

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

By:

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

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), the KCSS updates its database of SROs and administers 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 2008 and spring of 2009.

Data Collection

In the spring of 2009, researchers from the Kentucky Center for School Safety (KCSS) conducted the third 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 2008, a

questionnaire and cover letter explaining the importance of the project was mailed to all SROS in the database in January 2009. After four weeks, a second letter and questionnaire were mailed to those who did not respond to the original questionnaire. A final questionnaire and letter were mailed to non-respondents three weeks later. Of the 211 SROs who received a questionnaire, 149 responses were received, for a response rate of 70.6 percent. Thus, seven in ten of the known SROs in the state of Kentucky provided data for this report.

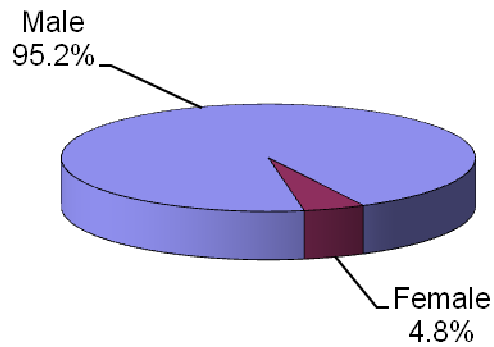
In 2004, the authors used a seven-page instrument to collect exploratory data from 216 SROs. More extensive research and discussion, combined with comments that presented unanswered questions in the 2004 survey, caused the authors to revise the questionnaire for the 2006 survey. In 2006, the survey was sent to 227 SROs and 128 responses were received. Based on those findings, and issues that have developed since that survey administration, we revised the survey once again for the 2008 data collection. 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 149 SRO questionnaires. Practically all respondents who responded 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. As such, 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

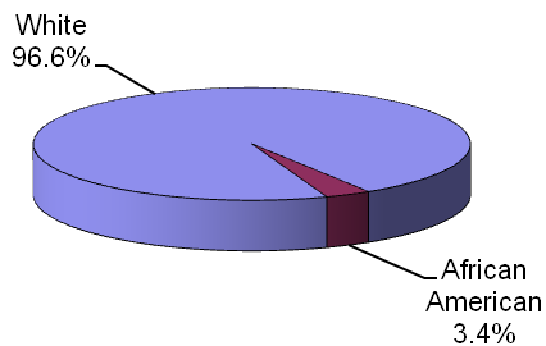
The gender and racial characteristics of the Kentucky SROs who provided data for this study are similar to those who responded in the 2004 and 2006 SRO reports.

Chart 1. Gender of the SROs



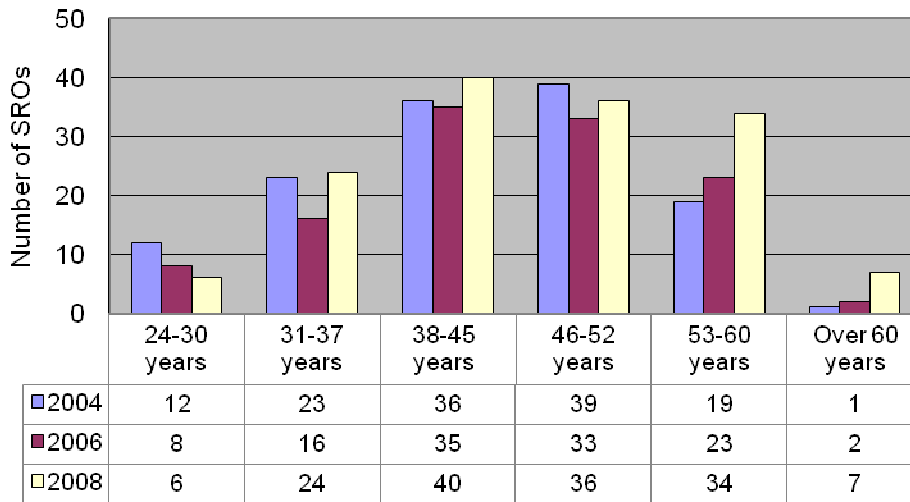
The vast majority (95.2%) of the SROs were male, while less than 1 in 20 SROs (4.8%) was female.

Chart 2. Race of the SROs

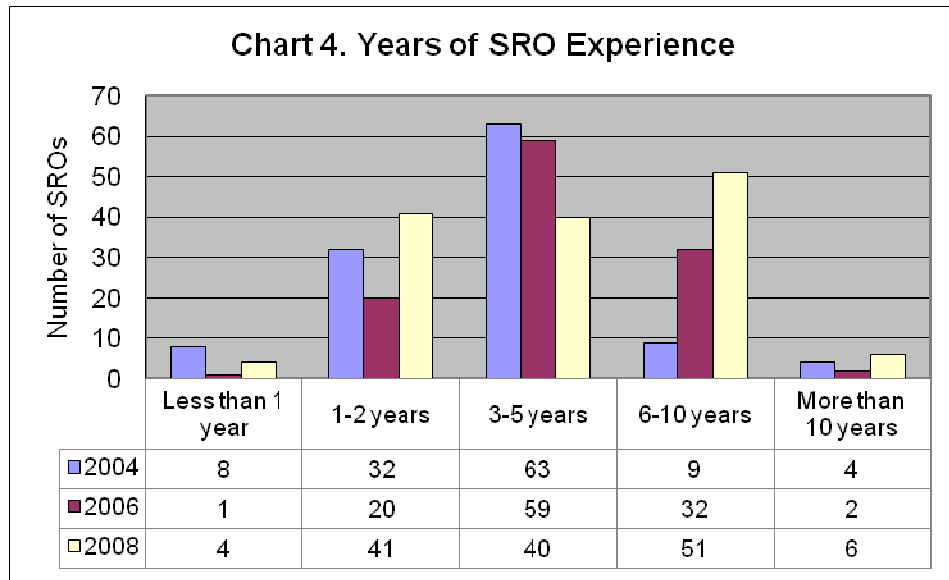


The vast majority of SROs (96.6%) were White, while a small percentage of SROs (3.4%) were Black.

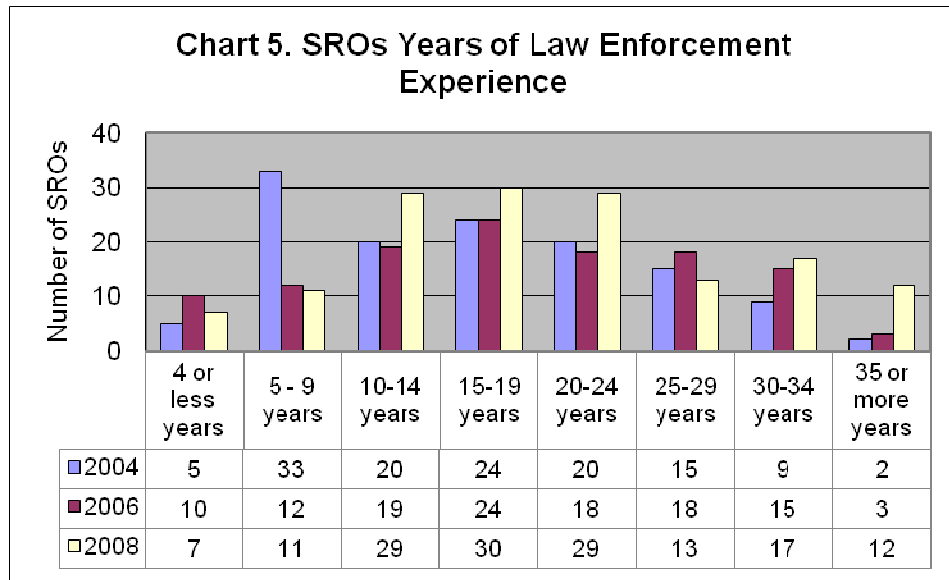
Chart 3. Age of the SROs



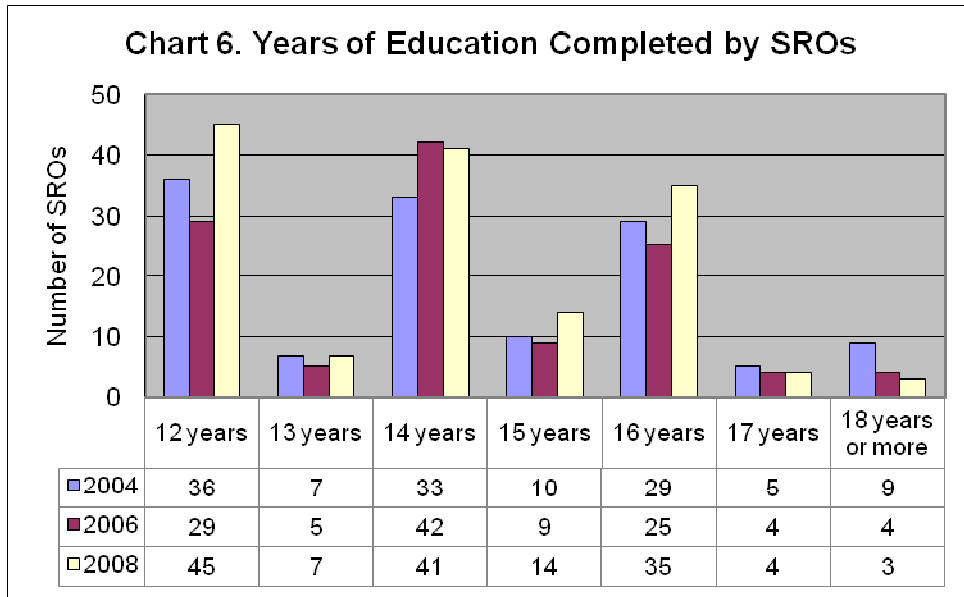
Of the 147 SROs who responded to the question that asked their age, a small percentage (4.1%) were 24 to 30 years of age and one in six (16.3%) were between 31 and 37 years of age. Approximately one in five SROs were 38 to 45 years of age (27.2%) and 46 to 52 years of age (24.5%), while slightly less than that number of SROs (23.1%) were between the ages of 53 to 60 years of age. A small percentage (4.8%) SROs were over 60 years of age.



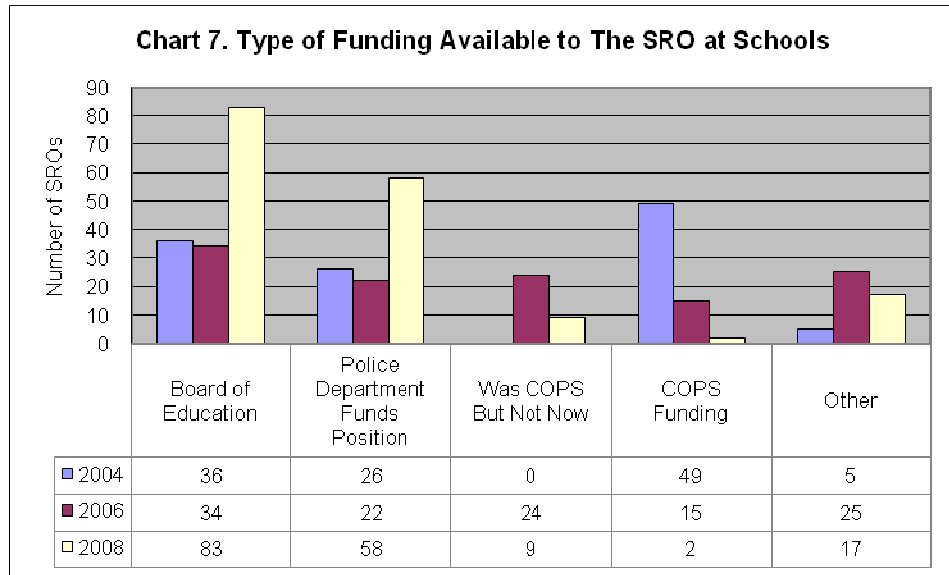
Of the 142 responses to the question asking how much SRO experience the officers had, over one in three (35.9%) had between six and ten years of experience as an SRO, while more than one in four had one to two years (28.9%) or three to five years (28.2%) experience. A small percentage (4.2%) had more than 10 years experience while a small percentage of SROs (2.8%) had less than one year experience as an SRO.



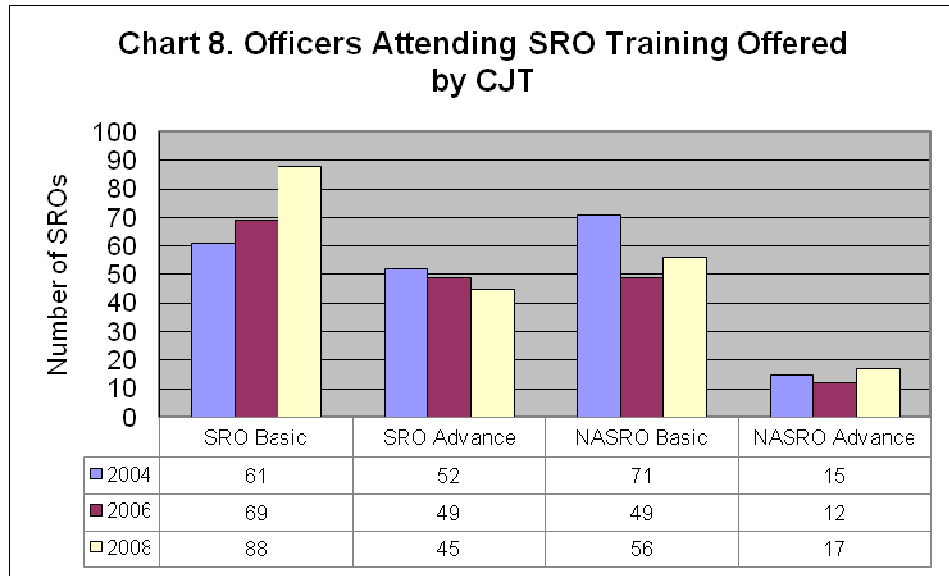
We then asked the respondents how many years they had been employed in law enforcement. Of the 148 officers who responded to that question, one in five (20.3%) had 15 to 19 years of law enforcement experience, while slightly less than that number had 10 to 14 years experience (19.6%) and 20 to 24 years experience (19.6%). One in nine (11.5%) had 30 to 35 years experience, while less than 1 in 10 had between five and nine years experience (7.4%), 25 to 29 years experience (8.8%), and 35 or more years experience in law enforcement (8.1%). A smaller percentage (4.7%) had four or less years experience in law enforcement. Thus, despite their relative “newness” to the SRO role, the vast majority of officers had a number of years of experience in traditional law enforcement roles prior to their assignment as an SRO.



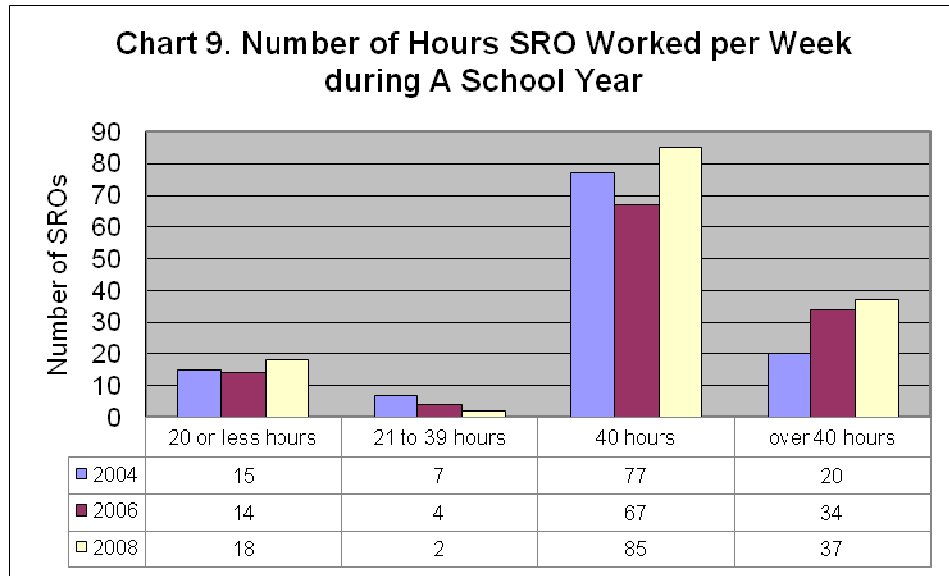
We then asked the SROs to tell us how many years of education they had completed. Of the 149 SROs who answered this question, three in ten respondents (30.2%) had completed high school and more than one in four (27.5%) had completed two years of college. Less than one in four (23.5%) had completed college while a small percentage (4.7%) had some postgraduate education.



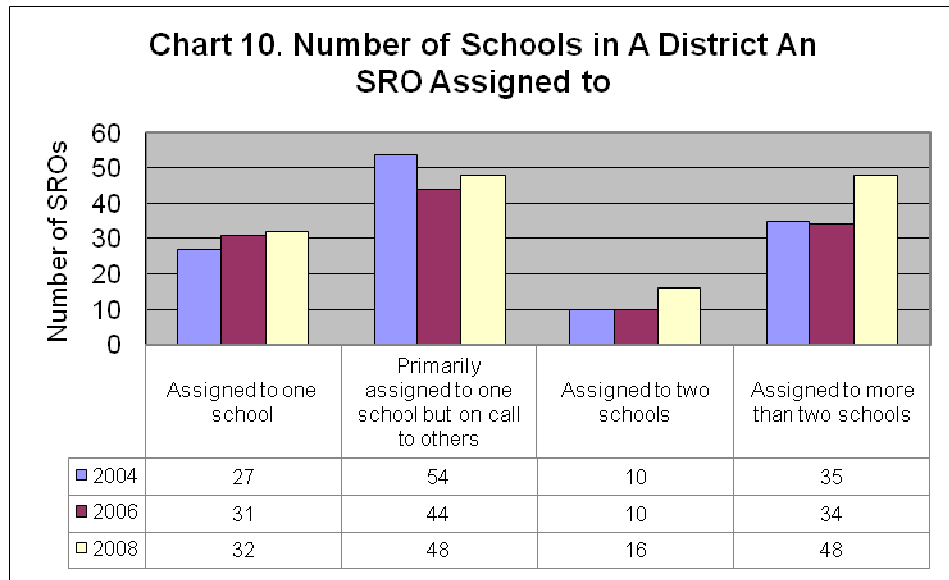
The SROs were then asked how their position was funded. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 7. Over half (55.7%) of the SROs were funded by their board of education while about two in five (38.9%) were funded by the police agency for which they worked. A small percentage of SROs (6.0%) indicated that they were funded by Community Oriented Policing (COPS) before but the funding has now expired. Two SRO (1.3%) positions were funded by Community Oriented Policing (COPS) grants. The results presented in Chart 7 reveal a clear pattern of movement from COPS funding to funding of the positions by the local school boards.



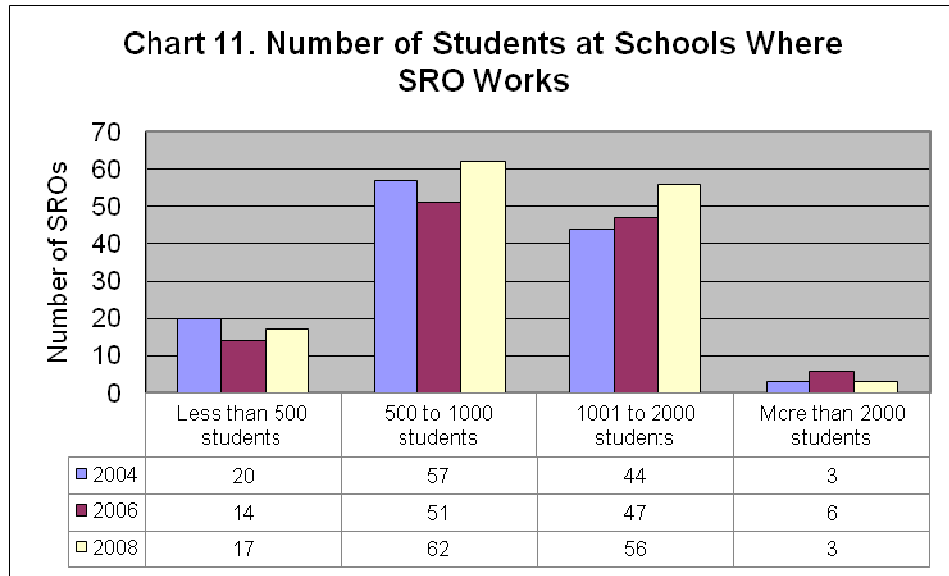
The SROs were then asked what type of SRO training they had received. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 8. Of 145 SROs who responded this question, several officers had attended more than one training program. Three in five SROs (60.7%) had attended the SRO Basic training offered by the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training (DOCJT). Less than two in five (38.6%) had attended the basic training program offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). While over three in ten (31.0%) had attended the SRO Advanced training offered by DOCJT, one in nine officers (11.7%) had attended the NASRO advanced training program.



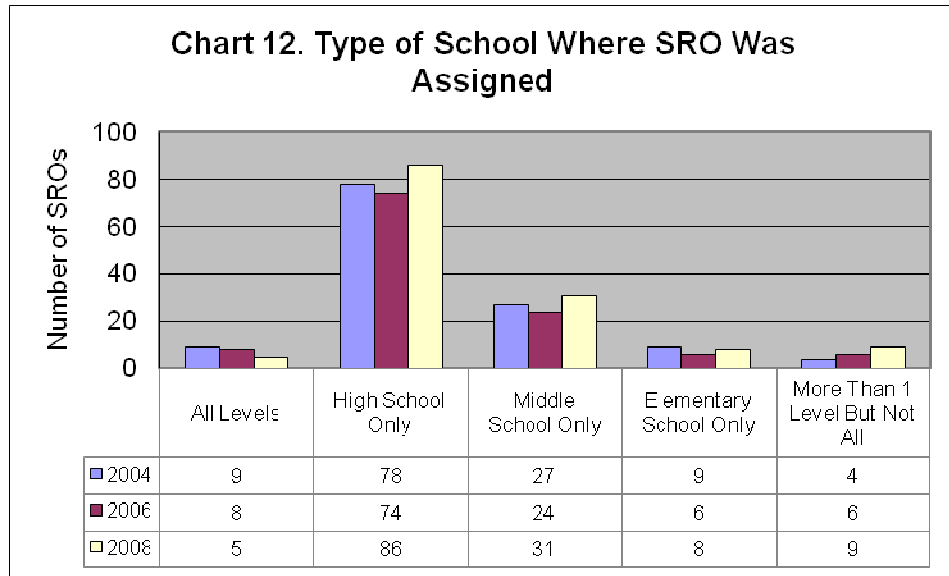
SROs were then asked how many hours per week they worked in the SRO role during the typical school year. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 9. Of the 142 SROs who responded, three in five (59.9%) worked full-time as SROs (40 hours per week) during the school year. More than one in four (26.1%) worked more than 40 hours per week while about one in seven (14.1%) worked less than 40 hours per week as an SRO. Thus, the majority of SROs were full-time SROs during the school year, a trend that matches the findings from the previous two years of data collection.



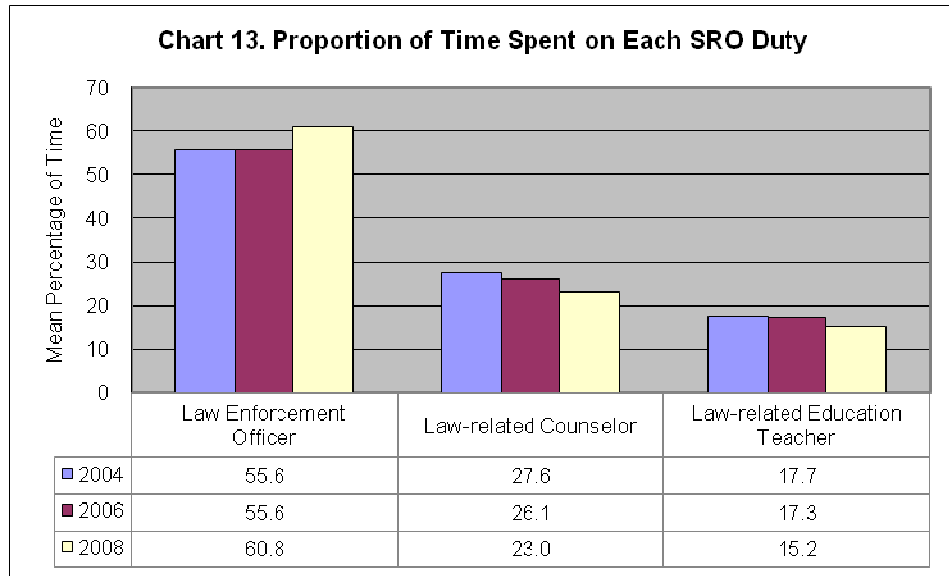
Respondents were then asked the number of schools in the district that they were assigned to cover. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 10. Of the 144 SROs who responded, more than one in five (22.2%) were assigned to one school while one in three (33.3%) were primarily assigned to one school but were on call for other schools. One in nine (11.1%) were assigned to two schools while one in three (33.3%) 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.



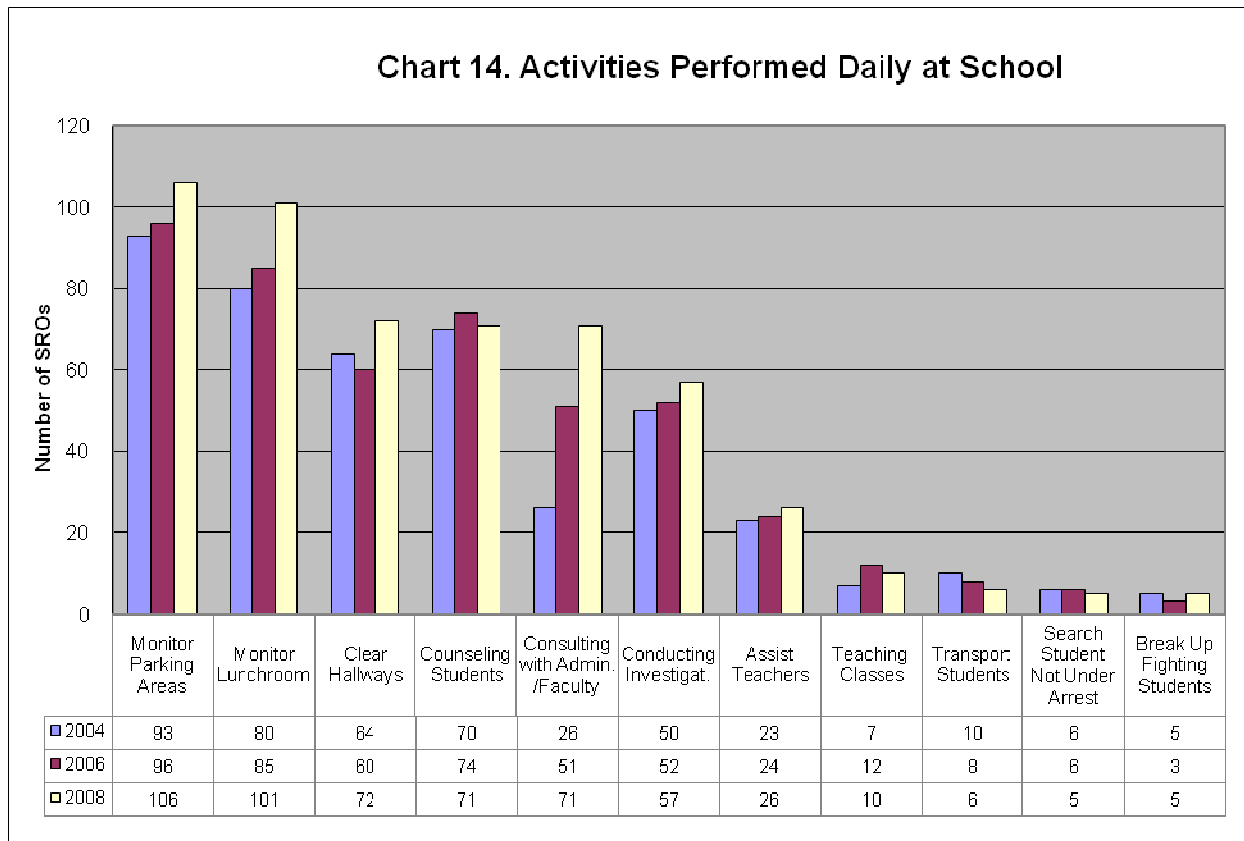
We then asked the SROs how many students were enrolled in the schools where they spent the majority of their time as SROs. The responses are presented in Chart 11. Of the 138 SROs who responded to that question, more than two in five (44.9%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 500 to 1000 students. Two in five (40.6%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 1001 to 2000 students while one in eight (12.3%) spent the majority of their time at schools with less than 500 students. Only three SROs (2.2%) spent the majority of their time at schools with 2000 or more students.



We then asked the SROs the type (grade levels) of school to which they were assigned. The responses are presented in Chart 12. Over three in five (61.9%) SROs were assigned exclusively to high schools, while over one in five (22.3%) were assigned exclusively to middle schools. Only a small percentage of officers (5.8%) were assigned exclusively to elementary schools. The remaining SROs (10.1%) were assigned to schools of more than one level. 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.

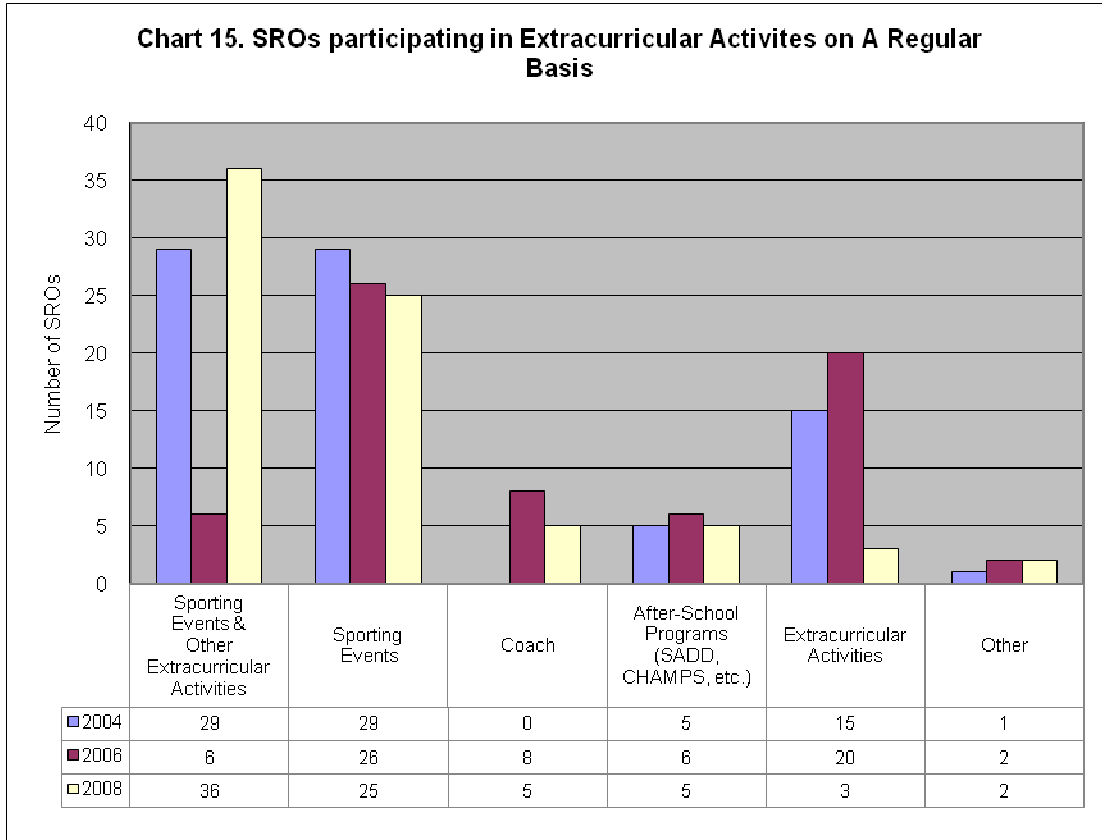


We then asked the SROs how much of their time was spent on each of the SRO duties that NASRO suggests comprise the SRO triad (law-related counselor, law-related educator, and law enforcement officer). The mean responses to those questions are presented in Chart 13. The SROs in this sample spent the majority of their time (60.8) as law enforcement officers with less than half that time spent on law related counseling (23.0) and a lesser amount spent as law-related educators (15.2). As such, it appears that the percentage of time SROs spend on law enforcement duties is slightly greater in 2008 than in previous years.

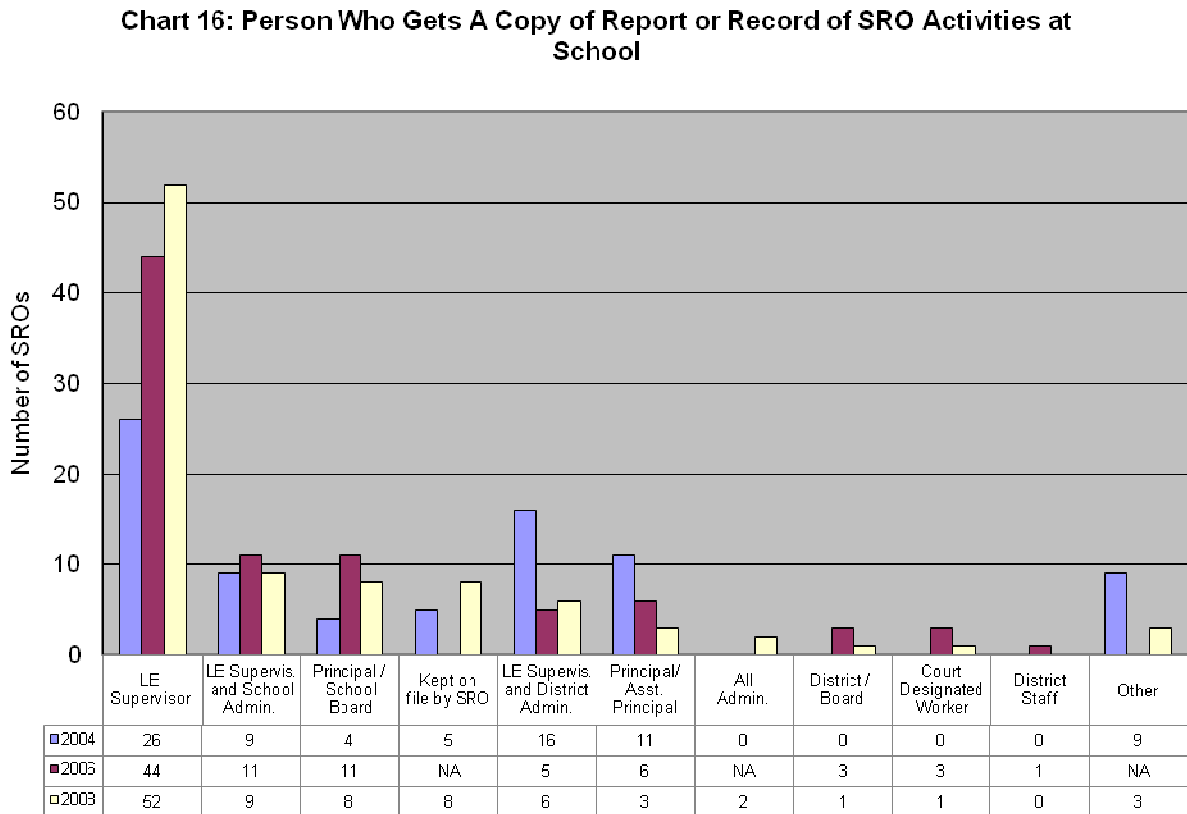


We then asked the SROs about the different types of activities they performed at their assigned schools and the frequency of those activities. The most frequently occurring activity that SROs performed daily was monitoring parking areas; three in four SROs (75.2%) did this activity daily. The second most common daily activity was monitoring lunchrooms (71.6% of the SROs performed this activity daily), then clearing hallways (52.9%), counseling with administrators or faculty (51.4%), counseling students (50.7%), and consulting with administrators or faculty (50.7%). The activities that many SROs never performed included transporting students (47.1% of SROs never transported students), searching students who were not under an arrest (41.3% never did that activity), and teaching classes (28.8%). Most of the officers performed most of the other activities at least occasionally.

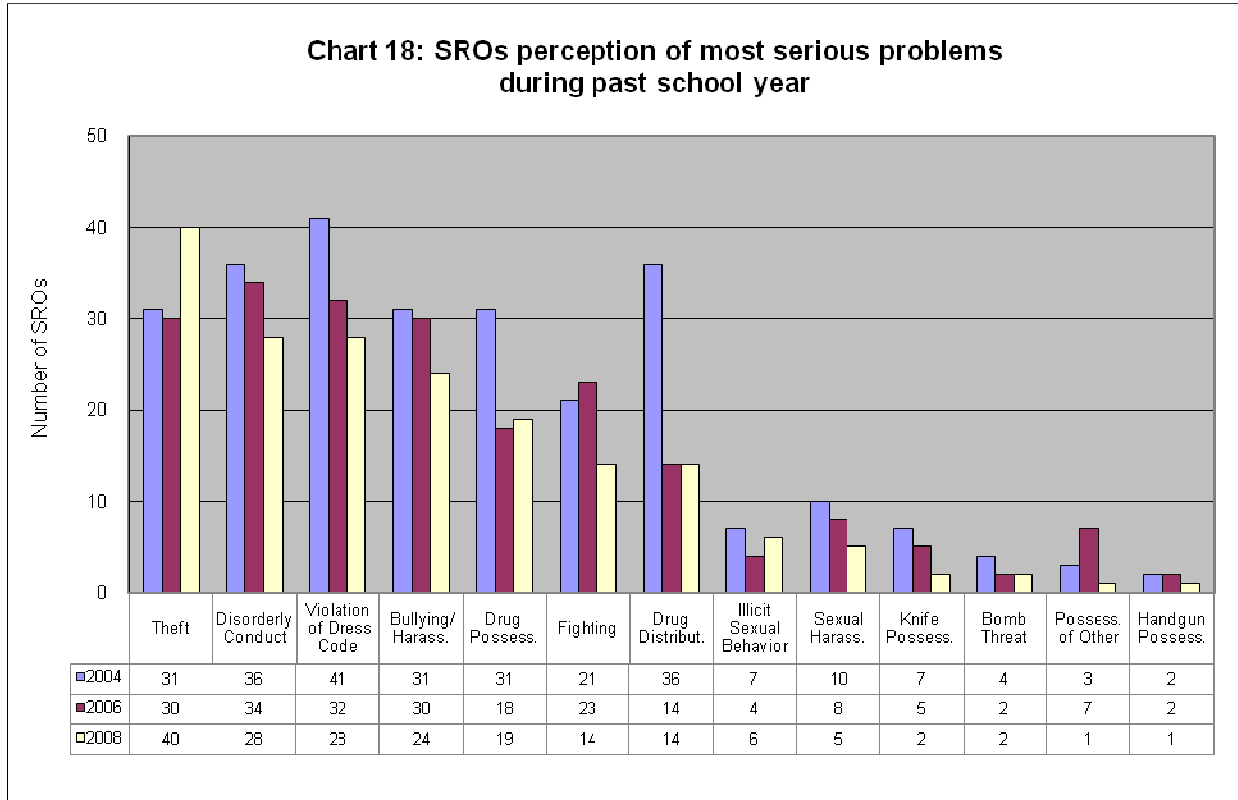
In charts not provided here, less than one in five respondents (18.4%) indicated that were either sponsors or co-sponsors of student organizations.



We then asked the SROs if there were extracurricular activities that they participated in on a regular basis and to describe what type of activity it was. We found 76 SROs that provided us with activities that they participate in on a regular basis. Their responses are presented in Chart 15. Most of the SROs (47.4%) who responded stated that they participated in sporting events and other activity. About one in three SROs (32.9%) participated in only sporting events. Small percentages of SROs stated that they participated in extracurricular activities as coaches (6.6%) and in after-school program such as SADD, CHAMPS, etc. (6.6%). Three SROs (3.9%) participated in extracurricular activities.

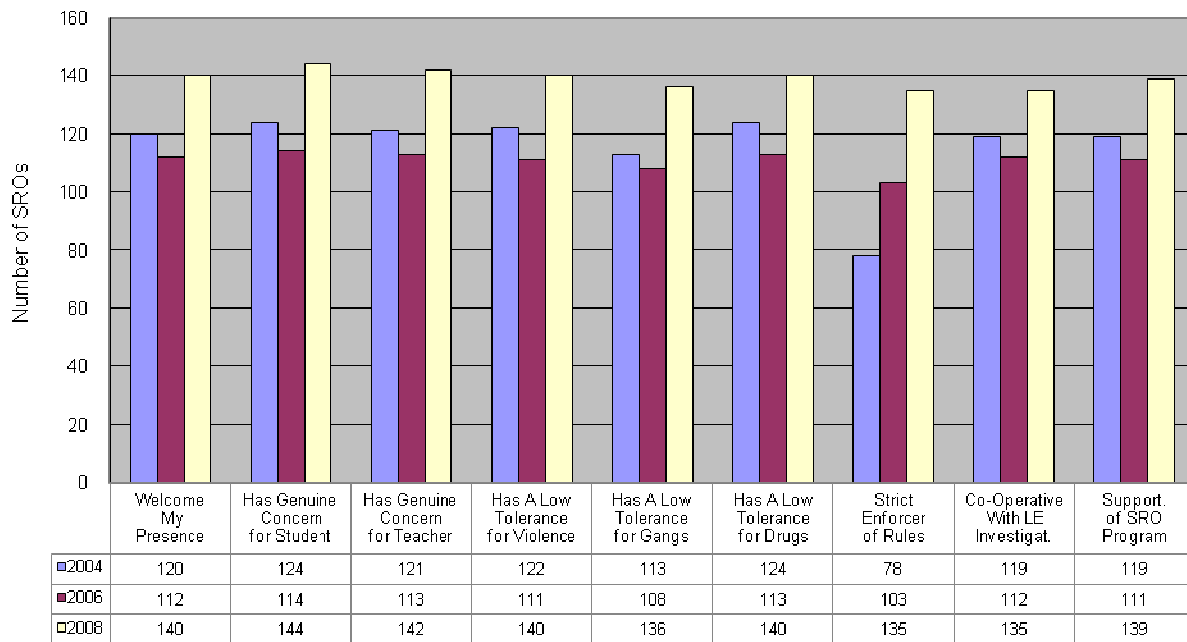


We also asked the SROs who received a copy of the report or record of SROs activities at the schools. The responses to that question are presented in Chart 16. Of the 93 SROs that responded, over half (55.9%) of the SROs said that the law enforcement supervisor in their department would get a copy. Only 9.7% of the SROs said both the law enforcement supervisor and the school administrator would get a copy of report while a slightly less than that number (8.6%) of the SROs stated that the Principal and school board would get a copy of report. Less than one in ten (6.5%) stated that the law enforcement supervisor and district administrator would get a copy of report while about half of that number (3.2%) SROs said that the Principal or Assistant Principal would get a copy of report. Two SROs (2.2%) stated that all administrators would get a copy of report and one SRO reported that the district or school board (1.1%) and Court Designated Worker (CDW) (1.1%) would get a copy of SROs activities report.

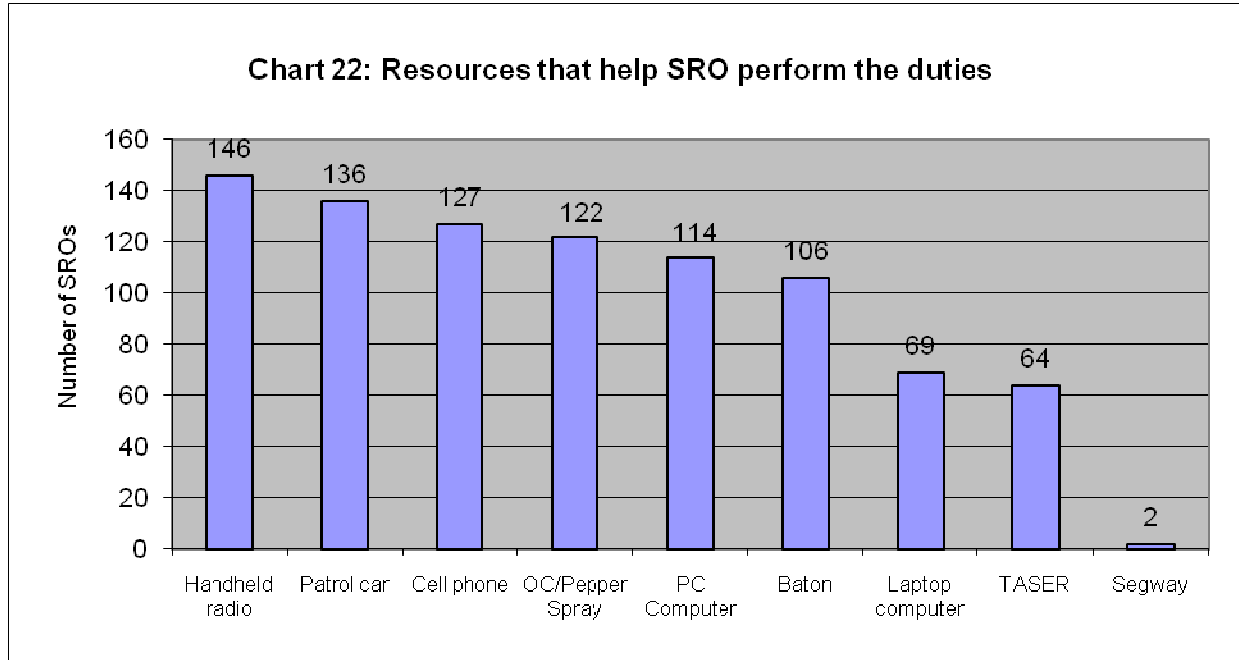


We then asked the SROs their perception of how serious a number of problems were at their school during the past school year. Their responses to those questions are presented in Chart 18. Of the 146 officers who responded to these questions, over one in four (27.4%) thought that theft was a serious problem at their school while slightly less than one in five thought that disorderly conduct (19.2%) and violation of dress code (19.2%) were serious problems at their school. Additionally, one in six respondents (16.4%) thought that bullying/harassment was a serious problem at their school while one in eight officers (13.0%) thought that drug passions was a serious problem at school. Less than one in ten officers (9.6%) thought that fighting and drug distribution were problems at their school. A small percentage of respondents thought that illicit sexual behavior (4.1%) and sexual harassment (3.4%) were problems.

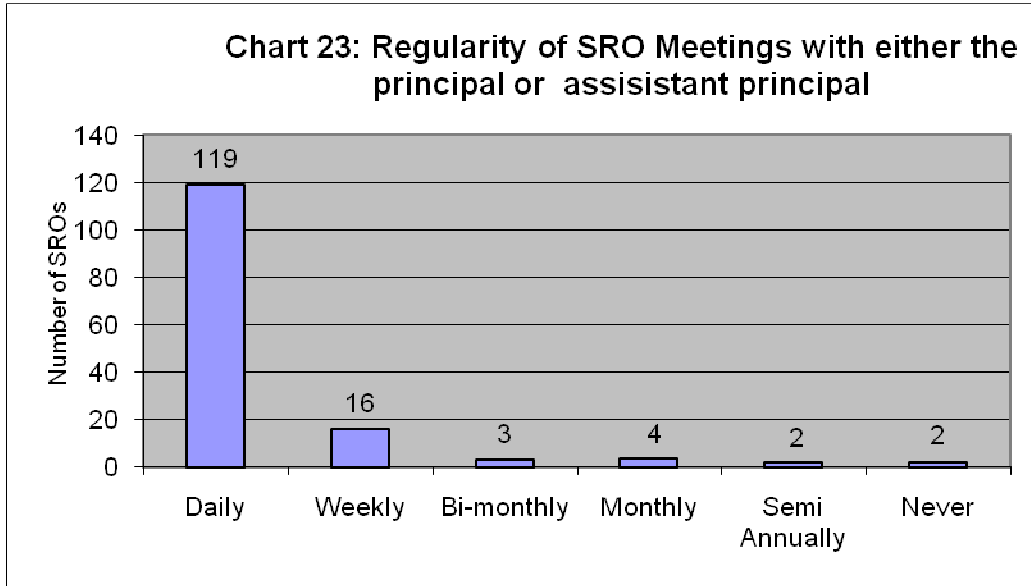
Chart 21: SRO opinion of principal at their school



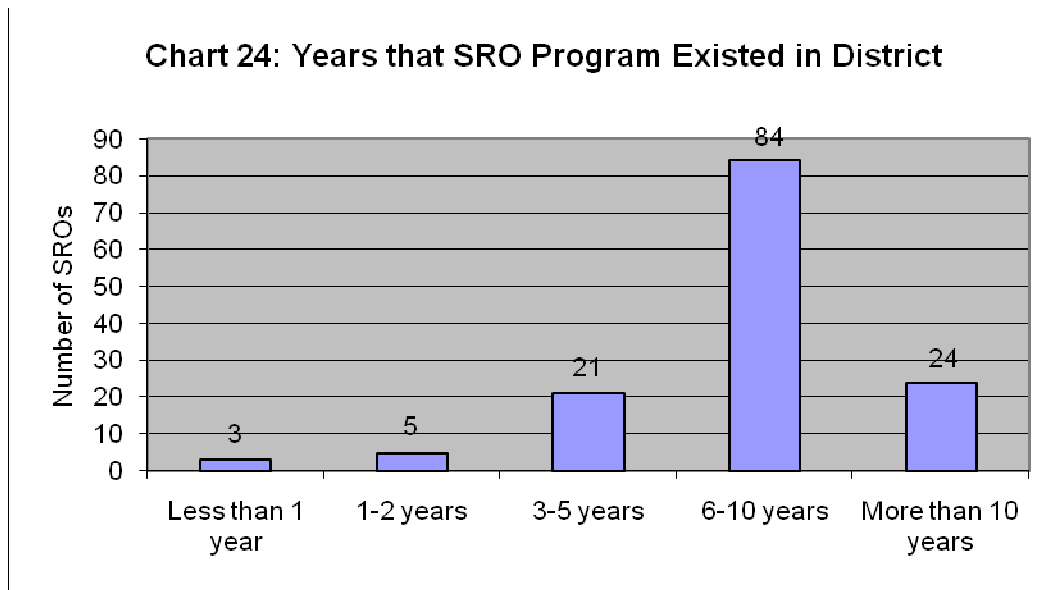
SROs were then asked a series of nine questions designed to allow SROs to give their opinion of the Principal at their assigned schools. The responses to that series of questions are presented in Chart 21. Among the 147 SROs who responded to these questions, it was evident that the vast majority of them thought highly of the principal at the school where they were assigned. Over nine in ten agreed that the principal at their assigned school: welcomed their presence at the school (95.2%); has a genuine concern for students (98.0%); has a genuine concern for the teachers (96.6%); has a low tolerance for violence (95.2%); has a low tolerance for gangs (92.5%); has a low tolerance for drugs (95.2%); was a strict enforcer of rules (91.8%); was cooperative with law enforcement investigations (91.8%); and was supportive of the SRO program (94.6%). 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.



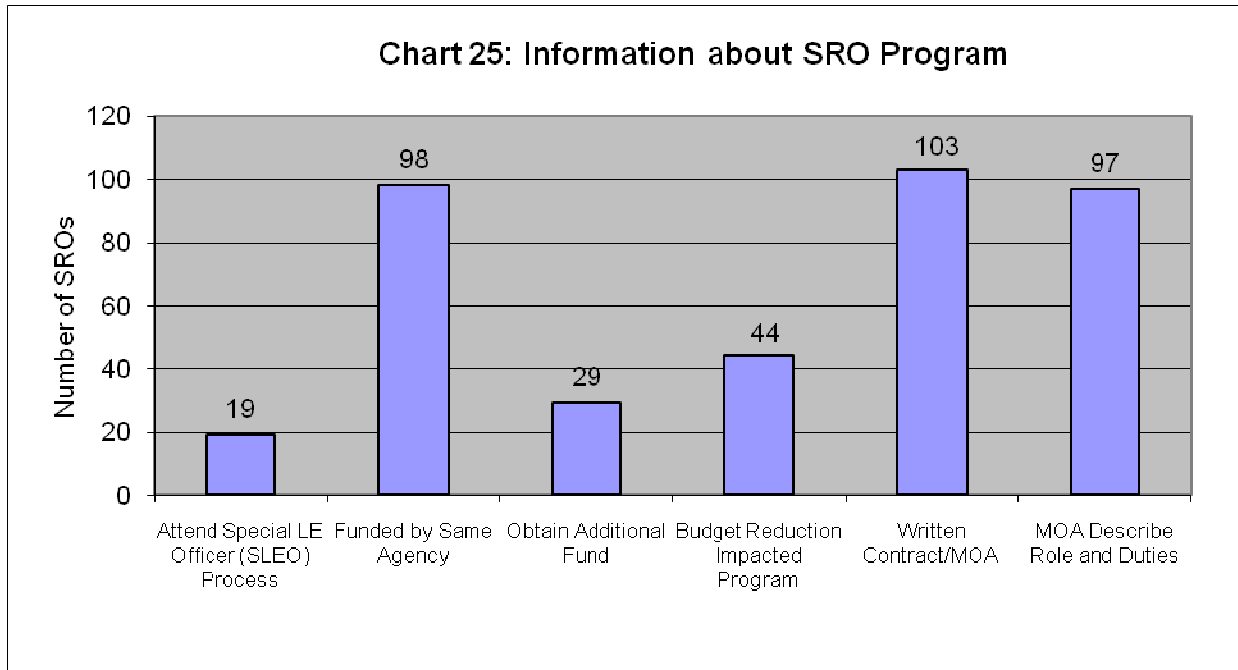
Based on feedback and questions we have received from SROs since the release of the 2006 report, we added a number of questions to the current questionnaire to exam emerging issues among SROs. We began by asking SROs to identify a number of resources that may or may not be available to SROs to help them perform their assigned duties. Their responses to these questions are presented in Chart 22. Of the 148 SROs who responded these questions, the vast majority (98.6%) stated that they had access to handheld radios. More than 9 in 10 (91.9%) stated that patrol cars were available to them at the school while slightly less than that number of officers (85.8%) reported that they had access to cell phones at the school. Over one in four (82.4%) agreed that OC/pepper spray was accessible at the school over three in four (77.0%) indicated that PC computers were available for them at the school. Less than three in four (71.6%) had access to batons at the school and less than half had access to laptop computers (46.6%) and TASERs (43.2%) 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 23. Of the 146 SROs that responded to this question, more than four in five (81.5%) met with either the principal or assistant principal daily. One in nine (11.0%) SROs met with the principal or assistant principal weekly. Small percentages of SROs met with principal or assistant principal bi-monthly (2.1%), monthly (2.7%), and semi-annually (1.4%). Two SROs (1.4%) stated that they had never met with the principal or assistant principal.

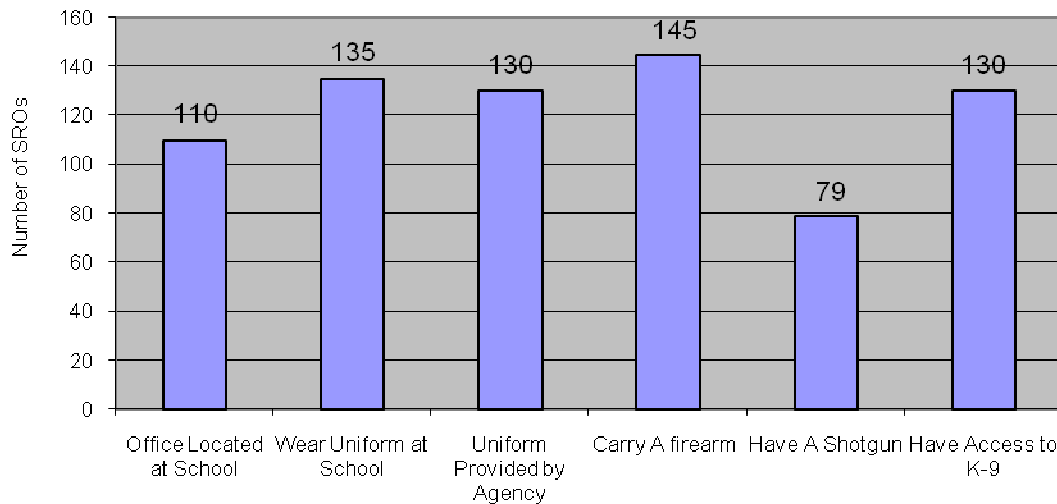


The SROs were then asked how long an SRO program had been in existence in the district to which they were assigned. Of the 137 officers who responded that question, over three in five (61.3%) stated that the SRO program had been in existence in the district for 6 to 10 years. More than one in six (17.5%) stated that the SRO program had been in existence in the district for more than 10 years while slightly less than that number (15.3%) of officers stated that the SRO program had been in existence in the district for three to five years. Small percentages of SROs stated that the SRO program had been in existence in the district for one to two years (3.6%) and for less than one year (2.2%). Overall, then, the SROs providing data for this study generally work in districts with fairly well-established SRO programs.



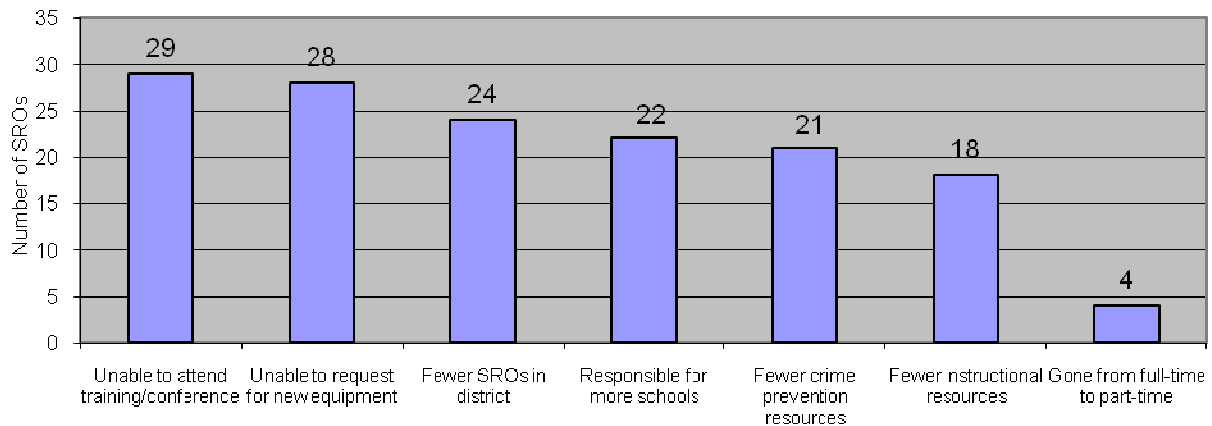
We then asked the SROs a number of questions about the information for the SRO program. The responses are presented in Chart 25. Of the 149 SROs who responded to the survey, only one in eight (12.8%) stated that they were a Special Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO). About two in three (65.8%) reported that since the SRO program began in the district, it had been funded consistently by the same agency. Approximately one in five (19.5%) stated that they had been able to obtain additional grant funds to support the SRO program in the district. About three in ten (29.5%) reported that the Safe School budget reductions over the past fiscal year had impacted the SRO program. Additionally, about seven in ten (69.1%) 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 (65.1%) SROs 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.

Chart 26: Information about SRO Resource



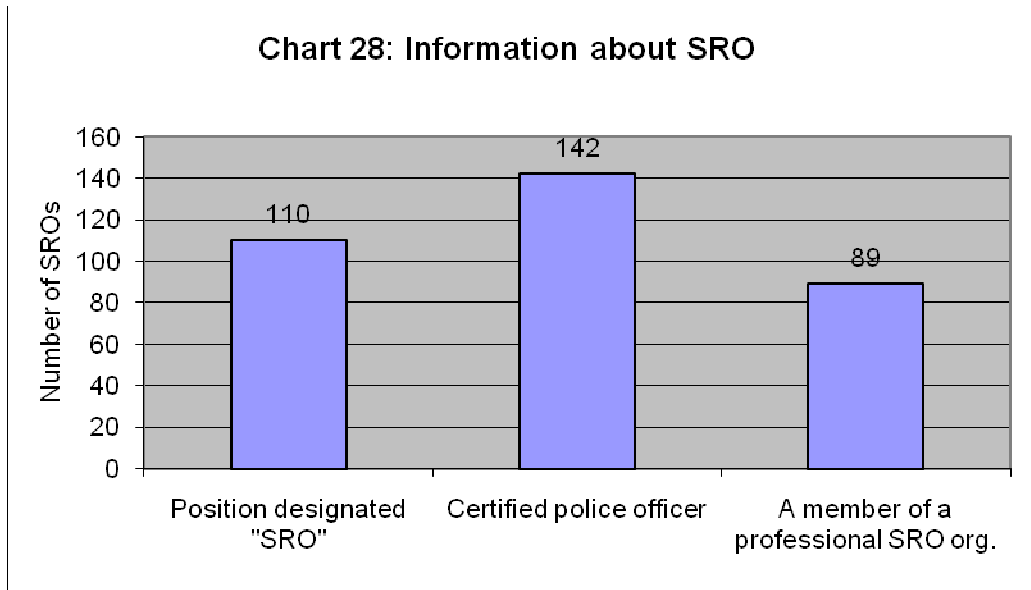
The SROs were then asked questions about their resources provided by the school and their law enforcement agency. The responses of the questions are presented in Chart 26. Of the 149 SROs who responded the survey, about three in four (73.8%) stated that they had their own offices located at school. Nine in ten (90.6%) reported that they wore a uniform in their role as an SRO, while slightly less than that number (87.2%) of officers agreed that their uniform were provided by the agency for which they were employed. The vast majority (97.3%) of the officers carried a firearm on school property, while over half of the officers (53.0%) had access to a shotgun on school property. Additionally, about nine in ten (87.2%) had access to canine patrol units for searches on the school property.

Chart 27: Results of Educational Budget Cuts

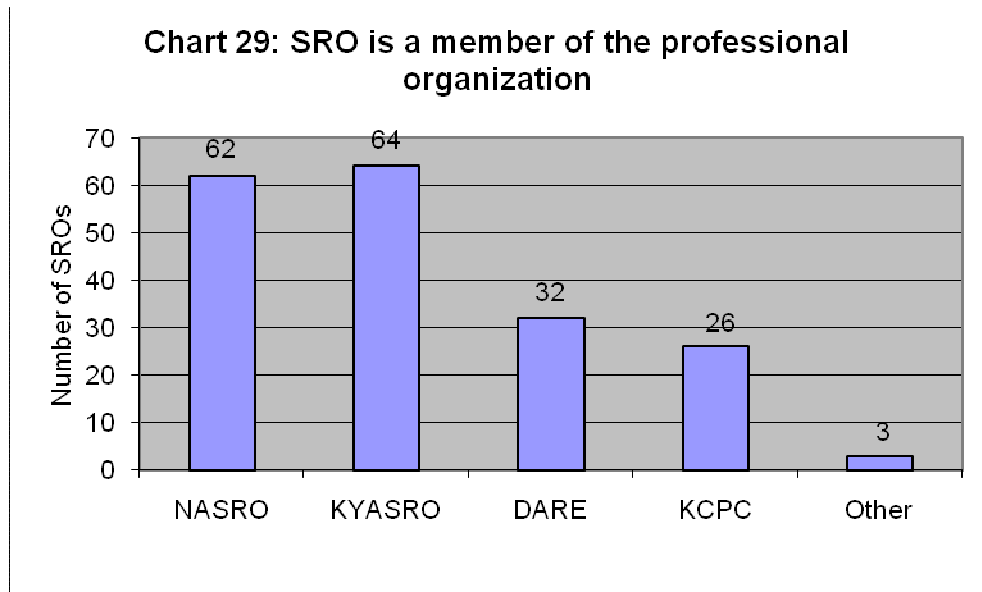


We then asked the SROs about the ramifications of budget reductions in their districts.

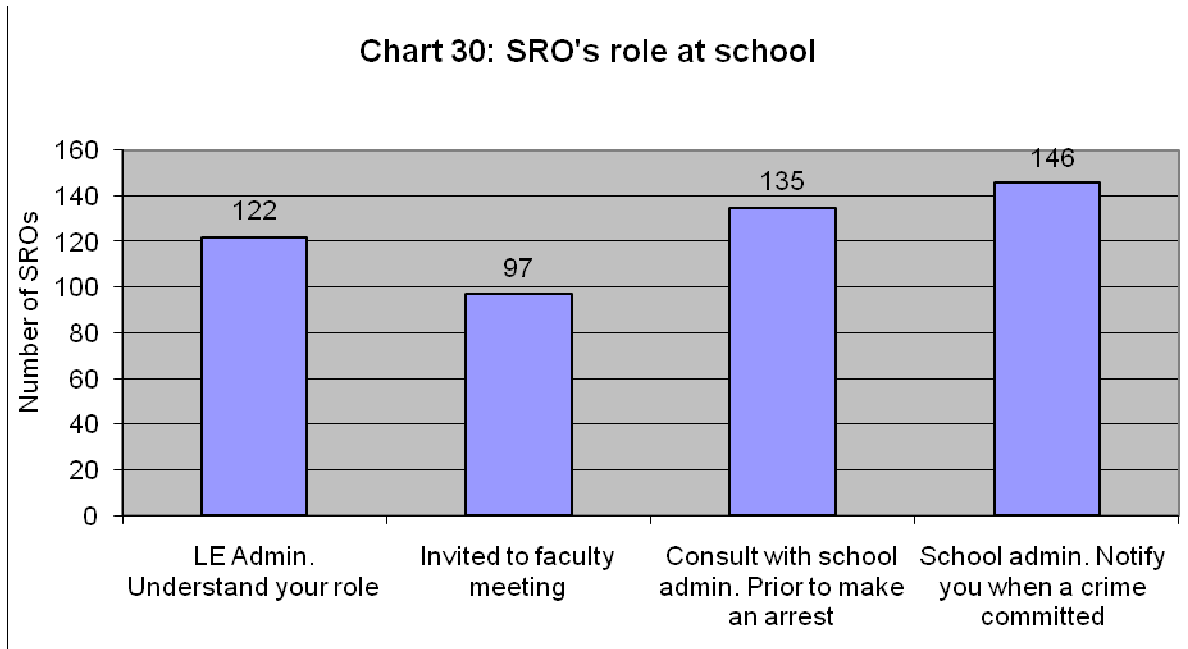
The responses are presented in the Chart 27. Of the 44 SROs who responded “yes” to the question that asked if the Safe Schools budget reductions over the past fiscal year had impacted their program (30.1% of the sample), about two in three (65.9%) stated that they had been unable to attend trainings and conferences that they had previously been able to attend. Slightly less than that number (63.6%) of SROs reported that the requests for new equipment had been unable to be met. More than half (54.5%) of the SROs stated that there were fewer SROs in their districts now and half of the SROs (50.0%) reported that they were responsible for more schools. About half of the SROs (47.7%) agreed that they had fewer crime prevention resources to help them do their job and two in five (40.9%) stated that they had fewer instructional resources to help them do their job. Finally, less than 1 in 10 (9.1%) had gone from full-time to part-time status.



The SROs were then asked information about their positions. The responses were presented in Chart 28. Of the 149 officers who responded the survey, about three in four (73.8%) stated that their positions were designated “School Resource Officer”. The vast majority (95.3%) reported that they were certified police officer in Kentucky and about three in five (59.7%) stated that they were 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 29. Of the 89 SROs that stated that they were member of professional SRO organizations, approximately 7 in 10 (71.9%) belonged to the Kentucky Association of School Resource Officers (KYASRO) and/or the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) (69.7%) while slightly more than that number (71.9%). Over one in three (36.0%) belonged to Drug and Alcohol Reduction Education (DARE) and three in ten (29.2%) belonged to Kentucky Crime Prevention Coalition (KCPC). Only three SROs (3.4%) belonged to other organizations.



Finally, we 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 30. Of the 149 SROs who responded, over four in five (81.9%) stated that the law enforcement administrators understood their role while about two in three (65.1%) reported that they were invited to faculty meetings. Nine in ten (90.6%) stated that they consulted with a school administrator prior to making an arrest on school property and almost all the SROs (98.0%) agreed that school administrators notified them when a crime had been committed on school property.

Conclusion

The results presented here suggest that, despite the reduced Community Oriented Policing grant funding that is currently available, 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.