence, not assumptions of effectiveness