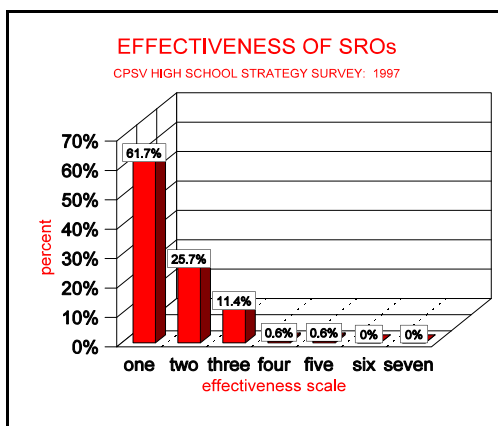


### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

With more than a doubling in the number of School Resource Officers (SROs) in North Carolina over the past five years, the effectiveness of the approach is of great interest. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence, a division of the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, has been conducting research on SROs since 1994. All aspects of the SRO approach have been examined in the Center's effort to enhance understanding, knowledge, and "best practices" about the approach. Included in this research is an ongoing effort to determine the "effectiveness" of placing law enforcement officers in schools.

In order to judge this effectiveness, the Center has established a definition of "School Resource Officer" which is based in research and in consensus which exists within the law enforcement community. An "SRO" is a certified law enforcement officer who is permanently assigned to provide coverage to a school or a set of schools. The SRO is specifically trained to perform three roles: law enforcement officer; law-related counselor; and law-related education teacher. The SRO is a comprehensive resource for his/her school and is part of a programmatic approach to placing law enforcement officers in schools.

The SRO research undertaken by the Center is of both a qualitative and quantitative nature. The Center has conducted surveys of principals, teachers, and students who have experienced the SRO approach. It has also pursued pre-and post-tests which measure school climate impacts of SRO placement and has begun to examine the impact of SROs on reported incidents of crime and violence on school property.



Of particular note are the findings concerning SROs in the Center's 1997 survey of high school principals and assistant principals in North Carolina. With "one" representing a "most effective" rating concerning impact on school safety and security, SROs received a "one" as a modal (most often occurring) rating; sixty-two percent of the respondents rated SROs with a "one," another twenty-six percent rated them with a "two," and the lowest rating received was a "five."

Center surveys of teachers and students concerning SRO impact on school climate have also yielded positive findings concerning SRO effectiveness. A comparison of pre-test to post-test results of teachers and students in Duplin County high schools for example, reveals that both groups thought more positively about the SRO approach after placement. Prior to the SROs' placement, thirty-two percent thought the SRO would deter violence; after only a year in the schools, this number had risen to fifty-nine percent. Forty-three percent initially believed that SROs would deter drug activity; that number rose to fifty percent after one year. And forty-nine percent thought that the SRO made the school safer compared to thirty-nine percent initially.

In terms of impact on reported incidents of crime and violence on school property, a correlation exists between the reduction in the number of firearms reported on school property and increasing numbers of SROs assigned to schools combined with zero tolerance approaches, tougher laws, and the Center's statewide efforts. Further analysis of this correlation is being conducted to determine the extent to which SROs are contributing to this reduction.

The above findings are supplemented by anecdotal evidence gained over the Center's years of research on SROs. When aggregated, all of the evidence suggests that the strategy of assigning SROs to schools is effective in enhancing the safety and security of these schools.

