

**SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN KENTUCKY
WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT DO THEY DO?**

By:

**Kentucky Center for School Safety Staff
David C. May, Ph.D., Research Fellow
Angie Wheaton, B.S., Graduate Assistant
LeeAnn Morrison, M.S.**

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The first School Resource Officer (SRO) program in Kentucky was initiated in Jefferson County in 1977. Since that time, the program has grown steadily due primarily to the availability of grants through the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office in the U.S. Department of Justice.

School Resource Officers were first referenced in Kentucky statutes with the passage of the Safe Schools Act in 1998. Kentucky Revised Statute 158.441 defines an SRO as *a sworn law enforcement officer who has specialized training to work with youth at a school site. The officer shall be employed through a contract between a local law enforcement agency and a school district.* The statutory language was extremely important to the development of the SRO program for three reasons: 1) it required SROs to have specialized training; 2) it recognized the importance of having a written contract between the two agencies to clarify the duties of the officer; and 3) it formally recognized SROs as a specialized field of law enforcement.

Every even year (e.g., 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010), the KCSS has updated its database of SROs and has administered questionnaires to the SROs asking questions regarding their characteristics, activities, and perceptions of school safety and the SRO's role in school safety in Kentucky. This report is an outcome of that effort during the fall of 2010 and spring and summer of 2011.

Data Collection

In the spring of 2011, researchers from the Kentucky Center for School Safety (KCSS) conducted the fourth phase of a panel study examining the attributes of School Resource Officers throughout the state of Kentucky. Using an existing database revised in the fall of 2010, an

electronic questionnaire was created to make it easier for the SROs to complete the survey. An introductory email that served as a warning email advising the SROs that the survey would be coming soon was sent to all SROs in the database in January 2011. After two weeks, a second email was sent that explained the purpose of the survey and included a link to a Survey Monkey website where the questionnaire was housed. A final email was sent two weeks later that contained the link and reminded the SROS to complete the survey if they had not already. Of the 214 SROs who received a questionnaire, 118 responses were received, for a response rate of 55.1 percent.

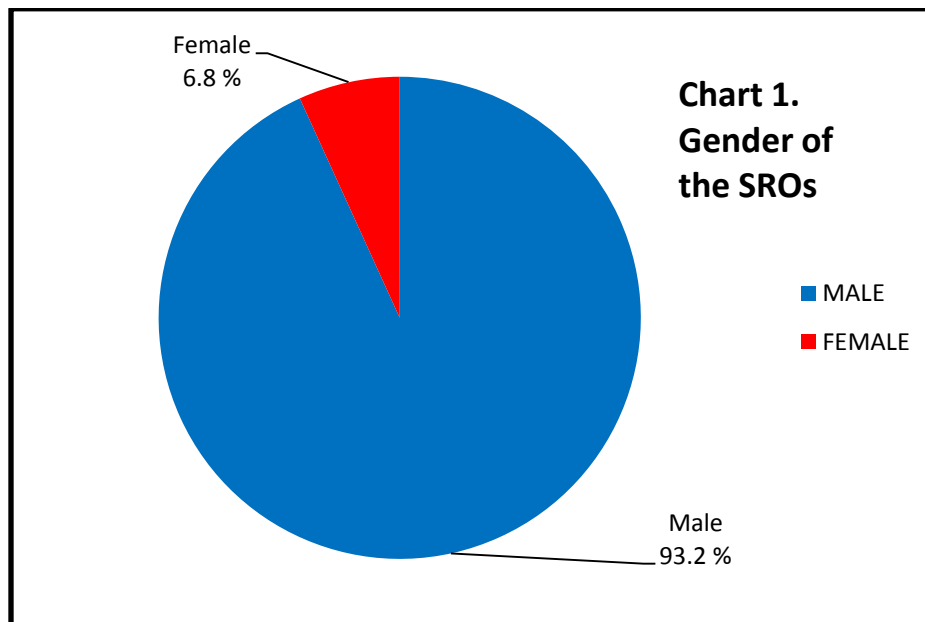
In 2004, the authors used a seven-page instrument to collect exploratory data from 216 SROs. More extensive research and discussion, combined with comments that presented unanswered questions in the 2004 survey, caused the authors to revise the questionnaire for the 2006 and 2008 surveys. Our analyses of previous data and our discussions with SROs over the course of the past decade made us realize that a number of SROs were unsatisfied with their assignment for a number of reasons; this dissatisfaction appeared to be most prevalent among those officers assigned without their input to their SRO position. To examine this phenomenon in more detail, we included a number of questions around SRO job satisfaction in the questionnaire providing data for this report. The final SRO survey for this report was eight pages long and required approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The data for this study are comprised from responses received from 118 SRO questionnaires. Practically all respondents provided data for questions on the last page of the questionnaire, indicating that the entire sample probably read the entire questionnaire. Nevertheless, some respondents failed to complete data for some of the questions. The charts provided below (as well as the percentages presented in the text of the report) reflect only valid

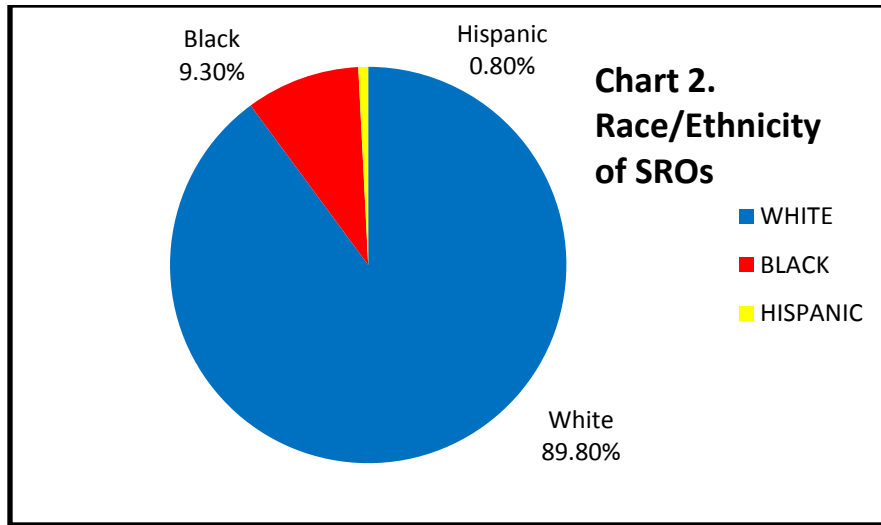
responses. In other words, the number of responses for some charts is greater than the number of responses for others because some respondents chose not to answer some questions. In most cases, the charts present the raw number of responses while the text presents summary of the charts, using percentages instead of raw numbers. The tables from which the charts were derived are available upon request.

Results

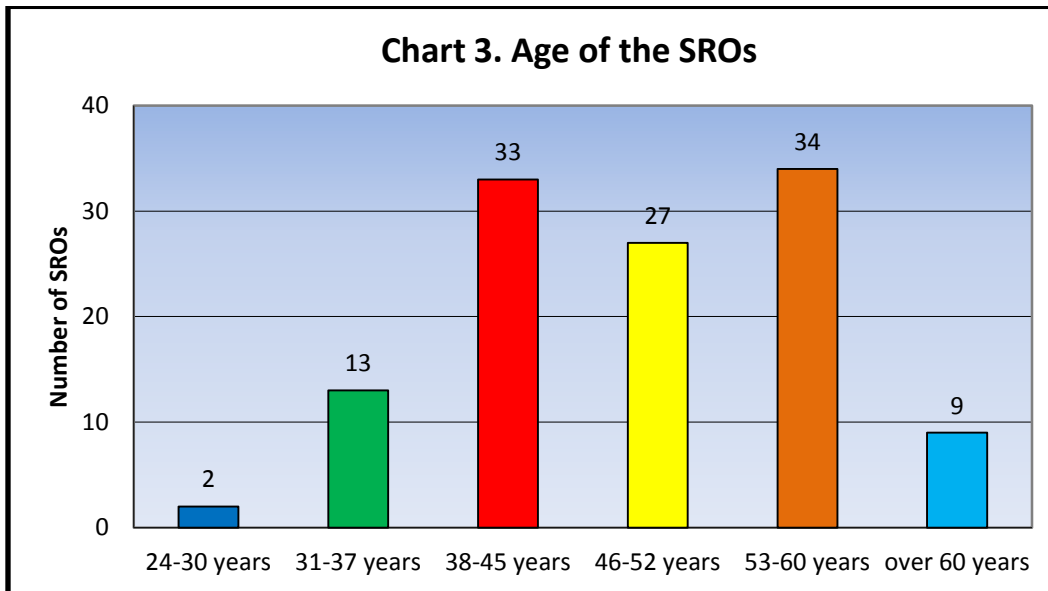
The gender and racial characteristics of the Kentucky SROs who provided data for this study are similar to those who responded in the previous SRO reports.



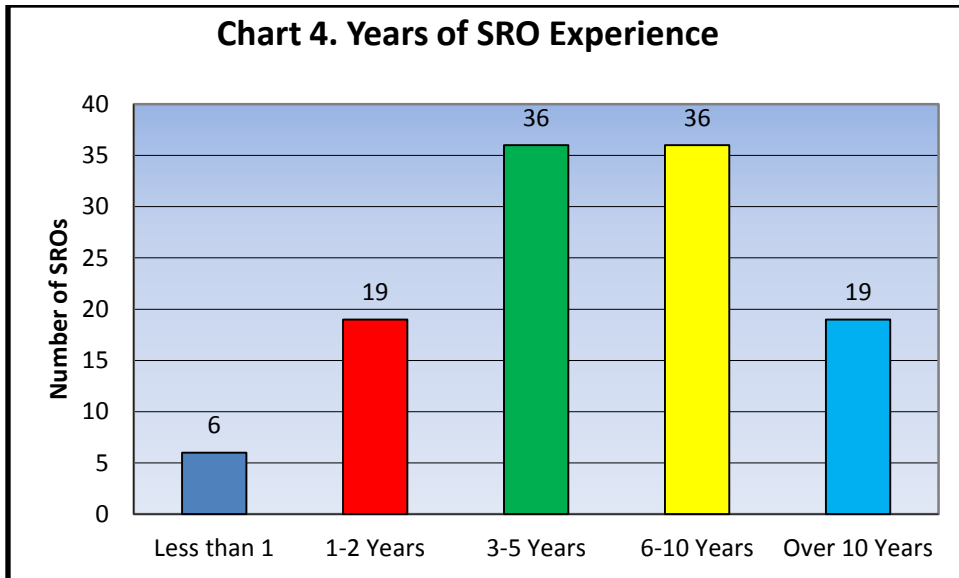
The vast majority (93.2%) of the SROs were male, while 6.8% were female.



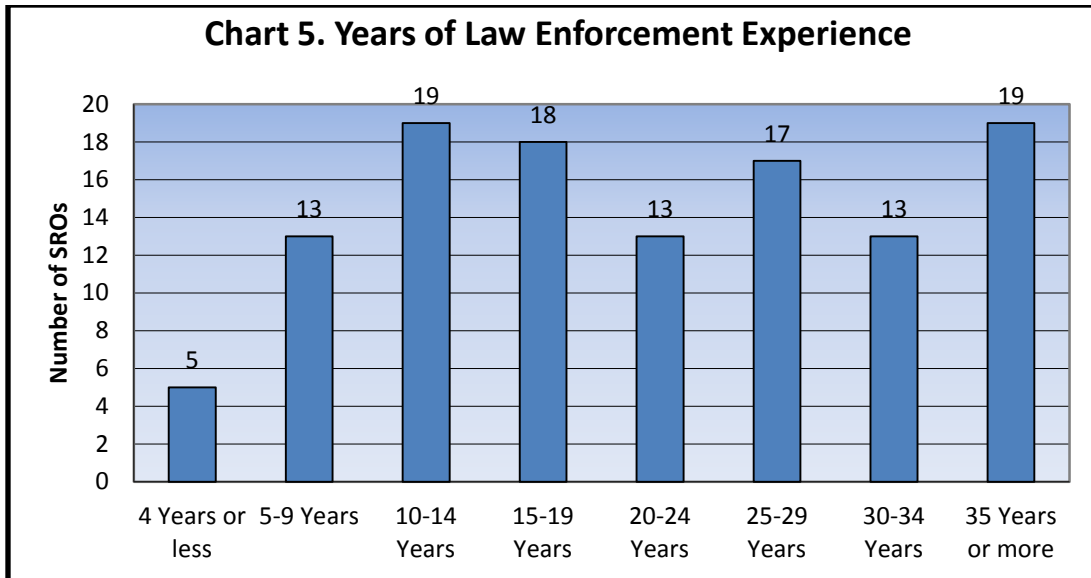
The vast majority of SROs (89.8%) were White, while the remaining SROs were Black (9.3%) and Hispanic (.8%).



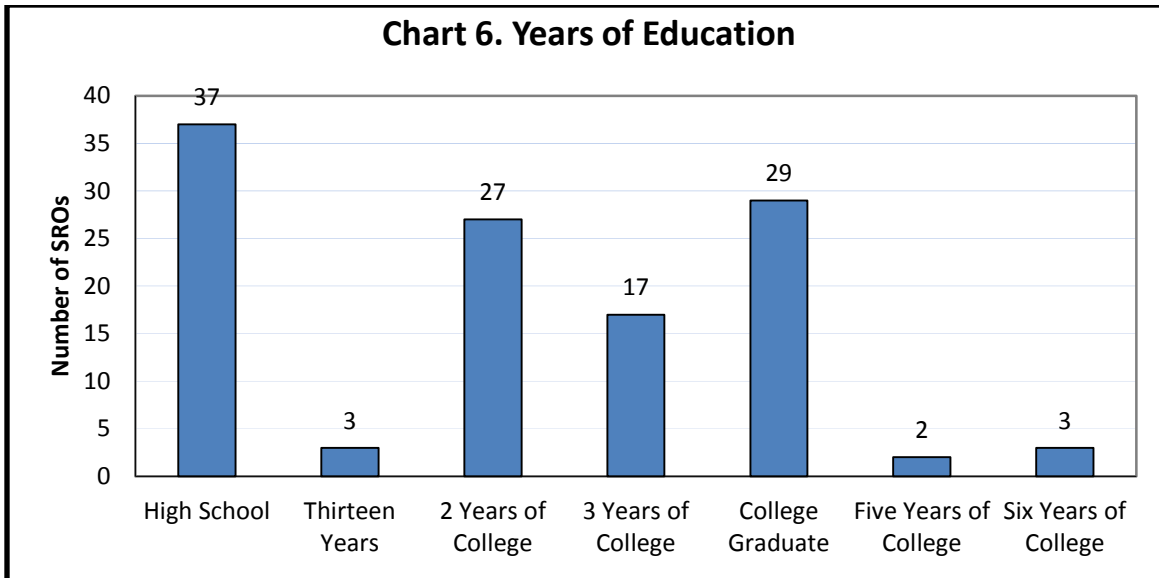
Of the 118 SROs who responded to the question that asked their age, a small percentage (1.7%) were 24 to 30 years of age and 11.0% were between 31 and 37 years of age. Approximately one in four were 38-45 years of age (28%), 46 to 52 years of age (22.9%), and 53 to 60 years of age (28%). Less than 1 in 10 (7.6%) were over 60 years of age.



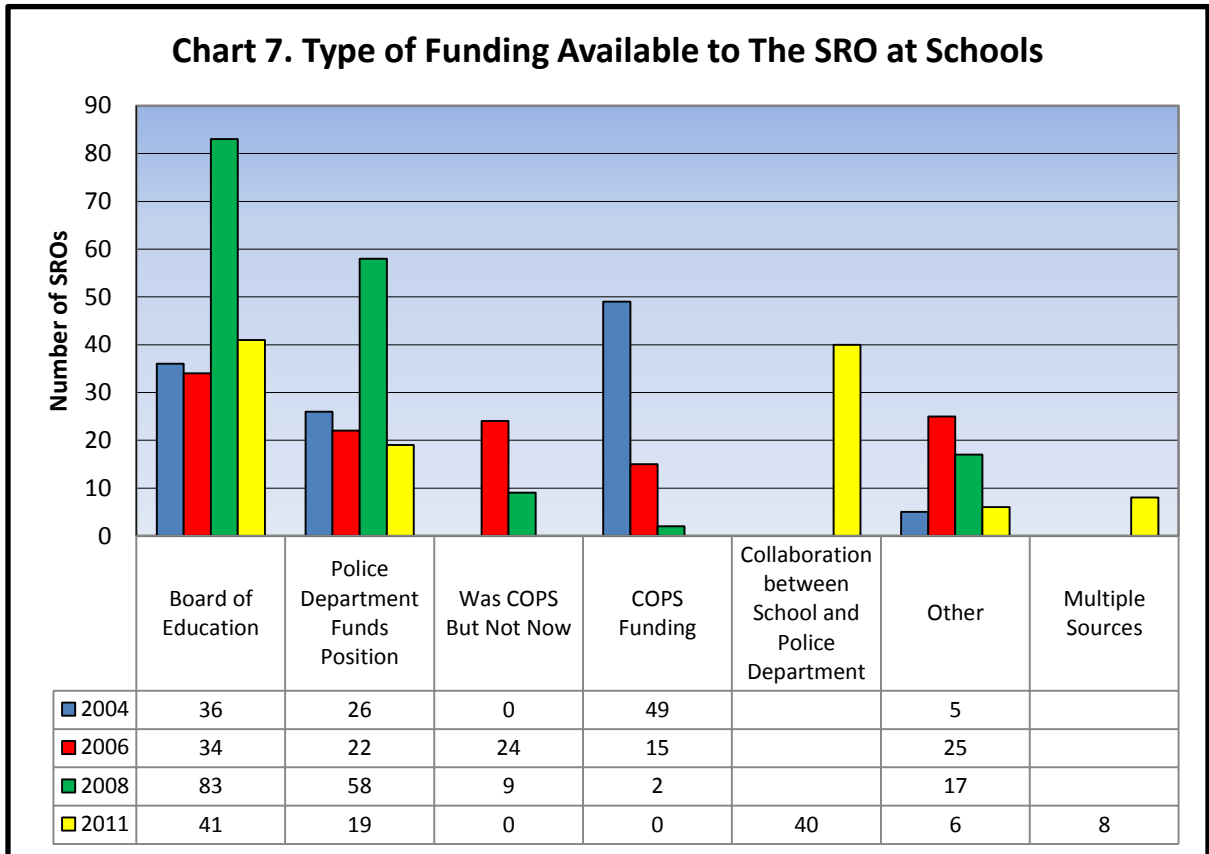
Of the 116 responses to the question asking how much SRO experience the officers had, 5.2% had been working as an SRO for less than one year. The majority of SROs had been working 3-5 years (31%) and 6-10 years (31%). Of the remaining SROs who responded, 16.4% had been working as a SRO for 1-2 years and for 10 years or more.



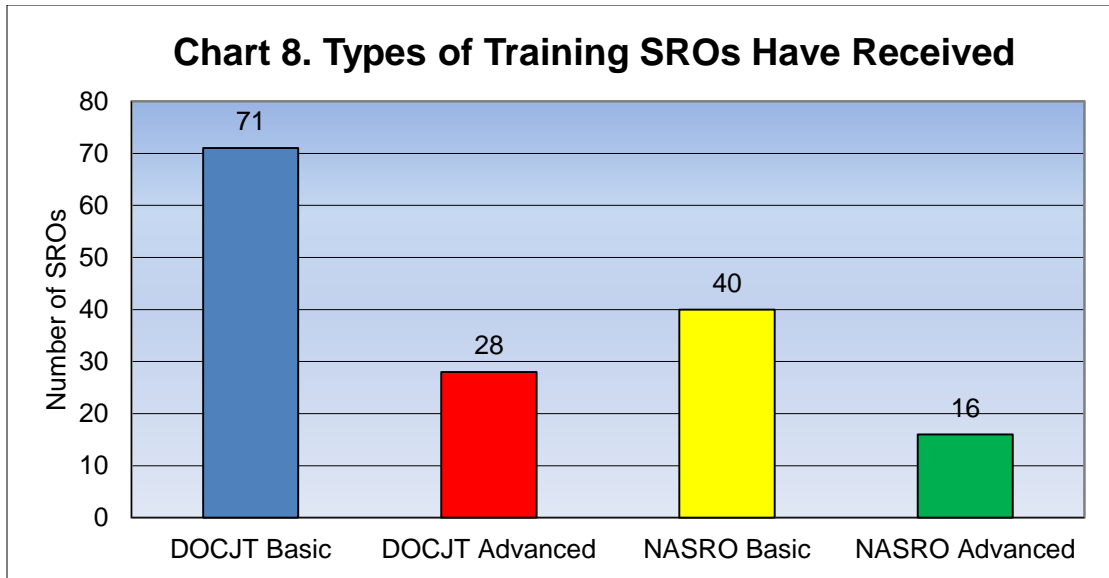
We then asked the respondents how many years they had been employed in law enforcement. Of the 117 officers who responded to that question, 4.3% had less than four years of law enforcement experience. Approximately 1 in 10 (11%) had been employed as law enforcement officers for 5-9 years, 20-24 years, and 30-34 years. Approximately one in six respondents had been employed in law enforcement for 25-29 years (14.5%), 15-19 years (15.2%), 10-14 years (16%), and 35 years or more (16%).



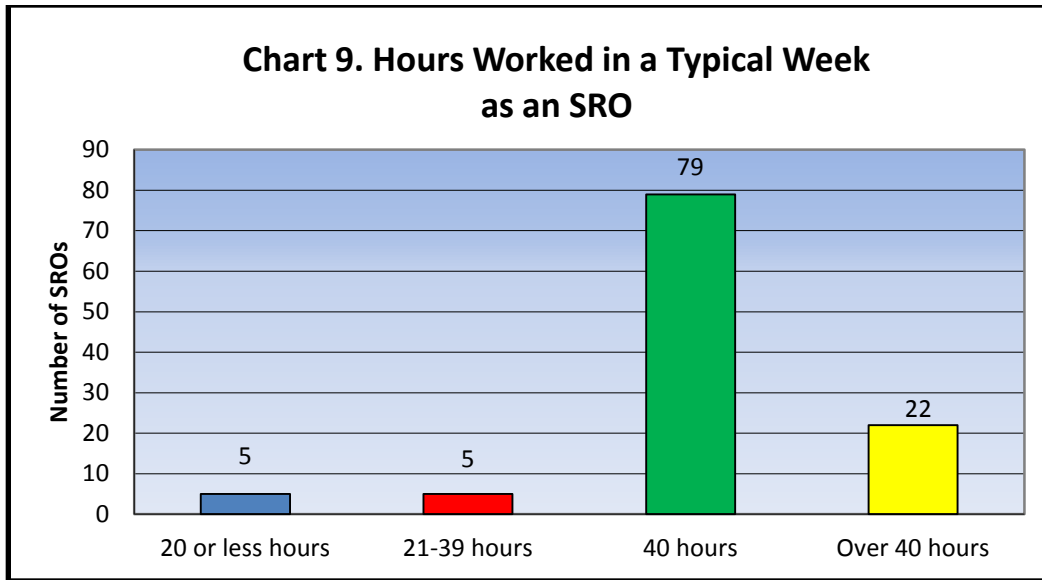
We then asked the SROs how many years of education they had completed. Of the 118 SROs who answered this question, 3 in 10 respondents (31.4%) had completed high school and almost one in four (23.0%) had completed two years of college. One in four (24.9%) had completed college while a small percentage (4.2%) had some postgraduate education.



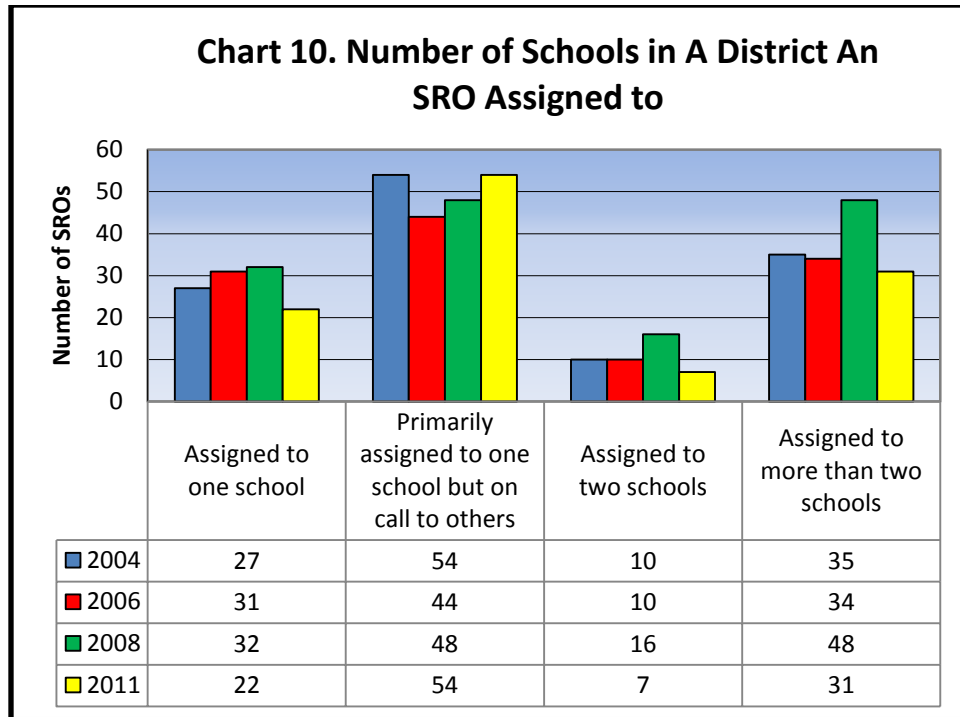
The SROs were then asked how their position was funded. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 7. As is evidenced by the chart above, in 2011 no schools were funded by Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funding, which is a dramatic reduction from 2004, when almost half of the SROs were funded by COPS funding. The majority of the SROS were funded either through the Board of Education (34.7%) or through collaboration between the Board of Education and Police Department (33.9%). Of the remaining categories, 16.1% were funded solely by police departments, 5.1% were funded by other sources which were not listed, and 6.8% were funded by multiple sources.



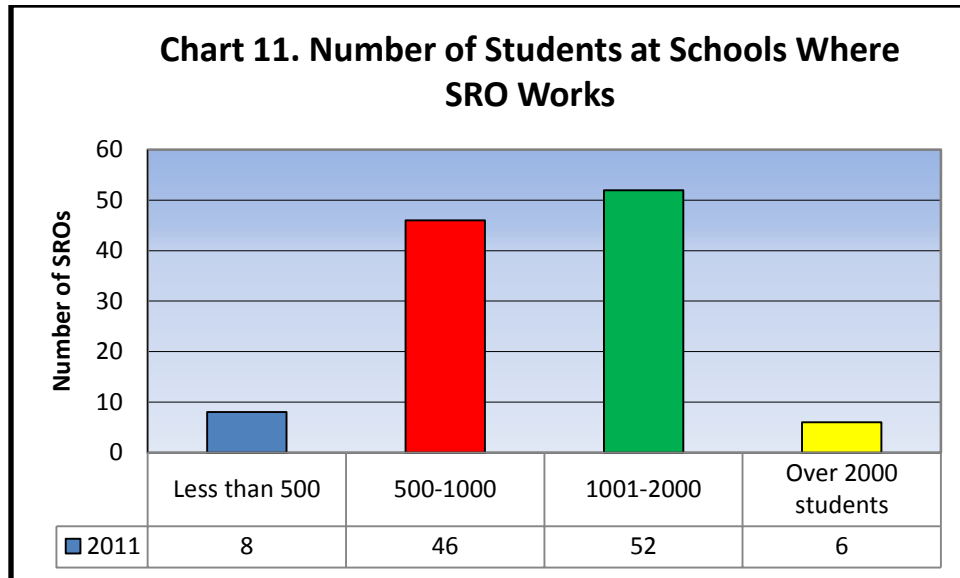
The SROs were then asked what type of SRO training they had received. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 8. Among the SROs who responded, 60.2% had attended the SRO Basic training offered by the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training (DOCJT). One in three SROs (33.9%) had attended the basic training program offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) while 23.7% had attended the SRO Advanced training offered by DOCJT and 13.6% had attended the NASRO advanced training program.



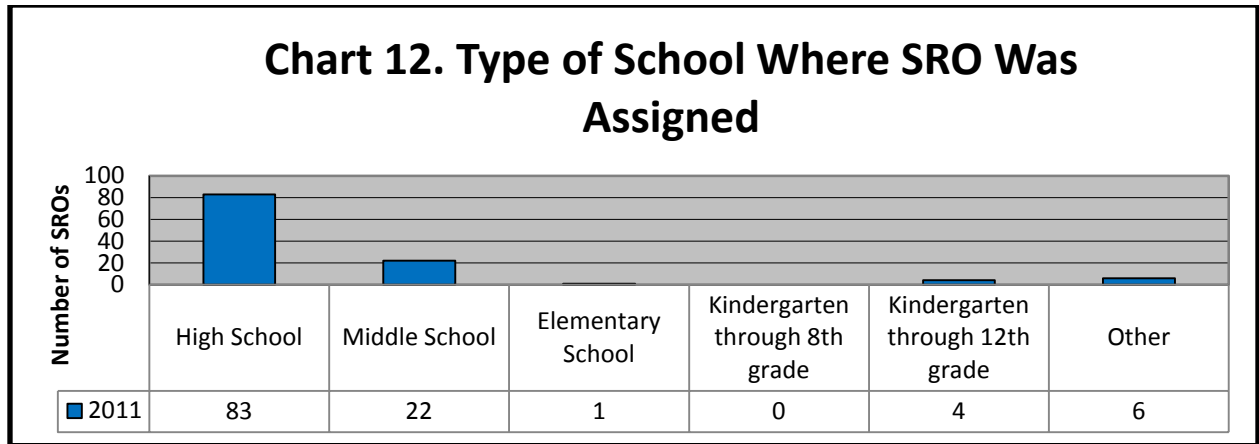
SROs were then asked how many hours per week they worked in the SRO role during the typical school year. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 9. Of the 111 SROs who responded, 71.1% worked full-time as SROs (40 hours per week) during the school year. One in five (19.8%) worked more than 40 hours per week. Small percentages had worked 20 hours or less (4.5%) or 21-39 hours (4.0%). Thus, the majority of SROs were full-time SROs during the school year, a trend that matches the findings from the three previous reports.



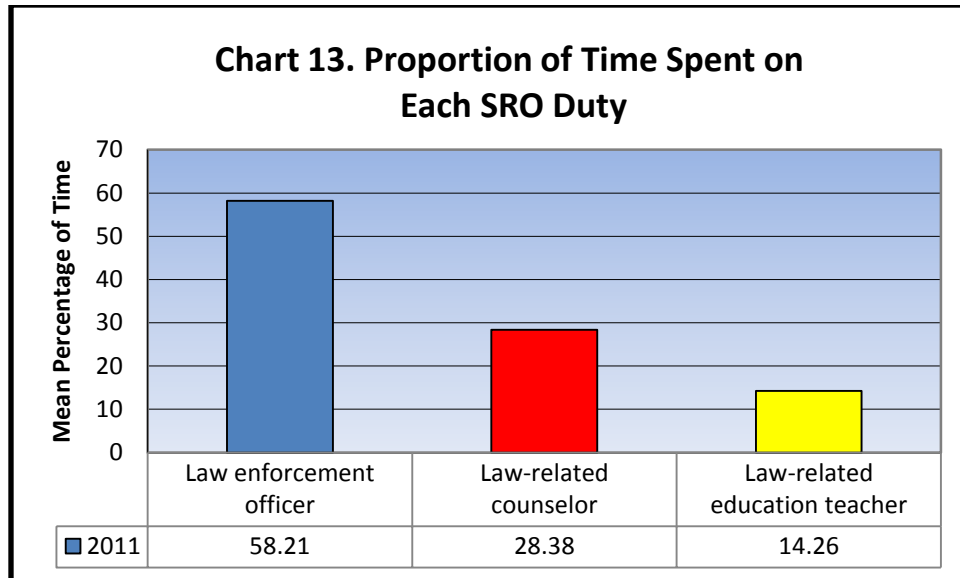
Respondents were then asked the number of schools for which they provided coverage. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 10. Of the 114 SROs who responded, less than one in five (19.3%) were assigned to one school while almost half (47.4%) were primarily assigned to one school but were on call for other schools. A small percentage (6.1%) split their time between two schools while one in four (27.2%) were assigned to more than two schools. Thus, despite the fact that the optimal situation is one SRO per school, most officers are responsible for more than one school in their district and that trend appears to be increasing over time.



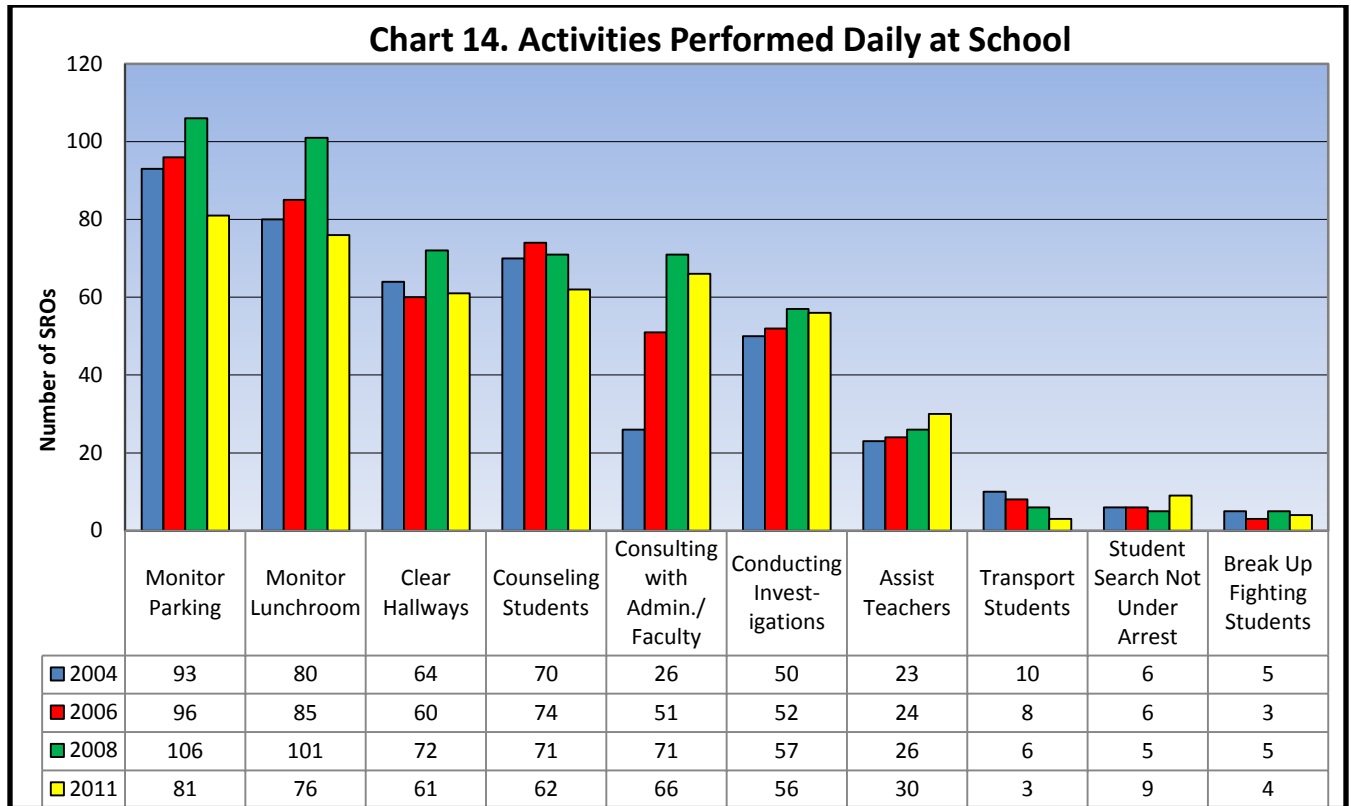
We then asked the SROs how many students were enrolled in the schools where they spent the majority of their time as SROs. The responses are presented in Chart 11. Of the 112 SROs who responded to that question, 41% spent the majority of their time at schools with 500 to 1000 students. Almost half (46.4%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 1001 to 2000 students while 7.1% spent the majority of their time at schools with less than 500 students. Only six SROs (5.4%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 2000 or more students.



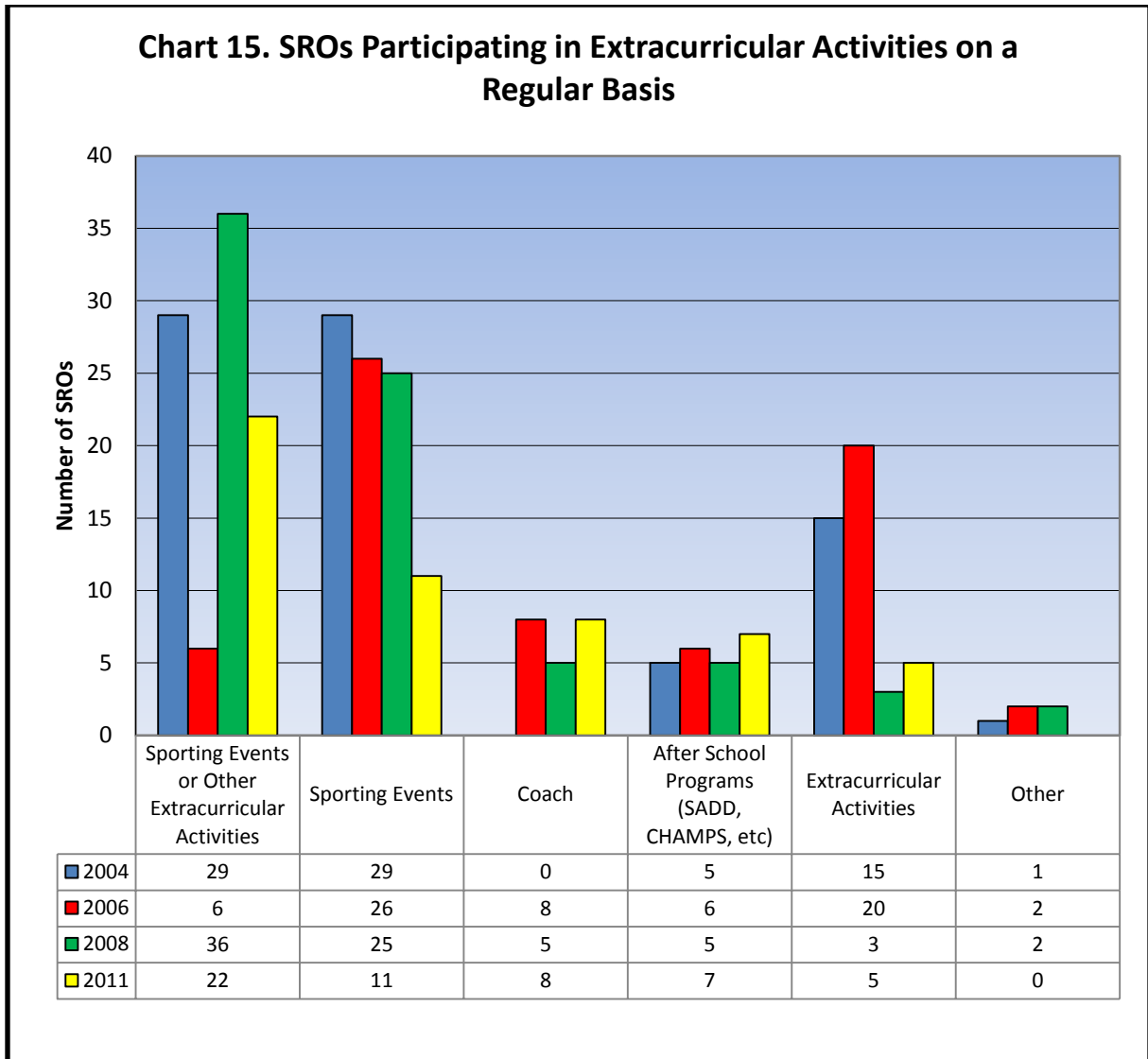
We then asked the SROs the grade levels of the school(s) to which they were assigned. The responses are presented in Chart 12. Almost three in four (71.6%) SROs were assigned exclusively to high schools, while approximately one in five (19%) were assigned exclusively to middle schools. Only one officer (0.9%) was assigned exclusively to elementary schools. Of the remaining SROs who responded, 3.4% were assigned to schools of more than one level and 5.2% responded with other. Thus, SROs in Kentucky work primarily in the middle and high schools and this has been the case for each of the years for which we have data.



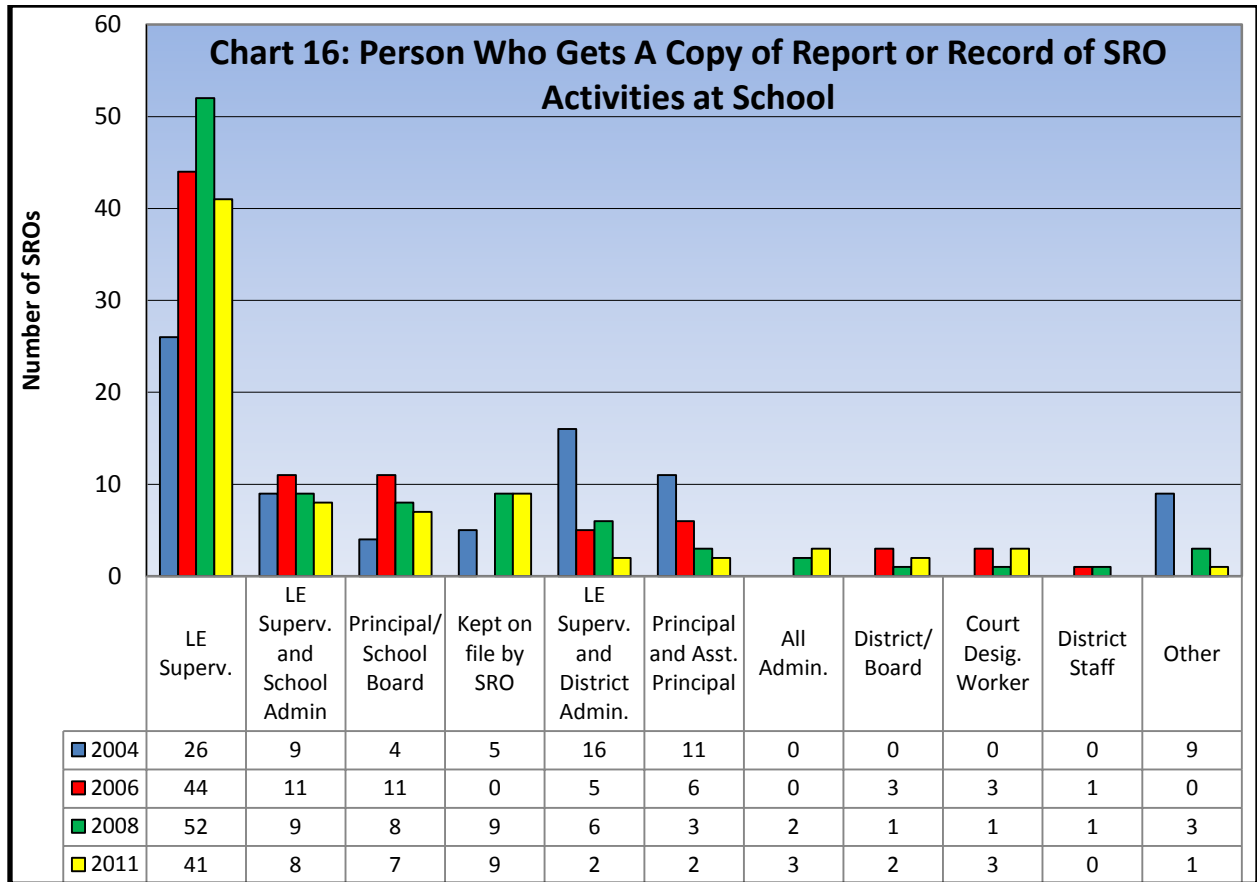
We then asked the SROs how much of their time was spent on each of the SRO duties that NASRO suggests comprise the SRO triad (law-related counselor, law-related educator, and law enforcement officer). The mean responses to those questions are presented in Chart 13. The SROs in this sample spent the majority of their time (58.21) as law enforcement officers with less than half their time spent on law related counseling (28.38) and an even smaller amount spent as law-related educators (14.26). Thus, at least among this sample of SROs, the “triad” is not an accurate depiction of the way in which SROs actually spend their time. In fact, the SRO’s proportion of time spent on the three tasks would better be described as a “pie,” with one slice teacher, two slices counselor, and three slices law enforcement.



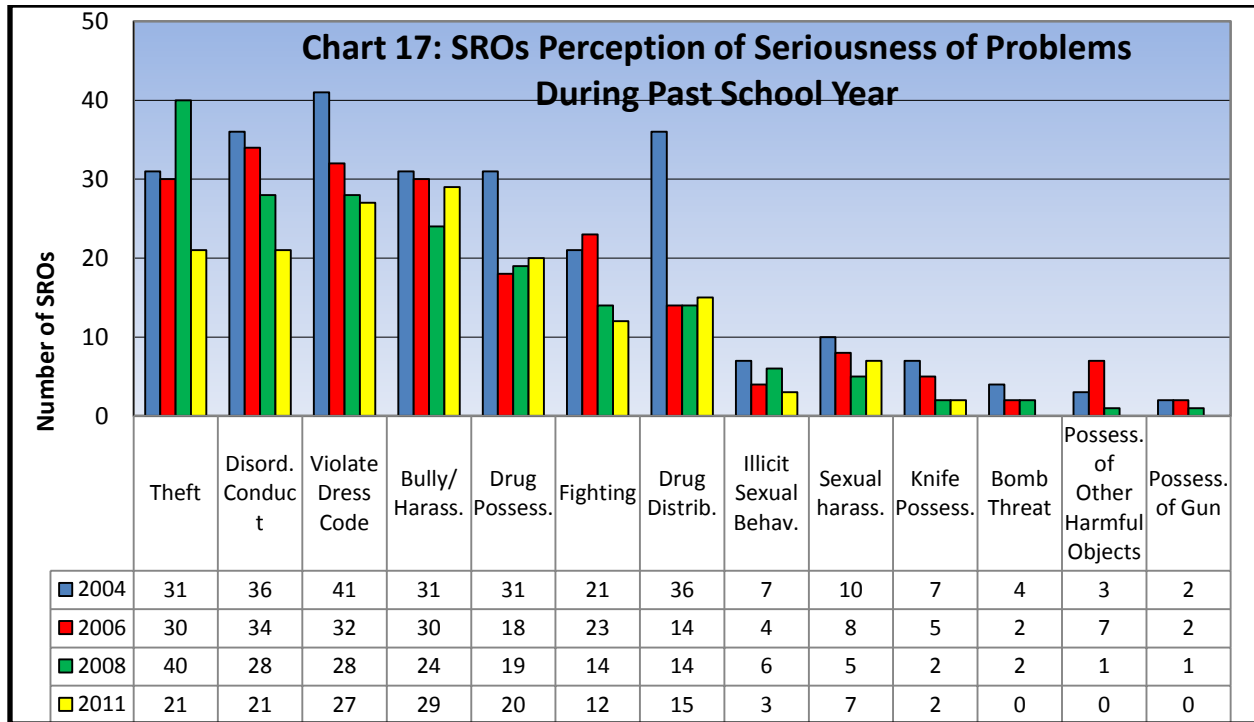
We then asked the SROs about the different types of activities they performed at their assigned schools and the frequency of those activities. The most frequently occurring activity that SROs performed daily was monitoring parking areas; three in four SROs (75.0%) did this activity daily. The second most common daily activity was monitoring lunchrooms (69.7% of the SROs performed this activity daily), then consulting with faculty and administration (60%), counseling students (56.9%), clearing halls (56%), and conducting investigations (51.4%). The activities that SROs performed less frequently were assisting teachers (27.8%), searching a student not under arrest (8.5%), breaking up fights between students (3.8%), transporting students (2.9%), and teaching classes (.9%). In a separate question in the survey, half of the SROs surveyed indicated that they also served as a sponsor for a student organization.



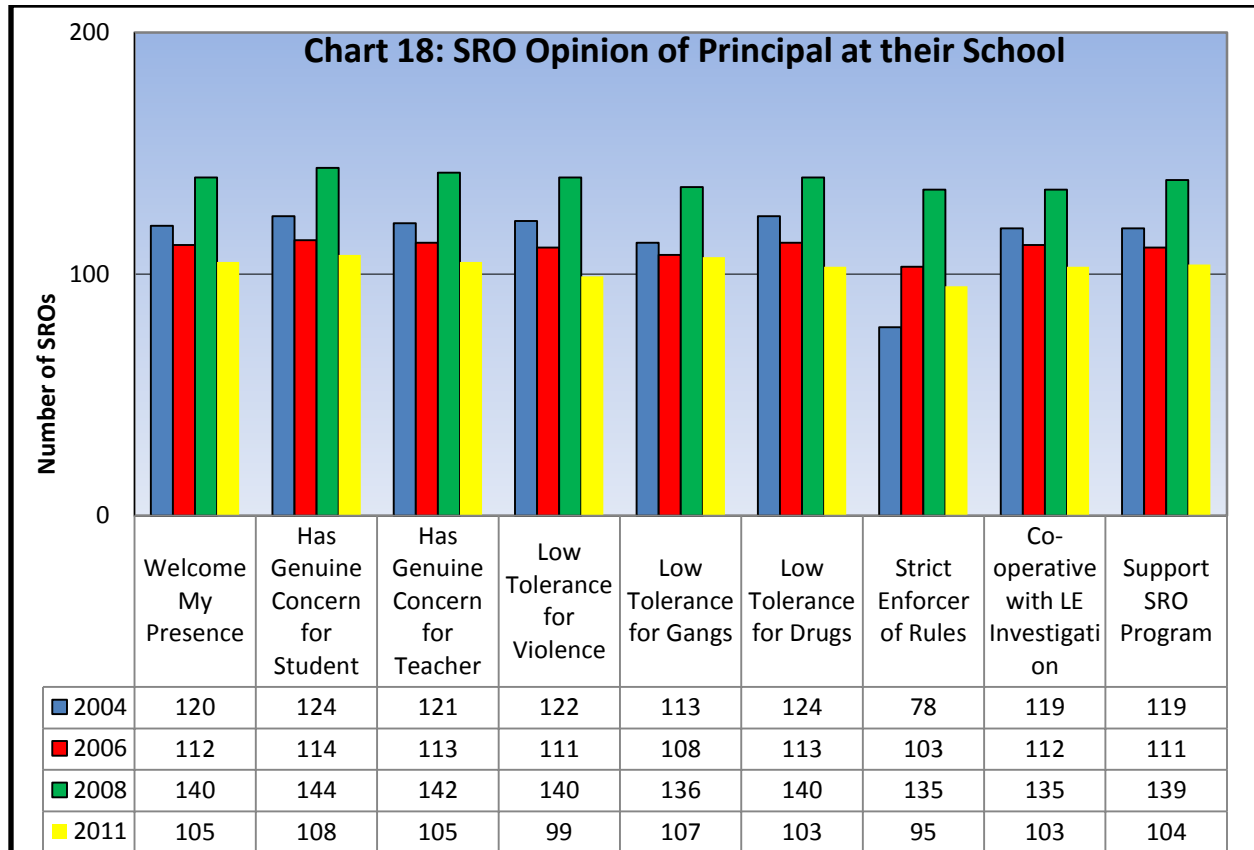
We then asked those SROs who said they participated in extracurricular activities on a regular basis to describe the activities in which they participated. Their responses are presented in Chart 15. The most common extracurricular event in which SROs were involved was sporting events.



We then asked the SROs if they maintained a written record of the activities they performed at school and, if they did, who received a copy of that record. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 16. Of the 78 SROs who responded (1) that they maintained a written record of their activities and (2) who provided information about what was done with that record, over half (52.6%) of the SROs said that the law enforcement supervisor in their department would get a copy. Only 1 in 10 (10.0%) SROs said both the law enforcement supervisor and the school administrator would get a copy of report while a similar proportion stated that (1) the Principal and school board would get a copy of report and (2) they would maintain the copy of the report but not share it with others.

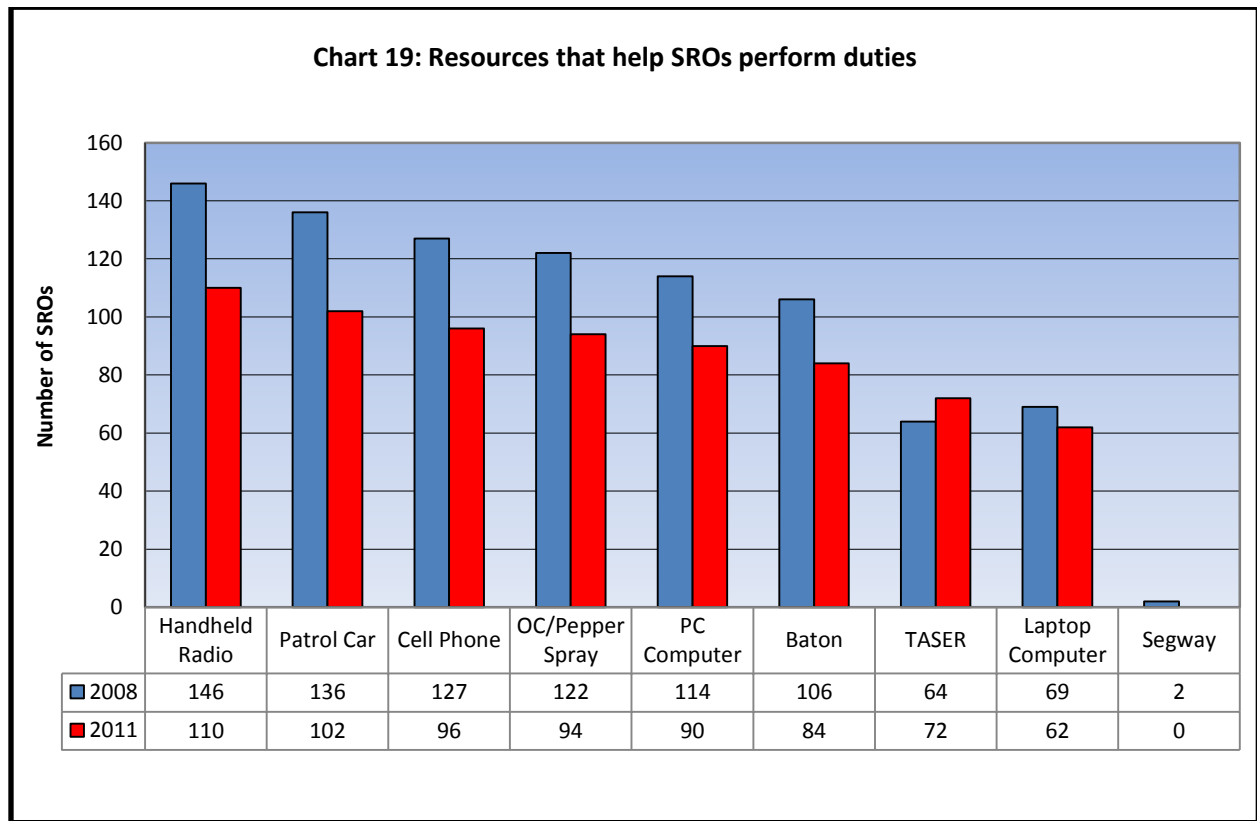


We then asked the SROs their perception of how serious a number of problems were at their school during the past school year. Their responses to those questions are presented in Chart 17. Of the 112 SROs who responded to these questions, approximately one in four (25.8%) thought that bullying/harassment was a serious problem at their school while slightly more than one in five thought that violation of dress code (24.1%) was a serious issue. Almost one in five SROs also listed disorderly conduct (18.8%), theft (18.8%), and drug possession (17.9%) as serious problems at their school. Of the respondents who answered in this category, none thought that bomb threats, possession of a handgun, or possession of other harmful objects were serious problems at their school.



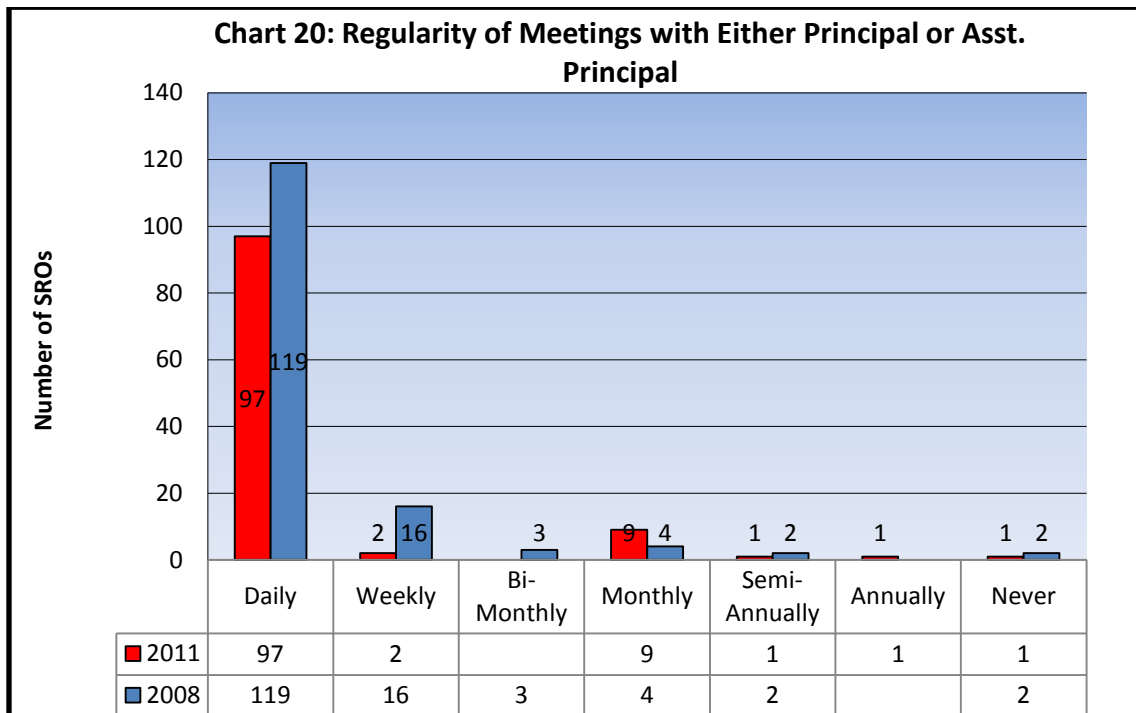
SROs were then asked a series of nine questions designed to allow SROs to give their opinion of the principal at their assigned schools. The responses to that series of questions are presented in Chart 18. The vast majority of responding SROs had a high opinion of the principal at the school where they were assigned. Over 9 in 10 agreed that the principal at their assigned school: (1) welcomed their presence at the school (93.7%); (2) has a genuine concern for students (96.4%); (3) has a genuine concern for the teachers (92.9%); (4) has a low tolerance for gangs (95.5%); (5) has a low tolerance for drugs (92%); (6) was cooperative with law enforcement investigations (92.8%); and (7) was supportive of the SRO program (92.8%). The vast majority also felt that the principal at their school had low tolerance for violence (89.2%) and that the administrator was a strict rule enforcer (84.8%). Overwhelmingly, then, the SROs

who responded to this questionnaire thought that the principal at their school was making an effort to reduce crime and violence in the schools and support them in their role as an SRO.

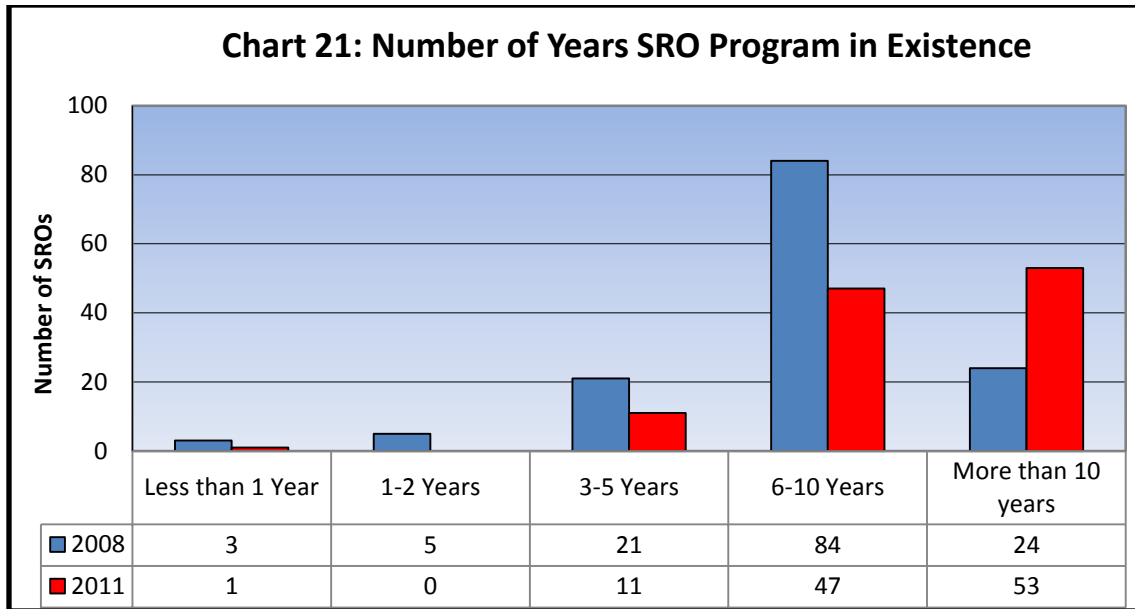


Based on feedback and questions we have received from SROs in earlier reports, we added a number of questions to the current questionnaire in 2008 to examine emerging issues among SROs. We began by asking SROs to identify a number of resources that were available to help them perform their assigned duties. Their responses to these questions are presented in Chart 19. Of the SROs who responded to these questions, the vast majority (93.2%) stated that they had access to handheld radios. More than 8 in 10 (86.4%) stated that patrol cars were available to them at the school while slightly fewer (81.4%) reported that they had access to cell phones at the school. Over three in four (79.7%) agreed that OC/pepper spray was accessible at the school and that PC computers were available for them at the school (76.3%). Less than three in four (71.2%) had access to batons at the school and slightly more than half had access to

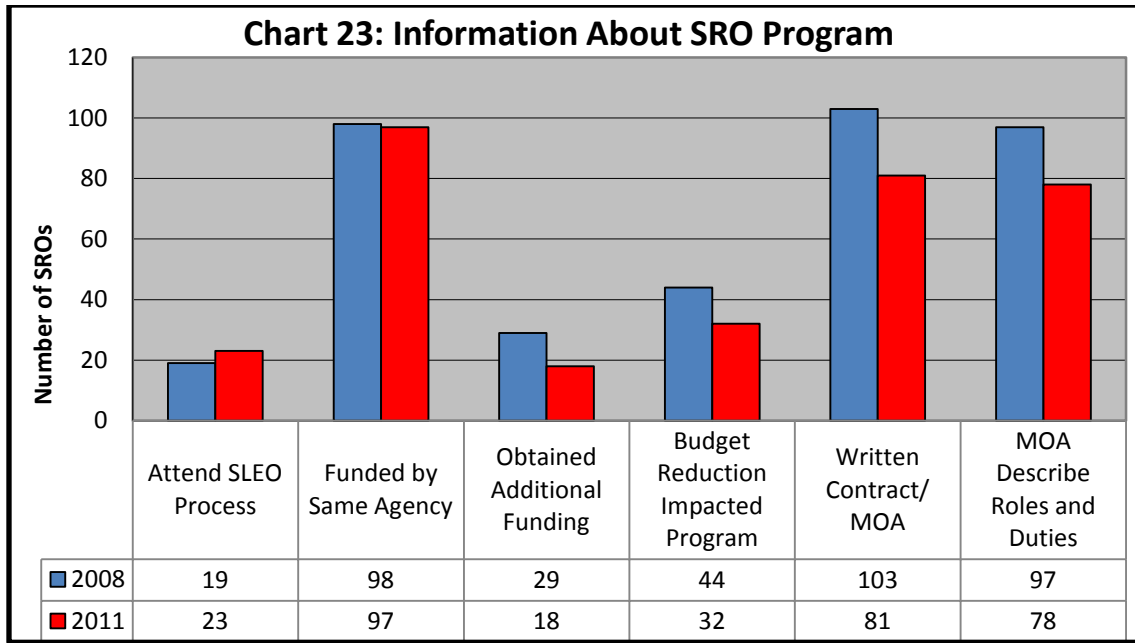
laptop computers (52.5%). Three out of five had access to TASERs (61%) while performing their duties at school.



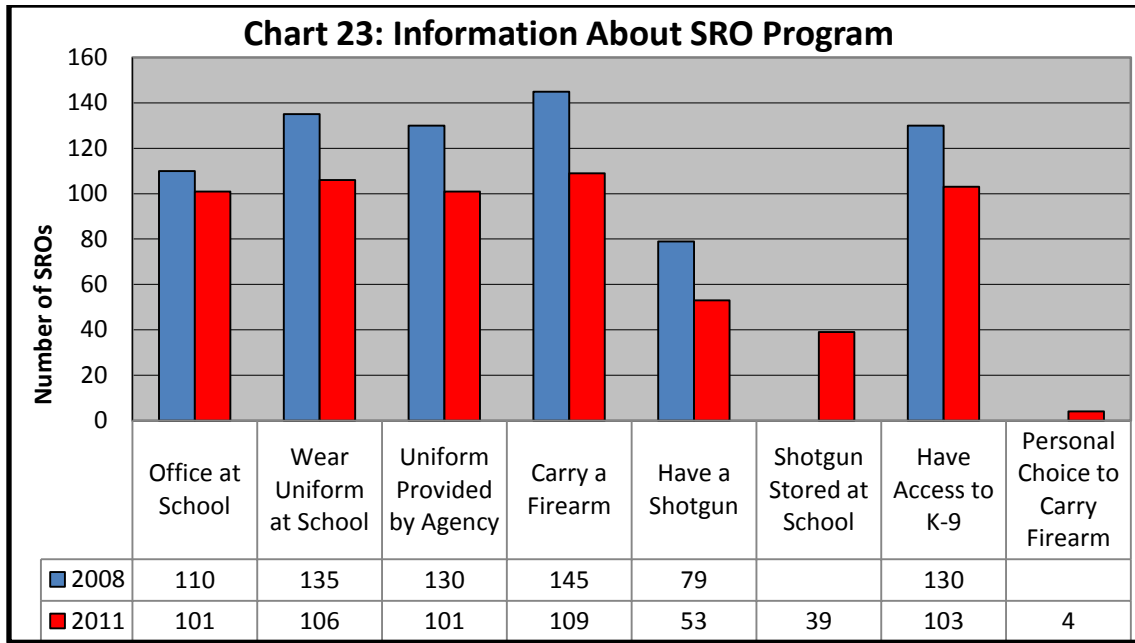
SROs were then asked how frequently they met with either the principal or assistant principal. The responses to the question are presented in Chart 20. Of the SROs that responded to this question, more than four in five (87.4%) met with either the principal or assistant principal daily. One in eight (8.1%) SROs met with the principal or assistant principal weekly.



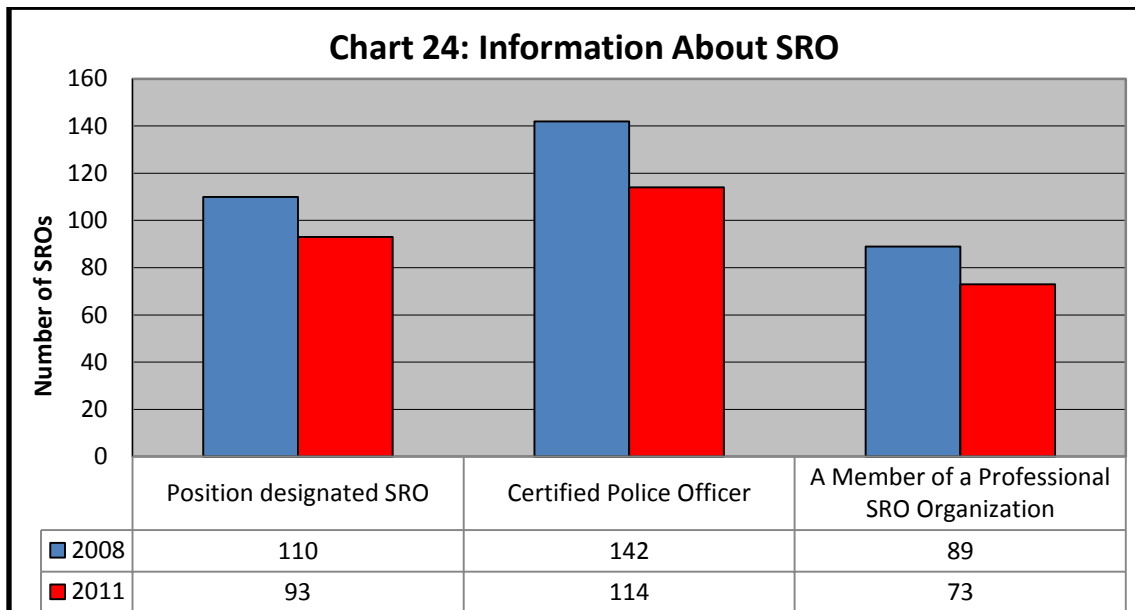
The SROs were then asked how long an SRO program had been in existence in the district to which they were assigned. According to the 112 officers who responded that question, the vast majority of SRO programs with which they were affiliated had been in existence 6 to 10 years (42%) or for over 10 years (47.3%). Less than 1 in 10 (9.8%) stated that the SRO program had been in existence in the district for 3-5 years. Overall, then, the SROs providing data for this study generally work in districts with well-established SRO programs.



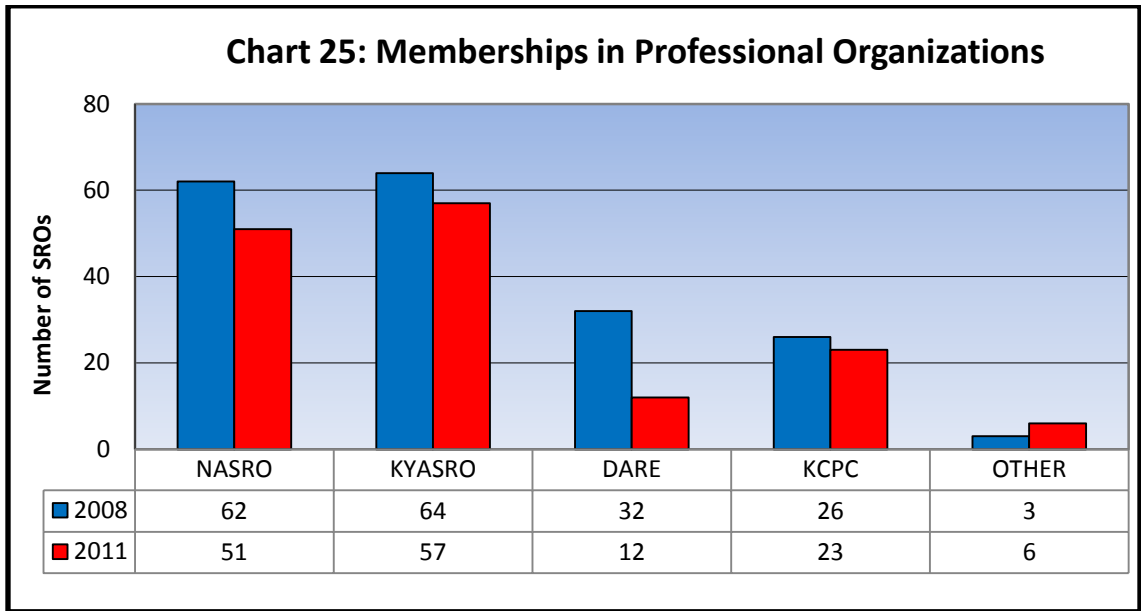
We then asked the SROs a number of questions about their SRO program. The responses are presented in Chart 22. Of the SROs who responded to the survey, over one in three (39%) stated that they were a Special Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO). The vast majority (84.3%) reported that since the SRO program began in the district, it had been funded consistently by the same agency. Less than one in five (16.4%) stated that they had been able to obtain additional grant funds to support the SRO program in the district. About three in ten SROs (28.6%) reported that the Safe School budget reductions over the past fiscal year had impacted the SRO program. Additionally, almost all of the SROs who responded (95.1%) stated that there was a written contract/Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the school(s) where they worked as an SRO and the police department with whom they were employed. Finally, about two in three SROs (65.1%) reported that the contract/MOA adequately described the role and duties of the SRO and the relationship between the school administration and the law enforcement agency to which they belonged.



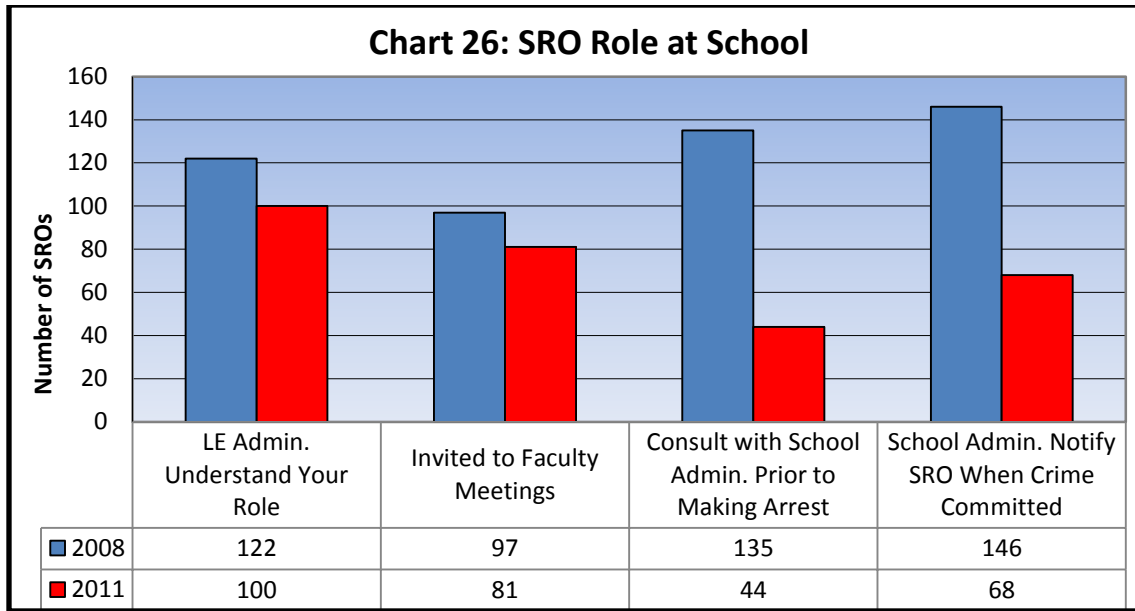
The SROs were then asked questions about their resources provided by the school and their law enforcement agency. The responses of the questions are presented in Chart 23. Of the SROs who responded the survey, 9 in 10 (90.2%) stated that they had their own offices located at school. Almost all of the SROs (93.8%) reported that they wore a uniform in their role as an SRO and that uniform was provided by the agency for which they were employed (94.4%). All but one officer (99.1%) carried a firearm on school property, while less than half of the officers (47.3%) had access to a shotgun on school property. Almost four out of five SROs (78%) stated the shotgun was stored on school property and a small amount (3.4%) responded it was their personal choice to have a weapon or not. Additionally, over 9 in 10 SROs (91.2%) had access to canine patrol units for searches on the school property.



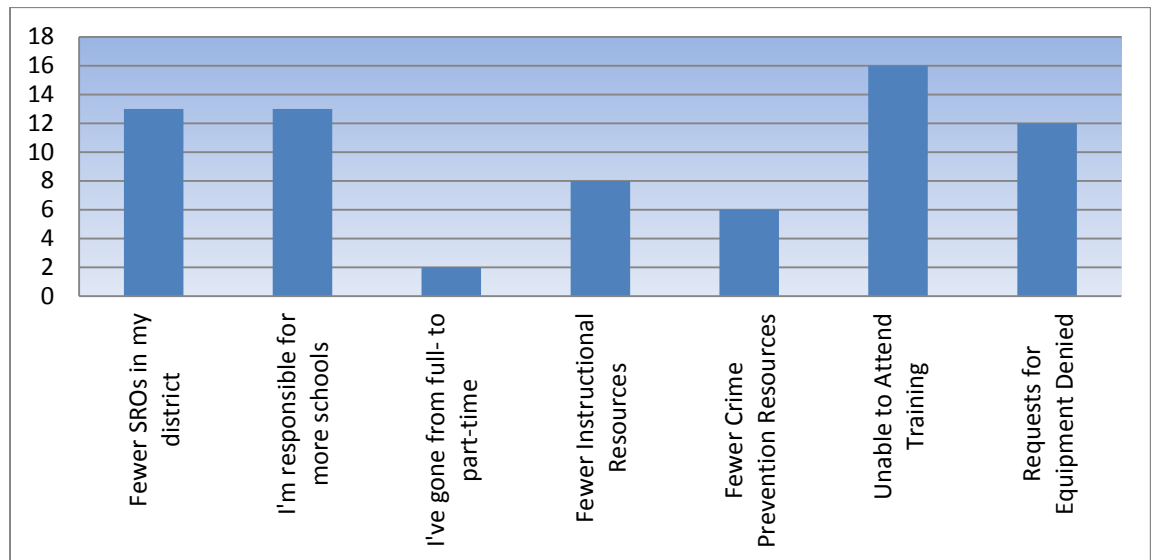
The SROs were then asked information about their positions. The responses are presented in Chart 24. Of the officers who responded the survey, about four in five (80.2%) stated that their positions were designated “School Resource Officer”. The vast majority (98.3%) reported that they were certified police officers in Kentucky and about three in five (62.9%) stated that they were a member of professional SRO organizations.



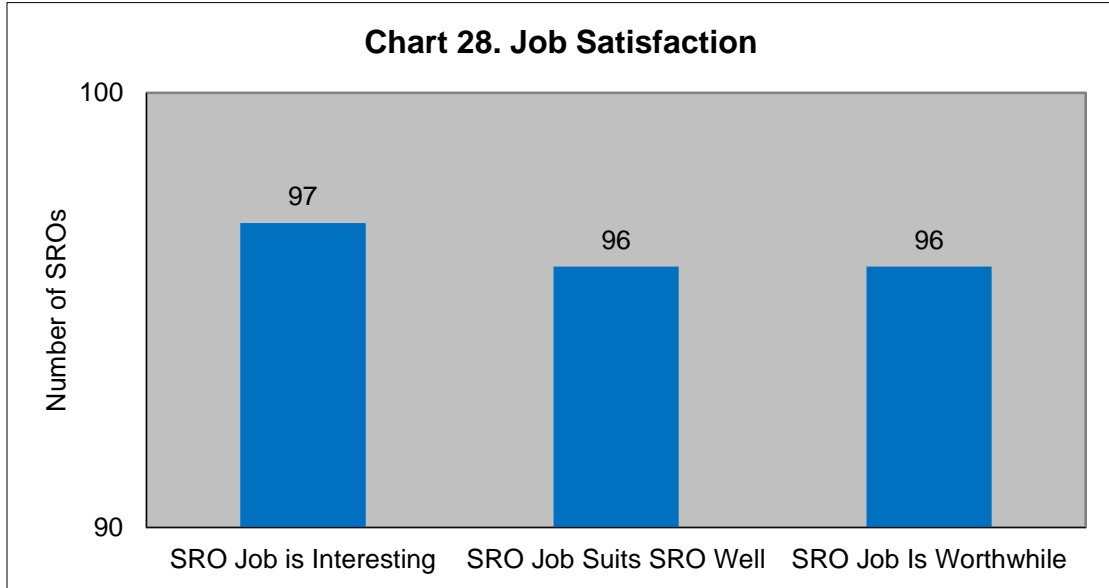
For those who responded that they were a member of professional SRO organizations, we then asked that they list the organizations to which they belonged. The responses are presented in the Chart 25. Of the SROs that stated that they were member of professional SRO organizations, approximately half (48.3%) belonged to the Kentucky Association of School Resource Officers (KYASRO) and/or the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) (43.2%). One in ten (10.2%) belonged to Drug and Alcohol Reduction Education (DARE) and one in five (19.5%) belonged to Kentucky Crime Prevention Coalition (KCPC). Only six SROs (5.1%) belonged to other organizations.



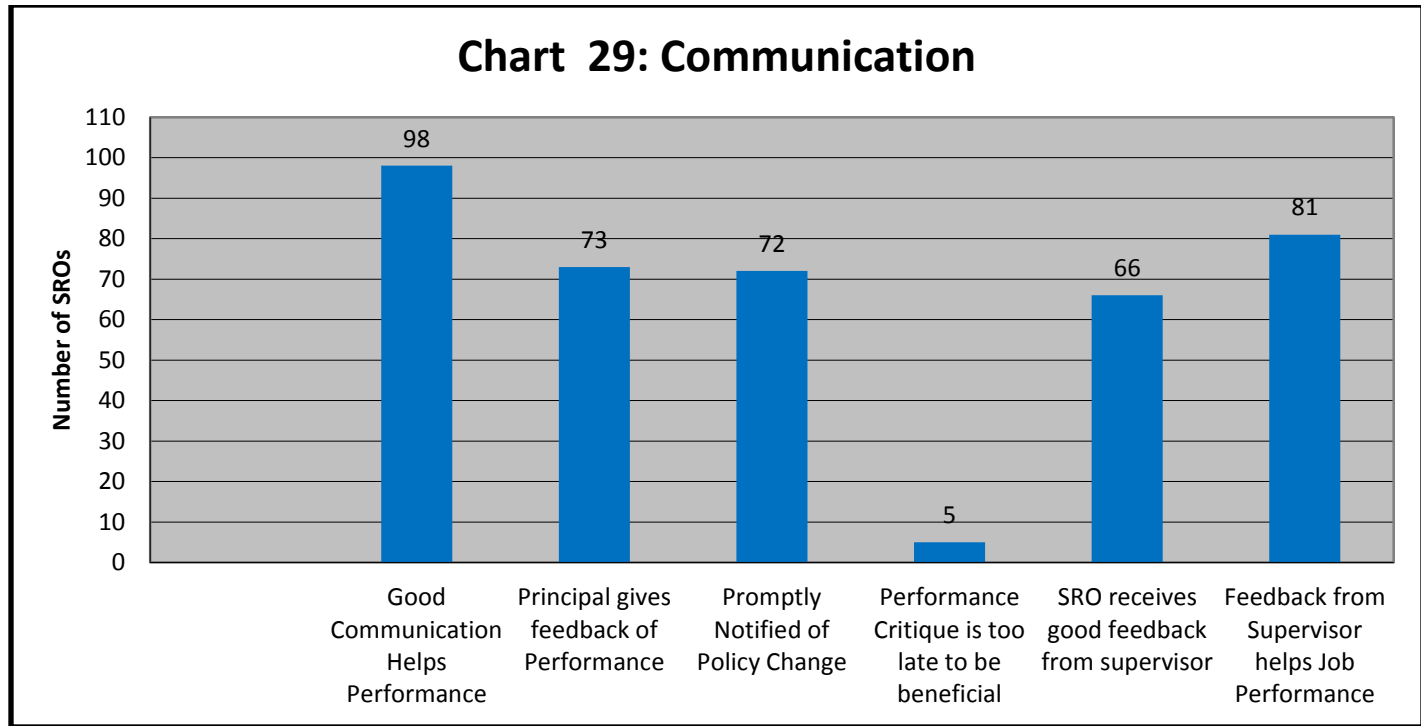
We then asked the SROs about changes they would like to see take place and their perception of an effective School Resource Officer. The responses to those questions are presented in Chart 26. Of the SROs who responded, almost 9 in 10 (88.5%) stated that the law enforcement administrators understood their role while about three in four (71.7%) reported that they were invited to faculty meetings. Less than half of the SROs (39.3%) stated that they always consulted with a school administrator prior to making an arrest on school property and three in five (60.7%) agreed that school administrators always notified them when a crime had been committed on school property.

Chart 27. Impacts of Budget Reductions

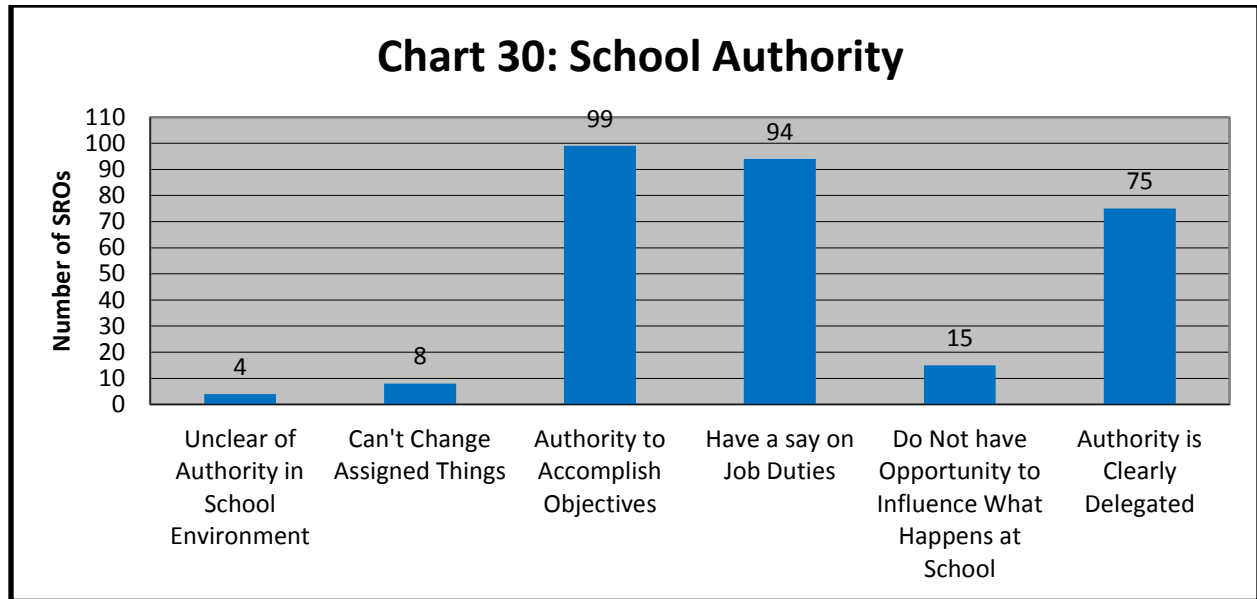
Based on responses to previous surveys and reports based on that survey data, we included a number of questions in this year's report that had not been previously examined. We first asked the SROs about the ramifications of budget reductions in their districts. The responses are presented in the Chart 27. Of the 32 SROs who responded "yes" to the question that asked if the Safe Schools budget reductions over the past fiscal year had impacted their program, half (50.0%) of them stated that they had been unable to attend trainings and conferences that they had previously been able to attend. Slightly fewer officers (37.5%) reported that the requests for new equipment had been unable to be met. Two in five SROs who thought budget cuts had impacted funding stated that there were fewer SROs in their districts now and that they were responsible for more schools (40.6%). One in four (25.0%) stated that they had fewer instructional resources to help them do their job while one in five agreed that they had fewer crime prevention resources to help them do their job (18.8%). Finally, two SROs had gone from full-time to part-time status because of budget cuts.



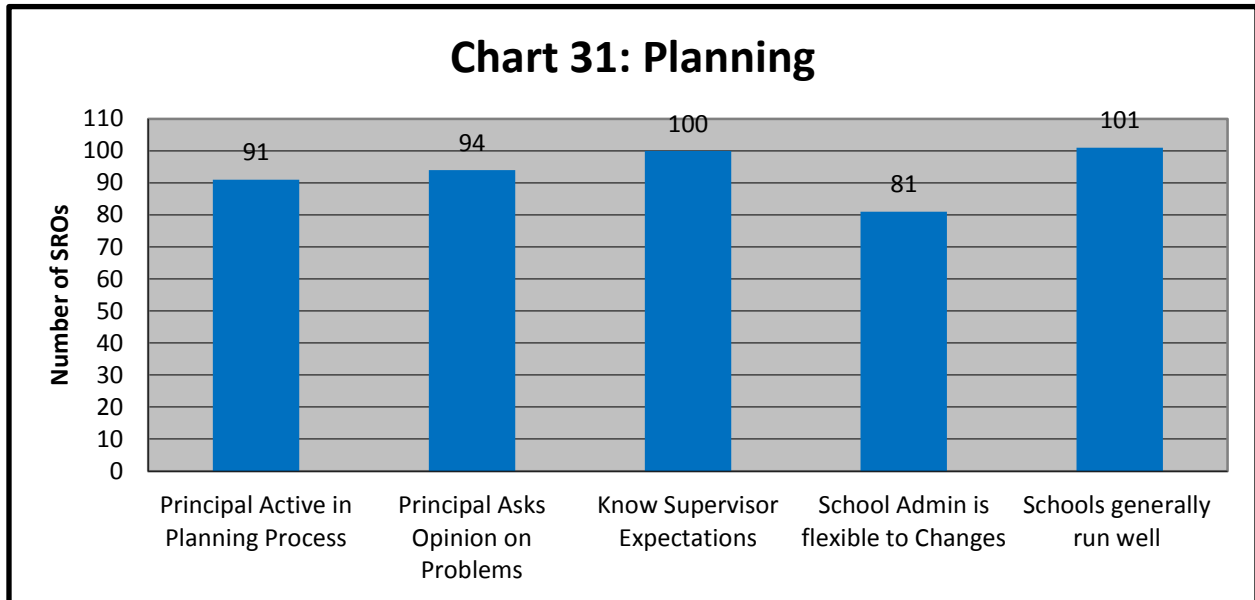
In chart 28, each of the respondents was asked about their level of job satisfaction as a SRO. Of the 118 who responded, 97 (82.2%) agreed that they felt that their job was interesting and 81.4% agreed that they felt that their SRO job suited them well and that the SRO job was worthwhile.



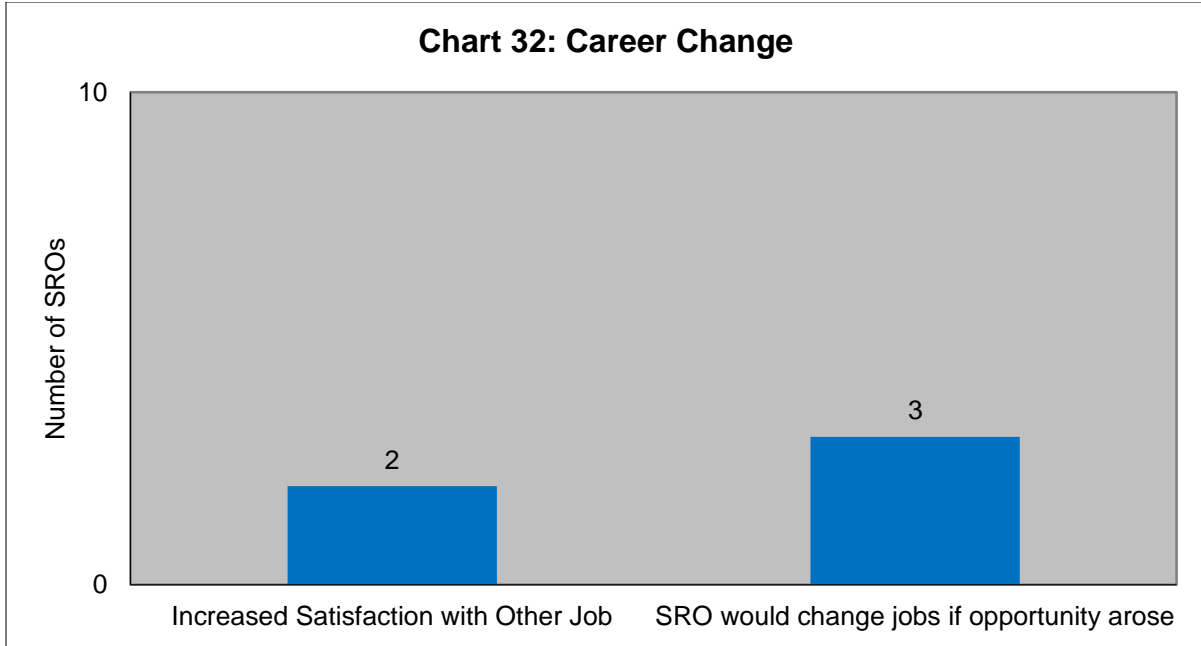
The respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their level of communication with supervisors and principals. Of the 118 who responded, 98 (83.1%) felt that good communication helps performance, 81 (68.6%) felt the feedback from supervisor helps their job performance, and 66 (55.9%) receive good feedback from their supervisor. Five officers felt that the performance critique (4.2%) was given too late to be beneficial to the SRO. Three in five SROs agreed that the principal gives feedback about their performance (61.9%) while three in five SROs (61%) agreed that they were promptly notified on policy changes that affected their working environment.



The SROs were then asked a series of questions regarding the authority structure in the school where they worked. A majority of the SROs who responded felt that they had the authority to accomplish their objectives (83.9%) and had input on what their job duties are as a SRO (79.7%). More than three out of five stated that authority is clearly designated (63.6%) although a small number of respondents were unclear of their authority in the school (3.4%) and felt that they can't change things they are assigned to do (6.8%). Approximately 1 in 10 SROs felt that they do not have the opportunity to influence what happens at school (12.7%).



SROs were then asked about the planning process in the school where they worked. Responses to those questions are presented in Chart 31. Three in four respondents agreed that the principal is active in the planning process (77.1%) and that the principal asked the SRO’s opinion on problems (79.7%). Most also agreed that schools generally run well (85.6%) and that their supervisor was aware of the SRO’s expectations (84.7%). Two in three SROs (68.6%) felt that the school administration was flexible to changes.



SROs were asked about their opinion of the SRO position, and changes in their career. Only two SROs (1.7%) felt that they would have increased satisfaction with another job and only three (2.5%) would change jobs if the opportunity arose. Overwhelmingly, then, SROs in Kentucky enjoy the SRO role in which they are working.

Conclusion

The results presented here suggest that the School Resource officer program continues to thrive in the state of Kentucky. Kentucky SROS are generally experienced law enforcement officers who enjoy their positions, work well with the school administrators at their school, and feel the schools in which they work are relatively safe environments. SROs generally work at least 40 hours per week in their positions as SROs and are generally assigned to more than one school (typically middle and high schools). Even though they respond that the majority of their time is spent in law enforcement duties, SROs engage in a wide variety of activities at school

that would not traditionally be considered law enforcement activities (e.g., monitoring hallways, parking lots, clearing hallways, counseling students). SROs perceive disorderly conduct, theft, verbal harassment, and bullying as the most serious safety problems at their schools and have a wide range of ideas on how to solve these problems. Given the findings from this report, it appears that the SROs who work in schools in Kentucky generally enjoy their work and are an asset to the schools in which they perform their duties.