



School Resource Officer Program

2011 Follow-Up Evaluation

December 2011

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Executive Summary

In early 2008, Chief William Blair approached the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board about implementing a School Resource Officer program in Toronto schools. The School Boards agreed to participate in the program and provincial funding allowed the placement of up to 30 School Resource Officers (SROs) in Toronto schools. The SRO mandate was to work in partnership with students, teachers, school administrators, School Board officials, parents, other police officers, and the community to establish and maintain a healthy and safe school community.

The initial evaluation of the School Resource Officer Program focused on measuring related perceptions of students, teachers/administrators, parents, and SROs in those schools where a School Resource Officer was assigned. The evaluation also included an analysis of crimes and victimization in and around the schools, and a review of the activities of the School Resource Officers.

The initial evaluation found that most students felt safe at school before the implementation and after the first year of the SRO program. Students who spoke informally to their SRO officer during the school year and those who thought an SRO was a good idea were more likely to say they felt safe in school. With regard to student comfort with the police, there was an increase in reporting by students who had been a victim of crime, but no similar increase in reporting to police when students had witnessed a crime. Students who informally talked to the SRO and students who approached the SRO to talk about a problem were more likely to report being the victim of a crime or having witnessed a crime.

Similarly, in the initial evaluation most administrators and teachers felt safe at school and in the neighbourhood around the school both before and after the implementation of the SRO program. School Resource Officers felt more a part of the school management team at the end of the school year than at the start, but identified some challenges to performing their duties (e.g. unwelcoming or isolated office space, lack of information, and issues related to transportation). By the end of that first year, most SROs felt that students were comfortable with them. And finally, the initial evaluation found decreases in reported offences both on school grounds and within 200 metres of the school.

By the 2010/2011 school year, the SRO program had been expanded to 46 schools. To formally examine the continuing performance of the SRO program, a follow-up to the original evaluation was requested. The follow-up evaluation used essentially the same surveys as were used at the end of the 2009 school year; the only difference was that the surveys were now completed on-line.

This follow-up evaluation again found that most students feel safe at school. As in 2009, in 2011, it was found that those students who had informally talked to the SRO and those who thought an SRO was a good idea were more likely to say that they felt safe in school. Those students who said they were comfortable speaking informally with the officer were also more likely to say they felt safe. While there was no relationship between perceptions of safety and whether or not students had approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having at school, those who said they were comfortable approaching the SRO to talk about a problem were more likely to say they felt safe.

In May 2011 fewer students said they'd been the victim of a crime during the school year than in May 2009, and more students in 2011 said that they'd reported the crime to the SRO. Similarly, while fewer students said they'd witnessed a crime during the school year, more students in 2011 said that they'd reported the crime they'd witnessed to the SRO. As in 2009, in 2011, it was found that those students who had informally talked to the SRO were more likely to have reported being a victim of crime to the SRO and more likely to have reported a crime they witnessed to the SRO. Similarly, students who said they'd approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having at school were more likely to report a crime that happened to them and more likely to report to the SRO a crime they had witnessed.

Although there was little change in how often students thought there were fights at school, in 2011 significantly fewer students felt that weapons were being brought to school once a week or more and more students felt that weapons were hardly ever or never being brought to school. While school administrators felt that students were fighting less frequently, they agreed with students' perceptions and felt that students were bringing weapons to school less frequently.

There were few differences in perceptions between students in schools that have had an SRO since the beginning of the program and students in schools that received an SRO in one of the succeeding years. However, it was found that students in schools that have had an SRO for a longer period of time were significantly more likely to say that they thought having the SRO assigned to their school made their school safer.

Most school administrators (84%) said their working relationship with the SRO was very or reasonably effective, and most of the administrators also said that they were satisfied with this working relationship. Most administrators (86%) said they were very or reasonably satisfied with the SRO program overall.

The officers who responded generally felt positive about their impact in the schools. In 2011, all of the SROs responding said that they felt that their relationship with students got better during the school year and 84% of the SROs said that their relationship with the school administration got better. Almost all (96%) of the SROs said they felt their working relationship with the school administration during this school year was very or reasonably effective and almost all said they were satisfied with this working relationship. As in 2009, in 2011 all of the SROs felt that safety in and around the school during the day improved during the school year. And in 2011, most officers said that their greatest accomplishment was earning the trust of or building relationships with students.

The total number of specific offences (aggravated assault, assault causing bodily harm, robbery, and weapons offences) decreased 7% between the two school years. While the number of aggravated assaults and number of assaults causing bodily harm showed little change, there was a 16% increase in robberies and a 57% decrease in weapons offences. About two-thirds of the total number of these offences took place during school hours in both school years. During school hours, the total number of offences decreased 8%. And while the number of robberies increased by 20%, the number of weapons offences decreased by 67%.

Overall, the SRO program continues to show positive results, particularly in the increasing willingness of students to report crime when they talked to, and when they felt comfortable talking to, their officer, and in the decrease in weapons offences in and around schools. The School Resource Officer program continues to be beneficial to crime prevention, crime reporting and relationship building in the schools.

Background

The School Resource Officer (SRO) program is a partnership between the Toronto District and Toronto Catholic District School Boards and the Toronto Police Service. The school environment provides an excellent opportunity for positive police interaction with young people outside of traditional enforcement activities. This interaction can build relationships and trust, have valuable preventative effects, and positively affect youth safety. Students become accustomed to the presence of an officer who is not carrying out investigations or dealing with a crisis, and they may feel more comfortable approaching that officer about a problem or with information about a crime.

In early 2008, Chief William Blair approached the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) about implementing a School Resource Officer program in Toronto schools. Provincial funding permitted 30 officers to be assigned to 30 Toronto high schools: 22 TDSB schools and 8 TCDSB schools. The schools were to be selected by the Boards and would only include schools willing to participate.

The SROs were expected to establish positive relationships by being a visible uniform presence in and around the schools, co-ordinate school lectures on safety and crime prevention, participate in the Empowered Student Partnerships program, facilitate and deliver educational programs, liaise with parent/teacher groups and the community, promote Crime Stoppers, provide support to officers conducting investigations relating to the school or students, and act as a resource to officers regarding the Police/School Protocol. These duties and activities were intended to help the SROs fulfill their mandate of working in partnership with students, teachers, school administrators, School Board officials, parents, other police officers, and the community to establish and maintain a healthy and safe school community.

The School Resource Officers were assigned to the Community Response unit within their division. They worked a forty-hour week, Monday to Friday, although shifts could be changed to accommodate evening and weekend school events. The SRO was expected to perform their duties in uniform. Throughout the school year, the SROs were required to attend orientation sessions related to their job function, and enhanced training on School Board policies, youth engagement, and program delivery.

The original evaluation, carried out in the 2008/2009 school year, involved the collection of information from 29 of the initial 30 schools.

The original evaluation found that most students felt safe at school before (October 2008) and after (May 2009) the SRO program. Students who spoke informally to their SRO during the school year, and those who thought an SRO was a good idea were more likely to say they felt safe in school. With regard to student comfort with the police, there was an increase in reporting by students who had been a victim of crime, but no similar increase in reporting to police when students had witnessed a crime. Students who informally talked to the SRO and students who approached the SRO to talk about a problem were more likely to report being the victim of a crime or having witnessed a crime. Students who thought the SRO was a good idea were also more likely to report victimization.

The perceived relationships between students and police improved during that school year. The proportion of students who felt the relationship between police and students was good or

excellent, increased from 56% to 67%; those who thought the relationship was excellent almost doubled over the school year.

Most administrators and teachers felt safe at school and in the neighbourhood around the school both before and after the SRO program. Similar to the students, the proportion of administrators/teachers who believed that the relationship between police and students in their school was good or excellent increased during the school year; those who believed the relationship between police and students was excellent almost doubled.

Although most parents, in both October and May, were more likely to feel their child was 'reasonably' rather than 'very' safe, their perception of their child's safety at school improved over the year. And, parents at the beginning and end of the school year felt positively about having an SRO assigned to their child's school.

School Resource Officers felt more a part of the school management team at the end of that initial school year than at the start; they also felt that conditions involving supportive/positive relationships with the school administration and/or teachers were important for performing their SRO duties. The SROs identified a number of challenges to performing their duties (e.g. unwelcoming or isolated office space, lack of information, and issues related to transportation). By the end of the school year, most SROs felt that students were comfortable with them.

The initial evaluation in 2008/09 also found decreases in reported offences both on school grounds and within 200 metres of the school. Overall, that evaluation found that the School Resource Officer program demonstrated a number of positive effects on schools and students, particularly those students who had interacted with the SROs.

Current Research

The SRO program has now been expanded to 46 high schools around Toronto, 34 schools in the Toronto District School Board and 12 schools in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. To formally examine the continuing performance of the SRO program, a follow-up to the original evaluation was requested.

The overall goals of the School Resource Officer program remained unchanged. They were to:

- Improve safety and perceptions of safety in and around schools.
- Improve perceptions of police.
- Improve the relationship between students and police.

This follow-up evaluation again measured the perceptions of safety in schools, perceptions of the police and the SRO program, and student comfort with, and willingness to report crime and victimization to, the police. The evaluation also reviewed the perceptions of the School Resource Officers.

The evaluation period was May-June 2011.

Main Research Questions

Related to the program goals, the main questions for the follow-up evaluation were:

What are student perceptions of safety in their school?

Is this affected by interaction or frequency of interaction with the SRO?

Is this affected by student opinion of the SRO program?

How comfortable or willing are students to report crimes to police?

Is this affected by interaction with the SRO?

Is this affected by student opinion of the SRO program?

What are the perceptions of the relationship between students and the police?

What are school administrator perceptions of safety in the school?

What are parent perceptions of safety in the school?

Did the School Resource Officer decrease crimes on school grounds?

To find out if positive findings noted in the original study continued and/or showed improvement, current results were compared to the end-of-school-year findings from the previous evaluation.

Methodology

Using essentially the same surveys as were used at the end of the 2009 school year, the follow-up evaluation measured the perceptions of safety in schools, perceptions of the police and the SRO program, and student comfort with, and willingness to report crime and victimization to, the police. As in the original evaluation, students, parents, principals and vice principals were surveyed. The only difference was that the current surveys – one for students, one for school administrators, and one for parents – were to be completed on-line. Completion of the surveys was again voluntary.

In each of the 46 schools with an SRO, principals were asked to identify one Grade 9 class, one Grade 10 class, one Grade 11 class, and one Grade 12 class, and to provide the students from these classes time during school hours to complete the on-line Student survey. Principals received an information sheet for each of these students, which outlined the purpose of the survey and provided a password for access to the survey through the School Action Teams website.

The principal and vice principals were also asked to access and complete the on-line Administrator survey through a link on the School Action Teams website. An information sheet that outlined the purpose of and provided the password for this survey was provided.

Finally, principals were provided with an information sheet for each student in the identified classes to take home to their parent(s)/guardian(s). The information sheet outlined the purpose of the Student survey and let parents know that they could contact the principal if they did not want their child to participate. In addition, the information sheet provided a link to, and a

password for, the on-line survey for parents. As with the other two surveys, parents were invited to access the survey through a link on the School Action Teams website.

Those who completed the surveys were not asked to identify themselves.

A link for the SRO survey was also placed on the School Action Teams website. The SROs were informed by the SRO Co-ordinator of the link, the purpose of the survey, and the password required for access.

Other Data

For the 46 schools participating in the SRO program, data was also requested on specific offences that occurred within 200m of the school. The specific offences were weapons offences, assaults causing bodily harm, aggravated assaults, and robberies for each of the past four school years (i.e. starting in school year September 2007/June 2008, to school year September 2010/June 2011).

The following photo (Figure 1) illustrates the area that is generally covered within a 200 metre radius of a school.



Figure 1

Findings

Overview: Research Questions

As noted previously, there were particular questions that the evaluation was intended to address in the assessment of whether or not the program was achieving its goals. The evaluation findings specifically related to these questions are outlined here.

Did the School Resource Officer improve student perceptions of safety in their school?

The results of the student surveys in May 2009 and again in May 2011 found that overall student perception of safety in their school did not improve, but almost all students at both times said they felt safe in their school (90% in both years).

Were student perceptions of safety affected by actual interaction or frequency of interaction with the SRO?

Perceptions of safety for students who had informally talked with the SRO or had approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having during the year were compared with those for students who said they had not talked with or approached the SRO.

As in 2009, in 2011, it was found that those students who had informally talked to the SRO were significantly more likely to say that they felt safe in school (93%) than those who had not informally talked to the officer (89%).¹

While the frequency with which the students said they had spoken informally with the officer had no effect on feelings of safety, those students who said they were comfortable speaking with the officer were significantly more likely to say they felt safe (96%) than those who weren't comfortable speaking with the officer (65%).

In comparison, there was no difference in perceptions of safety at school between those students who had approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having at school and those students who had not approached the officer.

However, the frequency with which students approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having was related to their perceptions of safety in school. Those who had approached the SRO to talk about a problem more than five times were significantly more likely to say they did not feel safe at school (38%) than those who'd approached the officer three times or less (11% of students who'd approached the officer once did not feel safe; 5% of students who'd approached the officer two or three times did not feel safe). And again, those students who said they were comfortable approaching the SRO to talk about a problem were significantly more likely to say they felt safe (92%) than those who weren't comfortable approaching the officer (73%).

¹ All significant differences noted in the report have a Chi-square statistic significance of at least $p < 0.05$.

Were student perceptions of safety affected by student opinion of the SRO program?

Again as in 2009, in 2011, student opinion as to whether having an SRO assigned to their school was a good or bad idea was also found to be significantly related to perceptions of safety in school. Those students who thought that having an SRO assigned to their school was a good idea were more likely to say that they felt safe in school (93%) than those who thought it was a bad idea (70%). Those who thought having an SRO assigned was a bad idea were significantly more likely to say they did not feel safe.

Did the School Resource Officer improve student willingness to report crimes to police?

In May 2011, significantly fewer students said they'd been the victim of a crime during the school year than in May 2009 (9% in 2011, 16% in 2009). And, significantly more students in 2011 said that they'd reported the crime to the SRO (35% in 2011, 19% in 2009).

Similarly, in May 2011, significantly fewer students said they'd witnessed a crime during the school year than in May 2009 (28% in 2011, 35% in 2009). And again, significantly more students in 2011 said that they'd reported the crime they'd witnessed to the SRO (14% in 2011, 8% in 2009).

Was student willingness to report crimes affected by actual interaction or frequency of interaction with the SRO?

Willingness to report victimization or a crime witnessed was compared for students who had informally talked with the SRO or had approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having during the year, and for those students who said they had not talked with or approached the SRO.

As in 2009, in 2011, it was found that those students who had informally talked to the SRO were significantly more likely to have reported being a victim of crime to the SRO (48%) than those who had not informally talked to the officer (26%). Those students who had informally talked to the SRO during the school year were also significantly more likely to have reported a crime they witnessed to the SRO (20%) than those who had not informally talked to the officer (10%).

The frequency with which students spoke informally with the officer, or how comfortable they felt in doing so, was not significantly related to their willingness to report to the SRO when they were the victim of or witnessed a crime.

And again as in 2009, in May 2011, those students who said they'd approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having at school were also significantly more likely to report a crime that happened to them to the SRO (54%) than those students who had not approached the officer (27%). And again, the students who had approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having were significantly more likely to report to the SRO a crime they had witnessed (25%) than those students who had not approached the SRO about a problem (12%).

However, the frequency with which students approached the SRO to talk about a problem they were having, or how comfortable they felt in doing so, was not significantly related to their willingness to report to the SRO when they were the victim of or witnessed a crime.

Was student willingness to report crimes affected by student opinion of the SRO program?

Student opinion as to whether having an SRO assigned to their school was a good or bad idea was not significantly related to either their reporting of a crime that happened to them or their reporting of a crime they witnessed.

What are the perceptions of the relationship between students and the police?

There was no significant difference in the perceptions of the relationship between students and police, with about two-thirds of students at both times saying the relationship was excellent or good (68% in 2009, 65% in 2011).

School administrators had a more positive view of the relationship between police and students in their school in both years: 93% said the relationship was excellent or good in 2009, while 81% said the relationship was excellent or good in 2011.

Did the School Resource Officer improve school administrator perceptions of safety in the school?²

The results of the school administrator surveys in May 2009 and May 2011 found that overall perception of safety in school did not improve. However, administrators at both times said they felt safe in their school (100% and 93%, respectively).

Did the School Resource Officer improve parent perceptions of safety in the school?

As outlined in the section on the parent surveys below, due to an extremely low response rate, information on parent perceptions is not available.

Did the School Resource Officer decrease crimes on school grounds?

As noted previously, changes in the number of specific offences (weapons offences, assaults causing bodily harm, aggravated assaults, and robberies) between the 2007/08 and the 2010/11 school years, occurring Monday through Friday, within 200 metres of SRO schools were examined.³

The total number of these offences decreased 7% between the two school years. Robberies accounted for the largest proportion of the total number of offences in both

² Due to small sample sizes, no significance testing was performed on administrator and SRO responses.

³ Only those occurrences that could be geocoded were included in the analysis. About 6% of all occurrences of these offences could not be geocoded.

years and showed a 16% increase; in contrast, there was a 57% decrease in weapons offences. During school hours only, while the number of robberies increased 20%, the number of weapons offences decreased 67%.

More detailed information on the results of the surveys, and on the crime data, is provided in the sections that follow.

Student Surveys

In May 2011, just over 3,500 student information sheets were provided to principals for distribution to students as outlined in the methodology section. Of the 46 SRO schools, 15 had fewer than 10 students complete the survey and 1 school had no students complete the survey. A total of 1,449 student surveys were completed, for a response rate of about 39%. With the more stringent requirements for survey completion in the original survey (paper copies of surveys were distributed, completed, and then collected in class), 3,553 surveys were completed in May 2009, for a response rate of 51%. The 2011 survey results are considered accurate at ± 2.5 , 95 times out of 100; the 2009 survey results are considered accurate at ± 1.5 , 95 times out of 100.

In the 2009 survey, about one-quarter of the surveys came from each grade (9 to 12), and about 30% came from schools in the Toronto Catholic District School Board, 70% from schools in the Toronto District School Board. In the 2011 survey, about one-quarter of the surveys came from each of Grades 10 and 11, with slightly more surveys from Grade 9 and slightly fewer from Grade 12; about one-third came from schools in the Toronto Catholic District School Board and two-thirds from schools in the Toronto District School Board. In both surveys, about half the surveys were completed by male students, half by female students, and over half of the respondents said they came from neighbourhoods with no or a little bit of crime (58% in 2009, 55% in 2011).

Thoughts on Safety:

Students were asked how safe they felt in and around school during the day. No change was seen from May 2009 to May 2011, with almost all students saying they felt very or reasonably safe at both times (90% in both years) (Figure 2).⁴

In keeping with the general feeling of safety in school, the largest proportion of students at both times said that they never had trouble concentrating during class because they felt unsafe, however, students were significantly more likely to say they never had trouble in 2009 than in 2011 (60% in May 2009, 56% in May 2011). And, while proportions were small, significantly more students in 2011 than in 2009 said they had trouble concentrating in class all of the time because they felt unsafe (2% in 2009, 4% in 2011).

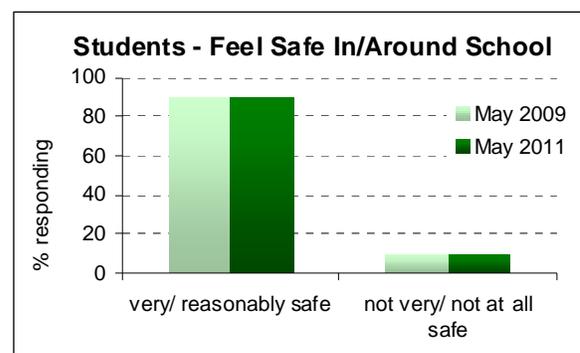


Figure 2

⁴ All proportions from survey results are of those who answered the question.

Most students in both years felt that their school and school grounds were not very or not at all violent, with significantly more students feeling this way in 2011 than in 2009 (59% in May 2009, 71% in May 2011) (Figure 3). In 2009, 41% of students felt their school was somewhat or very violent, compared to 29% in 2011.

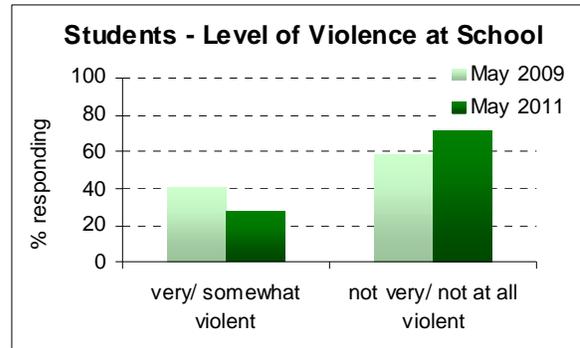


Figure 3

When asked about how often students got into fights during the school year, there was little difference between responses in 2009 and 2011, with most students in both years saying 'less than once a week' (41% in 2009, 44% in 2011).

There was a difference, however, in how often students thought that weapons were brought to school. In 2011, significantly fewer students felt that weapons were being brought to school once a week or more and significantly more students felt that weapons were hardly ever or never being brought to school. In 2011, 17% of students thought that weapons were being brought to school once a week or more, compared to 23% of students in 2009, and in 2011, 32% of students thought that weapons were hardly ever or never being brought to school, compared to 21% of students in 2009.

Similarly, significantly fewer students thought that drugs were hardly ever or never being sold at their school in 2011 than in 2009 (15% and 12%, respectively).

Students were asked to rate how serious they thought some problems were at their school. As can be seen in Figure 4, students in 2011 were somewhat more likely than students in 2009 to see most of the issues listed as serious problems, particularly kids hanging out in the halls between classes, being robbed, drugs, and trespassers on school grounds. Robbery and drugs were felt to be the most serious problems in both years.

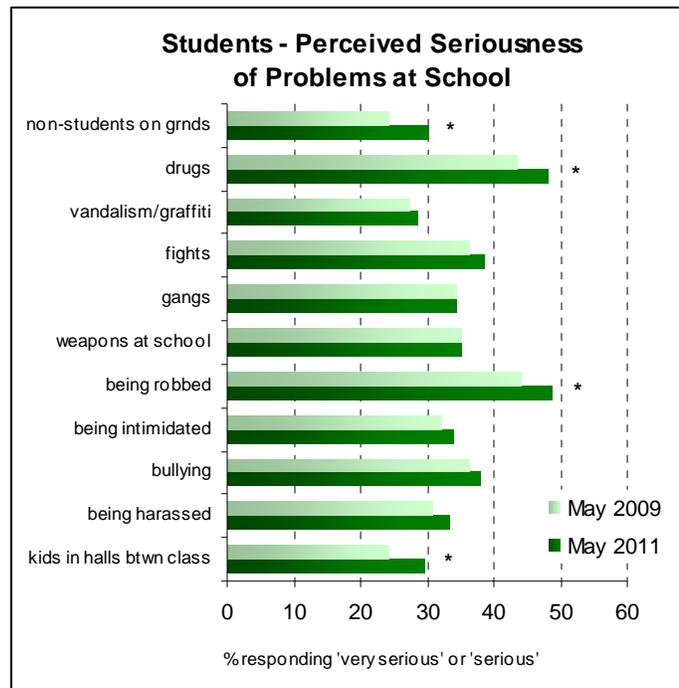


Figure 4

(* indicates significant difference)

Students were also asked how often they worried about certain things at school. As can be seen in Figure 5, there was little difference between students in 2009 and 2011 in how they said they worried about the different issues. The problems students worried about most in both years were 'having something stolen at school' (theft), and 'being robbed at school'.

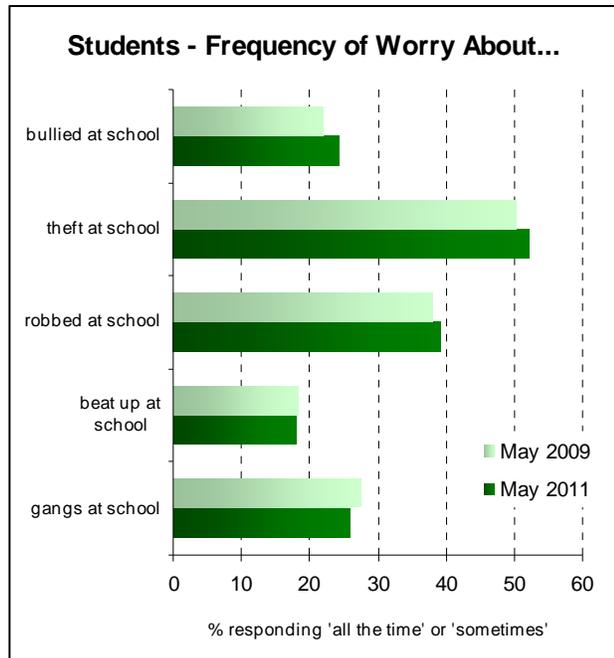


Figure 5

In both May 2009 and May 2011, most students said that they had never or only once avoided going to school during the year because they were afraid of getting hurt (91% and 90%, respectively). However, while the proportions were small, significantly more students in 2011 than in 2009 said that they had avoided school more than 5 times during the year because they were afraid of getting hurt (2% in 2009, 4% in 2011).

Students were asked a similar question regarding being bullied. Again, most students in both years said that they had never or only once avoided going to school during the year because they were afraid of being bullied or picked on (91% in 2009, 90% in 2011). There were no significant differences in proportions of students avoiding school more than once for fear of being bullied.

Thoughts on Police and the SRO Program:

The perceived relationship between students and police remained relatively unchanged between the two school years. About two-thirds of students in both years felt that the relationship between the police and students at their school was good or excellent (68% in 2009, 65% in 2011) (Figure 6).

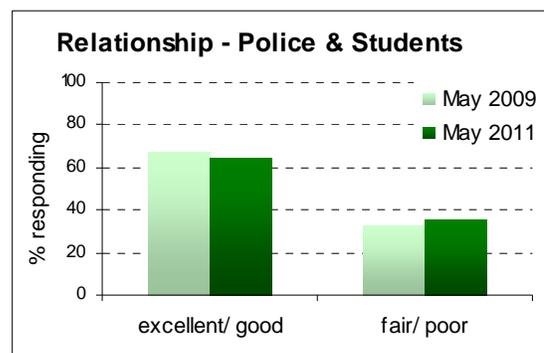


Figure 6

When asked what they thought about having a School Resource Officer assigned to their school, significantly more students in 2011 than in 2009 thought that it was a good idea (71% in 2009, 75% in 2011). And, while relatively few students in both years thought that having a SRO assigned to their school was a bad idea, significantly more students thought it was a bad idea in 2009 than in 2011 (7% in 2009, 5% in 2011).

While a large proportion of students at both times felt the SRO helped deal with problems and improved safety, students were more positive about the impact of the SRO in 2011 than in 2009. Students were significantly more likely in 2011 than in 2009 to say that having an SRO at their school had helped deal with problems there (69% in 2009, 73% in 2011). Similarly, students in 2011 were also significantly more likely to say that having the SRO assigned to their school made their school safer (71% in 2009, 74% in 2011).

Although they were more positive about the impact of having an SRO at school, students in 2011 were also significantly less likely to have actually spoken to the officer during the school year: in May 2009, 36% of students said they had spoken informally with the SRO during the school year; in May 2011, 29% of students said they had spoken informally with the SRO. For those who had spoken with the SRO, there was no difference by year in how frequently they spoke with the officer, and most students in both years said they talked with the SRO only once or twice (52% in 2009, 55% in 2011). Similarly, in both years, those who had spoken to the SRO said they felt comfortable doing so.

While they were less likely to have spoken to the SRO, students in 2011 were significantly more likely to have talked to him or her about a problem they were having (8% in 2009, 10% in 2011). There was no difference in how frequently students approached the SRO with a problem, however, with most students in both years saying they approached the officer only once (59% in 2009, 52% in 2011). And again, in both years, those who had spoken to the SRO about a problem said they felt comfortable doing so.

When asked if they had been the victim of a crime during the past school year, significantly fewer students said 'yes' in 2011 (16% in 2009, 9% in 2011). And, these students in 2011 were significantly more likely to say they reported the crime to the SRO than the victimized students in 2009 (19% in 2009, 35% in 2011). Similarly, when asked if they had witnessed a crime during the past school year, significantly fewer students said 'yes' in 2011 (35% in 2009, 28% in 2011). And again, these students in 2011 were significantly more likely than the students in 2009 to say they reported the crime they witnessed to the SRO (8% in 2009, 14% in 2011). In contrast, however, students in 2011 were significantly less likely to have approached the SRO if they saw someone else having a problem or being picked on (20% in 2009, 17% in 2011).

The proportions of students who said they were the victim of a crime and reported the victimization to police, or witnessed a crime and reported what they had witnessed to police, in May 2009 and May 2011, are summarized in Figure 7.

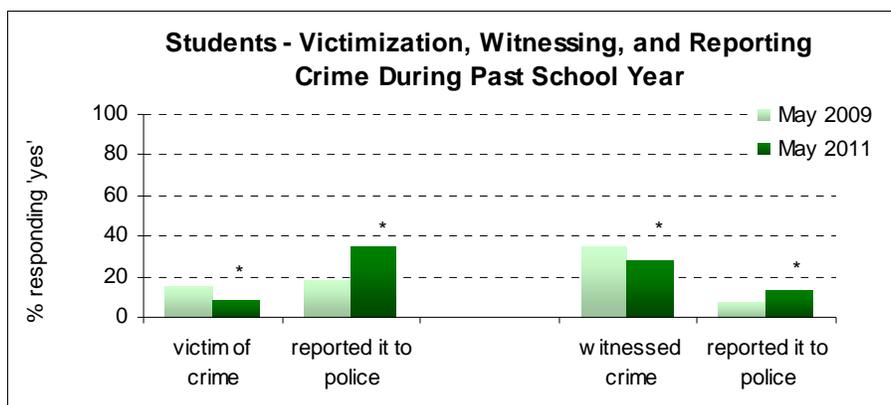


Figure 7

(* indicates significant difference)

Relatively few students in either year said they had worked with the SRO to address an issue or solve a problem at their school: only 9% in both years said they had done so.

Schools Involved in the SRO Program Original Evaluation:

There were few differences in perceptions between students in schools that have had an SRO since the beginning of the program and students in schools that received an SRO in one of the succeeding years. For example, students in both types of schools said they felt safe (90% in the initial schools, 91% in the other schools) and were generally equally as unlikely to have approached their SRO to talk about a problem they were having (9% in the initial schools, 10% in the other schools).

However, it was found that students in schools that have had an SRO for a longer period of time were significantly more likely to say that they thought having the SRO assigned to their school made their school safer (77% in initial schools, 71% in the other schools).

School Resource Officer Survey

Twenty-seven of the SROs provided their feedback on the program in the May 2011 survey; twenty had provided feedback in May 2009.

Almost all (96%) of the SROs who responded in 2011 said they felt that they were treated as part of the school management team by school staff during the school year, up from 83% in 2009. Few of the SROs (15%) in 2011, down from just under two-thirds in 2009, said that there were conditions at their school that made it challenging to perform their duties; examples of the challenges included: lack of understanding of SRO role, slow sharing of information, and equipment/facilities difficulties. The types of challenges remained generally the same as in the initial evaluation. And, while half of the SROs in 2009 said that there were conditions at their division that made it challenging to perform their SRO duties, only 4% felt this way in 2011. The main challenge at divisions in 2011 related to a lack of access to vehicles.

All of the SROs in 2011, up from three-quarters in 2009, said that they were able to get students involved in initiatives or activities that would help make their school safer. Examples of strategies that the SROs felt worked best for getting students involved included: class presentations, informal interaction to build relationships and trust, offering incentives (especially food), letting the students lead, involving teachers, working in small groups, coaching or participating in sports, getting students already involved to talk to others, making students feel part of a team, being actively involved rather than just offering advice, and being available to participate in events.

Just over one-third of the SROs (36%), however, also noted several challenges to getting students involved or to participate in events/activities. These included students not wanting to be seen involved with police, trying to maintain student interest and commitment, activities and programs in the school competing for student participation, and lack of access to facilities (e.g. the gym). Again, these challenges remained generally similar to those noted in 2009.

All of the SROs who responded in 2011 felt that by the end of the year students were more comfortable talking to them (as in 2009), and were more comfortable coming to them with a

problem (up from 95% in 2009). This perception of improved comfort was also reflected in very positive perceptions of the relationships between the SROs and students, staff, and the school administration.

And, by the end of the school year, all of the SROs felt that, in general, their relationship with students and staff/teachers was excellent or good, and 96% felt their relationship with the school administration was excellent or good. In particular, roughly two-thirds of the SROs felt that, in general, their relationship with students, school staff, and the school administration was excellent (64%, 60%, and 68%, respectively). As shown in Figure 8, these proportions were all roughly similar to those seen in 2009.

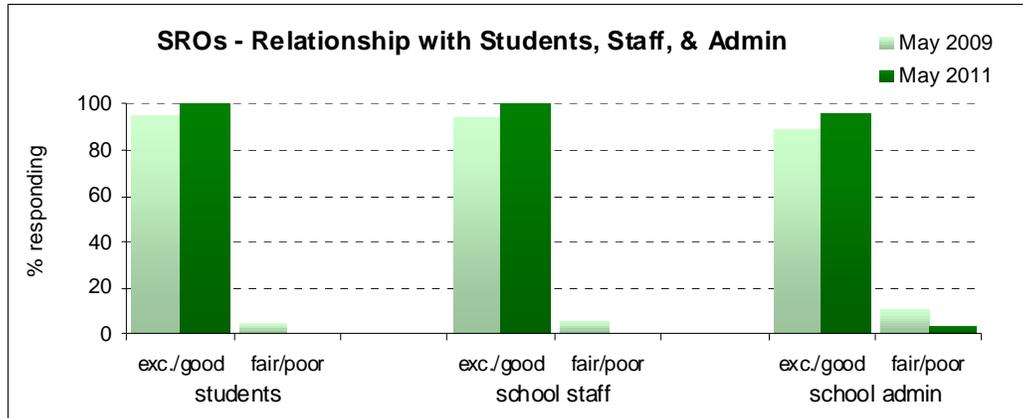


Figure 8

In 2011, the SROs felt their relationship with students showed the most improvement during the school year: all of the SROs responding said that they felt that their relationship with students got better during the school year.⁵ With regard to staff/teachers, 88% of the SROs said that the relationship got better, while 12% said it didn't change. And, 84% of the SROs said that their relationship with the school administration got better; 12% said it didn't change, while 4% said the relationship got worse.

All of the SROs said that they'd worked with the school administration or staff to address issues or solve problems at their school during the school year. Most SROs (88%) said that they'd worked with the school administration or staff more than five times during the year to address issues or solve problems; the rest of the SROs worked with the school administration or staff between two and five times during the year. Almost all (96%) of the SROs said they felt their working relationship with the school administration during this school year was very or reasonably effective. Similarly, 96% said they were satisfied with this working relationship.

As in 2009, in 2011 all of the SROs felt that safety in and around the school during the day improved during the school year. Just over one-third of the SROs (36%) felt that safety had improved very much, while 60% felt that it had improved somewhat, opposite to 2009, when 65% felt that safety had improved very much and 30% felt that it improved somewhat.

In both 2009 and 2011, the SROs were asked what they considered their greatest accomplishments during the past school year. While the SROs in 2009 gave a wide variety of

⁵ This question was not asked in 2009.

responses, in 2011, most officers said that their greatest accomplishment was earning the trust of or building relationships with students.

School Administrator Surveys

As noted previously, principals and vice principals in all 46 schools – about 152 administrators – were invited to complete an on-line survey in May 2011; a total of 59 surveys were completed (a response rate of 39%). In May 2009, about 90 surveys were delivered to school administrators; 42 surveys were returned (a response rate of 47%).⁶

Thoughts on Safety:

Most school administrators in both years said that they felt very or reasonably safe in and around the school during the day. However, as shown in Figure 9, school administrators were somewhat less likely to say they felt safe in May 2011 than in May 2009 (93% and 100%, respectively).

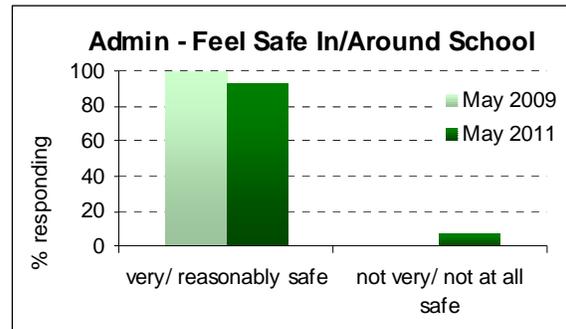


Figure 9

Over two-thirds of administrators in both years felt that the school and school grounds were not very or not at all violent, with slightly more administrators feeling that their school was not violent in May 2011 (71% in May 2009, 74% in May 2011) (Figure 10).

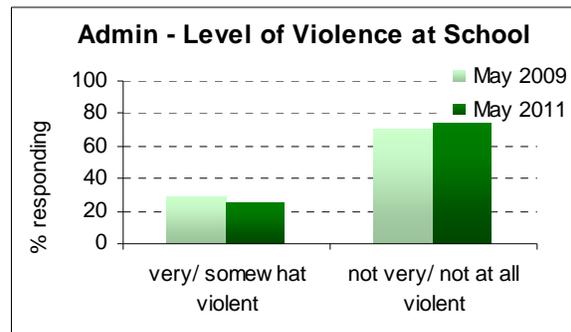


Figure 10

⁶ The original evaluation surveyed teachers as well as administrators; the data shown in this report are the administrator responses only from the May 2009 survey.

In May 2009 and again in May 2011, school administrators were asked to rate how serious they thought some problems were at their school. As can be seen in Figure 11, eight of the eleven issues were seen as more serious in May 2011, with 'fights between students' and 'bullying' showing the most increase. 'Drugs' was seen as the most serious problem at schools in both years.

It should be noted, however, that while administrators saw fighting as a more serious problem in 2011, when asked to say roughly how often students got into fights during the school year, fewer in 2011 said that students got into fights once a week or more (24% in 2009, 18% in 2011).

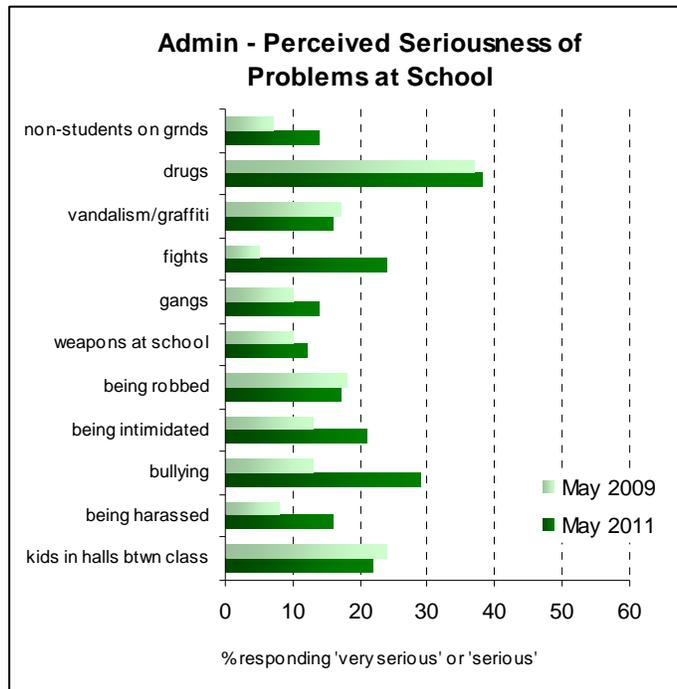


Figure 11

Administrators also thought that students were bringing weapons to school less frequently. In May 2009, 15% said they thought that students brought weapons to school once a week or more, while 10% said students never brought weapons to school. In May 2011, 12% of administrators said students brought weapons to school once a week or more, while 16% said students never brought weapons to school. Similarly, administrators thought that students were selling drugs at school less frequently: in 2009, 57% said students sold drugs once a week or more; in 2011, 53% said students sold drugs at school once a week or more. No administrator at either time said that students never sold drugs at their school.

Administrators were also asked in both years how often they worried about certain things at school. As can be seen in Figure 12, only two issues showed an increase from May 2009 to May 2011: worry about 'staff being robbed at school' and worry about 'staff being assaulted at school'. All other issues showed decreases, with worry about gangs at school showing the largest decrease. At both times, the administrators consistently worried more about students than themselves or other staff members. And at both times, administrators worried most about 'kids having something stolen at school' (theft) and 'kids being bullied or picked on at school'.

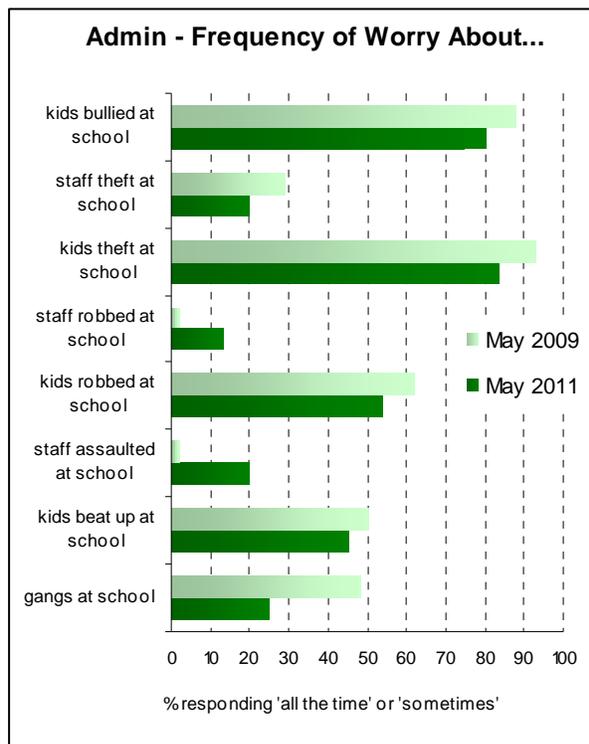


Figure 12

Thoughts on Police and the SRO Program:

Most administrators in both years believed that the relationship between the police and students in their school was excellent or good, although the proportion decreased (93% in May 2009, 81% in May 2011) (Figure 13).

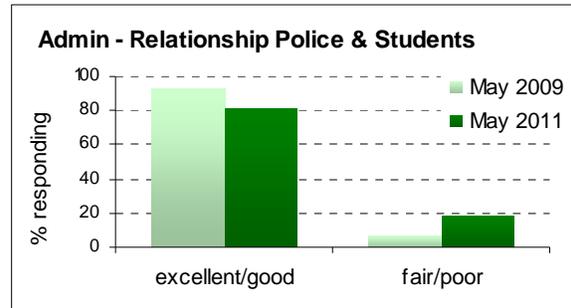


Figure 13

Similarly, most administrators felt the relationship between the police and the school staff/administration was good or excellent, although the proportion again decreased between the two years (93% in 2009, 86% in 2011) (Figure 14).

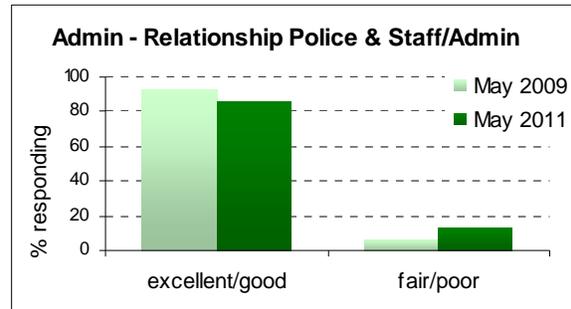


Figure 14

Most administrators at both times felt the SROs made their schools safer. When asked in May 2011 whether they thought that having the SRO at their school made the school safer, 86% said yes, down very slightly from the 88% who said yes in May 2009.

In May 2009, all of the administrators said that they had approached the SRO about a problem a student was having, and almost all (98%) said they felt comfortable doing so. In May 2011, 88% of administrators said that they had approached the SRO about a problem a student was having, and all of these administrators said they felt comfortable doing so.

Similarly, in 2009, almost all administrators (98%) said that they had encouraged their students to talk to the SRO if they had a problem or were the victim of or witness to a crime; in 2011, 88% of administrators had done so. And again, while in 2009 all administrators said that they had used the SRO as a resource when dealing with problems that arose at the school, in 2011, this decreased to 89% who said that they had done so. Finally, the proportion of administrators who said they had worked with the SRO to address issues or solve problems also decreased somewhat: from 95% in 2009 to 88% in 2011. About two-thirds of administrators saw the SRO as part of the school's management team in both years.

In 2011, administrators were asked some additional questions. When asked about their working relationship with the SRO, 84% said the working relationship was very or reasonably effective (with 70% saying very effective), while 12% said the working relationship was not very or not at all effective (with 11% saying not at all effective). Most of the administrators also said that they were satisfied with this working relationship between themselves and the SRO: 84% said they were very or reasonably satisfied (with 67% saying very satisfied), while 12% said they were not satisfied (with 9% saying not at all satisfied). The remaining 4% in both questions said they had no basis for rating. According to comments received, the negative perceptions seemed related to personality conflicts, lack of communication, and differences in expectations of the role of the SRO.

Finally, in 2011, administrators were asked about their satisfaction with the SRO program overall. Again, as shown in Figure 15, most administrators (86%) said they were very or reasonably satisfied with the SRO program, while 14% said they were not satisfied. The largest proportion of administrators said they were very satisfied (70%).



Figure 15

Parent Surveys

Roughly 3,500 information sheets were provided to school administrators to send home to the parent(s)/guardian(s) of those students who would be invited to complete the student survey. The information sheet included an invitation for parents/guardians to complete an on-line survey to give their thoughts on the SRO program. Unfortunately, only 12 surveys were completed. Looking at any changes to parental perceptions of school safety and the SRO program was, therefore, not possible.

Crime and Victimization Data

As noted previously, changes in the number of specific, serious offences at the 46 SRO schools between the 2007/08 school year (the year prior to the implementation of the SRO program) and the 2010/11 school year were examined. The specific offences were weapons offences, assaults causing bodily harm, aggravated assaults, and robberies, and were counted if they occurred within 200 metres of the school, Monday through Friday, both over all hours and during school hours (between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m.) only.⁷

Over all hours, these serious offences were reported at or around 37 of the schools in 2007/08 and at or around 36 schools in 2010/11. The total number of the specific offences decreased 7% between the two school years, from 129 to 120. Robberies accounted for the largest proportion of the total number of offences in both years (60% in 2007/08; 74% in 2010/11). While the number of aggravated assaults and number of assaults causing bodily harm showed little change, there was a 16% increase in robberies and a 57% decrease in weapons offences.

About two-thirds of the total number of these offences took place during school hours in both school years (66% in 2007/08; 65% in 2010/11). During school hours, offences were reported at or around 32 of the schools in 2007/08 and at or around 29 schools in 2010/11, and the total number of offences decreased 8%, from 85 to 78. Robberies again accounted for the largest proportion of the offences during both years (59% in 2007/08; 77% in 2010/11). And while the number of aggravated assaults and number of assaults causing bodily harm again showed little change, during school hours the number of robberies increased by 20% and the number of weapons offences decreased by 67%.

⁷ Only those occurrences that could be geocoded are included in the analysis. About 6% of all occurrences of these offences could not be geocoded.

The number of offences by time of day in each of the school years compared are summarized in Table 1 following.

Table 1
Number of Reported Offences

	2007/08 school yr	2010/11 school yr
All Hours:		
Total of 4 Offences	129	120
Aggravated Assault	2	3
Assault Causing Bodily Harm	13	12
Robbery	77	89
Weapons Offences	37	16
School Hours:		
Total of 4 Offences	85	78
Aggravated Assault	2	2
Assault Causing Bodily Harm	9	8
Robbery	50	60
Weapons Offences	24	8

As noted above, robbery was the most common of these serious offences, regardless of the time of day examined, and the number of robberies increased over the four year period. In contrast, weapons offences, the next most common offence, decreased by over half.

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

The results of this SRO follow-up evaluation once again suggests that the School Resource Officers had an overall positive effect in schools, and in particular a positive effect on students who talked to, and felt comfortable talking to, their SRO.

As in 2009, in 2011, student perception of safety at schools was high and did not appear related to the simple presence of an SRO officer. However, perceptions of safety at school did improve for those students who had talked informally to an officer. While the number of times students spoke informally with the officer didn't seem to make a difference, feeling comfortable with the officer did: those students who felt comfortable talking to the officer felt safer than those who didn't feel comfortable. Students who thought that having an SRO assigned to the school was a good idea also felt safer. While students who approached the SRO more than five times to talk about a problem they were having felt less safe in the school than students who approached the SRO less often to talk about a problem; these results are not unexpected, especially if the type of problem the students wanted to talk about affected their safety or feelings of safety (e.g. were being harassed, intimidated, bullied, etc.). And again, students who said they were comfortable approaching the officer to talk about a problem at school felt safer than those who weren't comfortable.

Having a School Resource Officer at the school also had a positive affect on student reporting when they were the victim of a crime or when they witnessed a crime, especially if students had

talked informally to the officer, had approached the officer to talk about a problem, or just thought that having the SRO assigned to the school was a good idea. While these trends were also seen in the initial evaluation of the SRO program, students were significantly more likely in 2011 than in 2009 to say they had reported being the victim of or witnessing a crime to the SRO.

Fewer students reported being the victim of or witnessing a crime during the 2010/11 school year compared to the 2008/09 school year. Specific offences at and around the school also decreased in the 2010/11 school year compared to the school year prior to the implementation of the SRO program. And while the number of robberies showed some increase during school hours (20%), the number of weapons offences decreased by 67%. As in the initial evaluation, in 2011, students showed the most worry about thefts and robberies. Students also identified being robbed as one of the most serious problems at school (drugs was the other frequently identified most serious problem). And students were significantly more likely to identify being robbed and drugs as serious problems in 2011 than in 2009. Administrators were more likely than students to worry about students being robbed or having something stolen at school, and they were far more likely than students to worry about students being bullied.

As in the original evaluation, administrators saw the relationship between students and police more positively than the students did. And again, the SROs saw their relationships with students, staff, and administration more positively than students and administrators saw their relationships with police. All of the SROs felt that their relationship with students got better during the school year, and almost all said that their working relationship with school administrators was very or reasonably effective. Most of the administrators also felt the working relationship was very or reasonably effective. Negative perceptions seemed to be the result of personality and/or communication issues.

Overall, the positive attitudes of the School Resource Officers and school administrators appeared to be the most important factor in creating a positive and effective experience for all partners.

The School Resource Officer program continues to show positive results, particularly in the increasing willingness of students to report crime when they have interacted informally with the officer and in the decrease in weapons offences in and around schools. The program shows the potential to be increasingly beneficial in crime prevention/reporting and relationship building, especially between police and students, and in helping to keep weapons away from schools and school grounds. Young people get to see police officers in a different light, and police officers get to see young people in a different light – when the program works well, both sides can take away something positive.

Recommendations

As is evident in the findings of this and the previous evaluation, the School Resource Officer program has made progress in achieving its objectives and has shown potential for continued benefits arising from the program. There is evidence to suggest that interaction between SROs and students has had a positive effect on reporting of crime and victimization, and an effect on reducing weapons offences at schools.

In order that the achievements made to date are maintained and benefits are realized, the Service must continue to recognize the importance of the program as a means to developing a

trusting relationship with youth, and in turn, providing and maintaining a safe school environment.

1. Officers recruited and assigned to SRO positions must possess a skill level that reflects the duties and importance of the position, must be committed to the goals of the program, must be able to work on their own initiative with little supervision, and must firmly believe in the program and its potential benefits.
2. Officers assigned to SRO positions must be trained to maximize their effect in the schools. In particular, School Resource Officers must be trained in youth engagement; training for other practical skills including positive interaction with youth, presentation techniques specific to youth, etc. is also required.
3. As far as possible, officer commitment to the SRO position should be at minimum two years, and the officer should remain assigned to a particular school during that time.
4. The program and SROs must be clearly valued and supported by all divisional unit commanders. The importance of the SRO position to community safety must be made clear to divisional officers and the SRO position should be incorporated into the divisional training program.
5. The profile of the SRO program must be raised within the Service and SROs who excel should be recognized.
6. Unit commanders must ensure that, as much as possible, SRO shift schedules allow officers to participate in all school activities. Schedules must be sufficiently flexible to allow officers to be available for before- and after- school programs/activities and when students are not in class.
7. A resource database/library should be created containing structured presentations, activities, programs, etc. that can be used by the SROs at their schools. The SROs should also use the School Action Teams website to communicate and share best practices, what works, and what doesn't.
8. Given the value of interaction between the SROs and students, if possible, SROs should be provided the tools necessary to make use of social media to increase their ability to engage with students.
9. The SRO program must continue to be mutually supported by the Toronto Police Service and the School Boards; a trusting and respectful relationship is critical.
10. All school administrators and teachers must be well informed of the program and its goals. The Service must provide information to school administrators and teachers outlining the purpose of SRO program, the role of the SROs, and expectations of school staff.
11. The SRO, divisional unit commander, divisional second-in-command, and school administration must meet at the beginning of the school year to discuss and clarify expectations on both sides. Regular meetings throughout the school year to discuss new and ongoing issues and concerns are also required.