School Resource Officers' Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities

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SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS’ REPORTS OF TRAINING AND PERCEPTIONS
OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

by

Kandace T. Jones

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Disability Disciplines

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2022
ABSTRACT

School Resource Officers’ Reports of Training and Perceptions of High School Students with Disabilities

by

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Utah State University, 2022

The purpose of this explanatory sequential, mixed methods research study was to identify the perceptions of school resource officers (SROs) regarding high school students with disabilities and their preparedness to work with this population, as a result of their SRO training. This study involved a national quantitative survey of SROs working in public high schools from which the research will develop guiding questions for one-on-one interviews from the same sample. The aim was to use the interviews to expand upon the responses from the national survey and then complete a thematic analysis to develop a theory explaining the relationships between SROs and high school students with disabilities.

Analysis of the survey results and interview highlighted four factors that influence SROs’ interaction with high school students with disabilities: (a) personal experience, (b) disability training, (c) school training, and (d) rapport building. The resulting theory ascertained that the presence of disability and school-specific training, personal
experience with disability, and a rapport with school staff, students, and families foster
positive interactions with and perceptions of high school students with disabilities. The
results of this mixed methods study may provide future researchers with a foundation for
exploring each of the factors identified. The results could also serve as a tool for
standardizing and implementing recruitment and training guidelines for SRO throughout
the country.

(139 pages)
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The purpose of this explanatory sequential, mixed methods research study was to identify the perceptions of school resource officers (SROs) regarding high school students with disabilities and their preparedness to work with this population, as a result of their SRO training. This study involved a national quantitative survey of SROs working in public high schools, followed by one-on-one interviews from the same sample to allow for a deeper analysis of the survey results and develop a theory on how training impacts SRO preparedness and their perceptions of high school students with disabilities. The resulting theory ascertained that the presence of disability and school-specific training, personal experience with disability, and a rapport with school staff, students, and families foster positive interactions with and perceptions of high school students with disabilities. The results of this mixed methods study may provide future researchers with a foundation for exploring each of the factors identified. The results could also serve as a tool for standardizing and implementing recruitment and training guidelines for SRO throughout the country.
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Kandace T. Jones
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this explanatory sequential, mixed methods research study was to identify the perceptions of school resource officers (SROs) regarding high school students with disabilities and their preparedness to work with this population, as a result of their SRO training. The literature review examines how the presence of SROs impacts youth with disabilities and the importance of adequate training when working in school environments. The review also addresses prior research that has studied the perceptions of SROs towards youth with disabilities and disciplinary actions taken towards these youth in comparison with their non-disabled peers.

**General Statement**

Despite only representing 12% of student enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year, youth with disabilities accounted for 28% of school arrests or referrals to law enforcement (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018). These arrests are particularly prevalent with youth with specific learning disabilities and behavioral or emotional disorders. This overrepresentation also brings into question how equipped schools are with handling the behavioral needs of this population (Merkwae, 2015).

Youth with disabilities already face bleaker post-secondary outcomes compared to their peers without disabilities, such as higher unemployment and lower rates of postsecondary education (Balcazar et al., 2012; Wehman et al., 2015). However, the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) also found that youth with disabilities face higher rates of exclusionary discipline (expulsion, suspension). These actions remove students from their learning environment, further exacerbating the educational gap between them and their non-disabled peers. When law
enforcement becomes involved, such as an arrest on school grounds, it introduces an additional barrier of the juvenile justice system. When youth discipline results in court involvement, the youth has a higher probability of dropping out of high school and having continued involvement with the criminal justice system into adulthood (Bright & Jonson-Reid, 2010; Katsiyannis et al., 2008). Essentially, the response to a youth’s behavior – although seemingly justified at the time – has the potential to generate more problems later in life, with those responses being more detrimental when the youth has a disability.

Statement of the Problem

As concerns grow regarding the increase of students with disabilities within the juvenile justice system, one must take a step back and address how officers arrive at the decision that arresting the youth is necessary. Although safety of the student and those around them may certainly be a concern, there are also the factors of the SRO’s perception of youth with disabilities and their training on how to approach and resolve escalated situations involving these youth. Essentially, what is the SRO bringing to the situation and what factors other than the actual incident may be influencing decision-making?

SROs are generally viewed as fulfilling three roles: law enforcer, teacher, and mentor (NASRO, n.d.). As a result, they are often tasked with counseling or mentoring students, as well as providing law-related education within the classrooms – often without prior experience or training to equip them with fulfilling these additional duties outside of law enforcement (Finn et al., 2005; James & McCallion, 2013). Even the
knowledge SROs have regarding the law may be limited when laws relate to minors, particularly with interrogations, search and seizure, and privacy (Finn et al.).

Despite the increasing use of SROs, there is no standardized national training for them nor for general law enforcement regarding issues affecting youth with disabilities, such as communication, behavior management, development, and disability (Ryan et al., 2018). This lack of standardization may result in inconsistencies across school districts and incompetence among school personnel as it relates to adequately assessing and addressing student needs. Without proper training, SROs may not consider the disability status of a student prior to making an arrest or enforcing another form of exclusionary discipline (Ryan et al.).

Within SRO programs, there may be pre-service and/or in-service training. Finn and colleagues (2005) reviewed 19 SRO programs within the U.S. and found that most sent their SROs for training with one or more of the following agencies: (a) the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS in Schools), (b) National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO, n.d.), (c) Corbin and Associates, and (d) the North Carolina Justice Academy – however, few trainings took place prior to the SROs beginning their school assignment. One issue may be the timing of offered trainings not aligning with the hiring timelines of SROs (Finn et al., 2005). The result is SROs learning on the job until training is available. This on-the-job approach may lead to a limited understanding of expectations of the SRO (on the part of the SRO, administrators, and students), as well as inappropriate or unpredictable responses to student behaviors. Even with this in-service and on-the-job training, there may not be adequate education on the needs of students with disabilities. Ryan and colleagues (2018) found that when SROs do
receive training on youth, the training focuses on the juvenile justice code as opposed to
disability, minority populations, behavior management, or other factors that impact
effective communication and interaction with high school students, particularly those
with disabilities. There is also the added barrier of a lack of funding and the inability to
leave during the school day that contributes to low attendance for in-service training.
Some approaches SRO programs have taken to address this issue include: (a) having the
most senior SRO become a certified SRO trainer, and (b) having new SROs shadow
experienced SROs prior to beginning their assignment (Finn et al.).

A factor possibly just as important as proper training is perception. That is, how
the SRO perceives students with disabilities may influence their response in school
situations. A key question may be: How do SROs perceive high school students with
disabilities, and how does that perception impact their interactions and decision-making?
May and colleagues (2012) discuss stigmatization that students with disabilities face from
other students and the potential that teachers negatively influence SROs’ perception of
this population, resulting in harsher punishment such as suspension or arrest.

This study aims to identify the perceptions of SROs regarding students with
emotional and/or intellectual disabilities, as well as the amount and type training SROs
received relating to their positions. Although there are 13 disability categories identified
by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), this study will focus on
emotional/behavioral disorders, intellectual disabilities, and autism to retrieve more
targeted information and allow for a more streamlined surveying and interviewing
process. The definitions from IDEA are as follows:

- Emotional Disturbance: “a condition exhibiting one or more of the following
characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, (c) inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances, (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems”; includes schizophrenia; “does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted”

- Intellectual Disability: “significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance”

- Autism: “a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences”

**Research Questions**

The research questions reflect a mixed methods approach with thematic analysis serving as a basis for the qualitative methods, and the quantitative methods providing an explanatory approach. The researcher answered each question using both qualitative and quantitative data.
**RQ1:** What are the perceptions of SROs towards high school students with disabilities as measured by findings in a national survey and interview responses?

**RQ2:** How does the training SROs receive impact their methods for interacting with high school students with disabilities as measured by a national survey and interview responses?

**RQ3:** How prepared do SROs report they are in working with students with disabilities as measured by findings in a national survey and interview responses?

**Overview of Research Design**

This mixed methods study incorporated a national quantitative survey and thematic analysis based one-on-one interviews. This explanatory sequential design used the qualitative data to provide more depth to the quantitative findings. All participants in the quantitative survey were invited for interviews, providing them with an opportunity to expound upon their survey responses and speak on the general results of the survey. This mixed methods approach allowed for a more widespread SRO perspective, providing a foundation for a deeper investigation into the responses using interviews.

**Summary**

There is an overrepresentation of youth with disabilities among students receiving exclusionary discipline and becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. This study aimed to identify possible factors contributing to these outcomes. A quantitative survey sent nationally to SROs, followed by a qualitative one-on-one interview with a number of those same SROs allowed for more insight into the interactions between students with disabilities and SROs and the factors impacting the SROs’ decision-making when it comes to these youth.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

With the recurrence of school shootings, calls for increased safety within the schools continue to rise. Until recently, one common solution has been expanding the use of school resource officers (SROs). However, there are growing concerns of whether these same individuals charged with ensuring the safety of students can often lead to more detrimental consequences impacting youth, especially those with disabilities (Theriot, 2009). This literature review will address the history of the use of SROs, their roles within schools today, and how school policies may encourage the increased use of law enforcement in school disciplinary actions.

The information for this literature review was obtained using the search terms “training” AND “school resource officers”, “outcomes” AND “school resource officers”, “disab*” AND “school resource officers” in Google Scholar and Academic Search Ultimate. The inclusion criteria for the literature review were as follows: (a) based on a U.S. public school, (b) include SROs working at least part-time in a U.S. public school, and (c) include students with disabilities. Articles not meeting these criteria were excluded. This search yielded nine articles for full review.

What is an SRO?

The use of SROs began in 1958 in Flint, Michigan at the start of desegregation and expanded in the 1990s as a result of community crime and the War on Drugs (Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018). Per the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the reported number of SROs in the schools for the 2015-2016 school year was 52,100 – up from 40,200 in the 2009-2010 school year (2016). Below is a table from the NCES website showing the increase in SRO presence in public schools over a 13-year period.
Table 1

Estimates of the Number of Public School Resource Officers and the Number of Public Schools with Resource Officers (NCES, 2016)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public school resource officers</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td>36,700</td>
<td>46,100</td>
<td>40,200</td>
<td>52,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Schools</td>
<td>80,500</td>
<td>83,200</td>
<td>83,000</td>
<td>82,800</td>
<td>83,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Schools with SROs</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>26,900</td>
<td>29,400</td>
<td>25,700</td>
<td>35,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SROs are often employed by local law enforcement agencies and assigned to schools within the community (Theriot, 2009). They are responsible for patrolling the schools, educating students on law, and providing law-related counseling (NASRO, n.d.). The federal definitions for SROs are as follows:

- Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (20 U.S.C. § 7161): a “school resource officer” is defined as “a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department to a local educational agency to work in collaboration with schools and community based organizations to—(A) educate students in crime and illegal drug use prevention and safety; (B) develop or expand community justice initiatives for students; and (C) train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime and illegal drug use awareness”.

- Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program under Public Safety and Community Policing (42 U.S.C. § 3796dd-8): a “school resource officer” is defined as “a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in
community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with schools and community-based organizations—(A) to address crime and disorder problems, gangs, and drug activities affecting or occurring in or around an elementary or secondary school; (B) to develop or expand crime prevention efforts for students; (C) to educate likely school-age victims in crime prevention and safety; (D) to develop or expand community justice initiatives for students; (E) to train students in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and crime awareness; (F) to assist in the identification of physical changes in the environment that may reduce crime in or around the school; and (G) to assist in developing school policy that addresses crime and to recommend procedural changes”.

**Roles and Responsibilities of SROs**

Despite these definitions, specific duties of SROs will vary from one school district to the next (Ryan et al., 2018). As a result, there tends to be a lack of consistent guidelines regarding their SRO roles and responsibilities. The consequence is often the blurring of lines between SROs as school administrators and law enforcement. These discrepancies may result in inappropriate uses of SROs in some circumstances, such as searching students without probable cause or a warrant (an action not allowed with officers patrolling outside of the schools) (Theriot, 2009). Another concern to consider would be an SRO’s ability to question students without the parents being present.

One key issue is understanding the roles of SROs and how that impacts their interactions with students. SROs take on duties as safety experts, educators, law
enforcers, mentors, and community liaisons -- the extent to which each duty is fulfilled varies by state, districts, and even schools (James & McCallion, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017).

May and Higgins (2011) conducted a survey regarding the characteristics of SROs, particularly how those with fewer than 2.5 years of experience (newbies) compared to SROs with more than 2.5 years of experience (veterans). These researchers collected their data in January 2009 through a survey sent to 211 SROs in Kentucky, resulting in 149 responses (70.6% response rate). The survey instrument included data pertaining to “SRO demographics; characteristics of schools to which SROs were assigned; SRO roles, responsibilities, and resources; and SRO perceptions about the administrators in the schools to which they were assigned” (p. 99).

The responding SROs were typically employed by the city or county police department and assigned to schools averaging 1,026 students (May & Higgins, 2011). The demographics of the participants were 96% white, 95% male, and an average age of 46 years. The breakdown of the training they received was as follows: basic SRO training = 67%, advanced SRO training = 41%, basic NASRO training = 51%, advanced NASRO training = 20%. There was no definition provided regarding what constituted each level of training. The NASRO website indicates that SRO basic training includes 40 hr on “working in an educational environment and with school administrators” and “provides tools for officers to build positive relationships with both students and staff” (NASRO, n.d.). Course topics for this basic SRO training include but are not limited to: (a) foundations of school-based law enforcement, (b) ethics, (c) SRO as a teacher and effective presenter, (d) SRO as a counselor/mentor, (e) social media and cyber safety, (f) understanding the teen brain, and (g) developing and supporting successful relationships
with diverse students. The advanced NASRO SRO training is 24 hr and includes the following topics: (a) leadership and working effectively with the school community, (b) interview skills, (b) threat assessment, (c) general legal updates, (d) incident command system for schools, (e) crime prevention through environmental design, and (f) skills assessment (NASRO, n.d.).

Concerning responsibilities, the SROs in the May and Higgins (2011) study indicated that 60.79% of their time was spent in the role of law enforcer. They also reported that their daily duties included: clearing hallways, maintaining classroom order, transporting suspended students to their homes, monitoring lunchrooms and parking areas, locating students within the school and community, breaking up fights, counseling students, and consulting with administrators and faculty regarding safety issues. Teaching was reported as a weekly duty. These duties did not vary between newbies and veterans. May and Higgins suggested that this lack of difference may be beneficial for SRO training, allowing for the development of a consistent curriculum that can apply to every school. The authors also found no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of school administrators between newbies and veterans, with both groups rating their relationships with school administrators as positive and reporting school administrators as welcoming and supportive of SROs, as well as cooperative with investigations. The SROs also stated that the school administrators showed concern for students and teachers. This finding may be attributed to school administrators being satisfied with the presence of an SRO, regardless of experience. This research expanded on the study by Theriot (2009), which examined the correlation between the presence of SROs and students’ in-school arrests rates and the impact of SRO experience on this factor. This literature
SROs as School Personnel or Law Enforcement Officers

A common dilemma regarding SROs is whether to consider them school personnel. This question arises, at least in part, due to concerns regarding the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974; Merkwae, 2015). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) requires local education agencies (LEAs) to share with law enforcement the student’s disciplinary and special education records that are specific to the alleged offense, provided they remain in compliance with FERPA. FERPA requires consent from a parent or guardian, except in the case of an emergency or when submitted to the juvenile justice system. If SROs are considered school employees, they are protected under FERPA and thus have regular access to this information (Merkwae). If SROs are not considered school employees, but solely law enforcement officers, they do not have the same access — which may bring into question how to adequately inform SROs of student needs prior to a situation escalating to a possible safety, security, or criminal matter. Although whether to designate SROs as school personnel varies from district to district, they are still required to have a basic understanding of and abide by legislation in place to protect the rights of students with disabilities. This legislation includes the IDEA, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

IDEA

Section 300.530 of the IDEA addresses the authority of school personnel when encountering a student with a disability who has violated the school’s code of student
conduct (IDEA, 2004). Although each violation should be considered on a case-by-case basis, the IDEA states that a student should not be removed from their current placement for more than 10 days. If the school believes more than 10 days is necessary and the behavior was not due to the student’s disability, the school may move forward with the same protocols afforded to students without disabilities. During this removal, regardless of the reason, the LEA is required to provide educational services to aid the student in progressing towards the goals in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) – even if it is within a different setting. The LEA must also conduct a functional behavior assessment, interventions, and modifications to address the behavior violation (IDEA, 2004). During the initial 10 days of removal, the IEP team (including the LEA and parent) must meet to review the student’s file and teacher observations to ascertain whether the violation was related to the student’s disability or if the LEA failed to properly implement the IEP. These steps ensure that the student is not suspended or expelled due to their disability and that the school takes the necessary steps to determine the cause and adjust their IEP and behavior plan accordingly.

**ADA and Section 504**

Title II of the ADA (1990) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provide protections for individuals with disabilities against discrimination from state and local agencies and any entities that receive federal financial assistance, including law enforcement. Both statutes also require accommodations, including those necessary for effective communication. This point is crucial, as it considers the “offenders” ability to understand what is taking place in their interaction with the SRO. May et al. (2012) suggested SROs confer with special education teachers to determine any necessary
adaptations to better communicate with students receiving special education services, based on assessments and their IEPs. Merkwae (2015, p. 172) notes that “a student’s disability may play a significant role in whether his waiver of legal rights was made knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily, as required by law”.

**Summary: The Role of SROs**

The SRO’s role working with students who have disabilities depends on whether the school district or other governing body hires the SRO as school personnel with the prescribed access to student records or as a law enforcement officer with only conditional access to records. If SROs do not have access to records, and therefore, are unaware of a student’s disability, they can make no judgment of whether a student’s behavior is related to a disability. As such, their role as a law enforcement officer is simply to protect all students and establish or maintain a civil and safe learning environment. If they are school personnel with knowledge of disability status, they may – depending on the school and their training – take on limited roles as assistants in the teaching process. Whether these responsibilities are clear to SROs and school administrators remains unclear. Collaboration with school administrators and teachers may aid in SROs’ command of this legislation and possibly impact their interactions with the students.

**Impact of SROs**

The use of SROs has increasingly resulted in criminalizing behavior previously handled by school administrators (Ryan et al., 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2018), over 290,600 students were referred to law enforcement during the 2015-2016 school year. These referrals pertained to school related arrests, which were arrests for incidences occurring on school grounds, while
taking school transportation, or during school events. Unfortunately, there appeared to be discrepancies between how this form of punishment was applied to students. The distribution of those arrests or referrals to law enforcement showed that although students with disabilities made up 12% of school enrollment, they comprised 28% (82,500 students) of school-related arrests or referrals to law enforcement (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights).

Theriot (2009) conducted a study of the prevalence of school-based arrests in middle schools and high schools with SROs compared to those without SROs in the same district. Theriot compared arrests at 13 schools with SROs and 15 schools without SROs for three consecutive school years (2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006). The researcher noted that the schools with SROs were in a metropolitan area of 200,000 residents and that the SROs were employed by the local police department and received extensive training in line with NASRO standards. The schools were in urban and suburban communities consisting of over 53,000 students total, with 81% white, 15% Black, and 2% Hispanic.

Theriot (2009) counted 1,012 school arrests of 878 students at the middle and high schools within the studied district, with 216 more occurring at schools with an SRO (n = 614) – disorderly conduct being the most common arrest (n = 398). The researcher found that an SRO presence resulted in a 197.7% increase in arrest rate per 100 students.

The Disability Label and Implicit Bias

Labeling a student with a disability places them in a minority group where they are no longer judged as an individual but judged based on a category (Li Li, 2001; Rynders, 2019). Their identity becomes defined by stereotypical characteristics versus
personal traits. This concept relates to labeling theory, which refers to the designation of a “deviant” label to people with disabilities – as society views them as straying, or deviating, from the norm (Li Li, 2001). Labeling may influence implicit bias, which Rynders (2019) defines as “attitudes [that] are stereotypes that can impact our actions without our conscious recognition” that are more likely to impact a person’s behavior if they are responsible for quick decision-making or involved in matters permitting a “high level of discretion” (p. 462).

Labeling can lead to increased surveillance of a student with a disability due to the expectation of wrongdoing. There is also the expectation of lower academic performances with little opportunity for improvement, even when performing on par with their nondisabled peers (Graves & Ye, 2017; May et al., 2012). The negative stigma already places them at a higher risk for disciplinary actions, such as suspension and expulsion from school (May et al., 2012).

**SROs Attitudes and Perceptions**

May et al. (2012) conducted a survey of SROs in Kentucky to gain a better understanding of SROs’ attitudes of the behavior problems of students receiving special education services. The study took place in April 2004 and used an SRO database from 2002 to mail self-report questionnaires for the SROs to complete. The researchers achieved a 61.1% response rate with 132 responses from the 216 SROs contacted. The researchers described the survey as seven pages in length, requiring 30 min to complete; however, there were only four questions pertaining to the perceptions of SROs towards the behavior of youth receiving special education services – due to the original focus of
the research study differing from the proposed questions of the journal article by May and colleagues (2012).

The demographics of the study described SRO participants as 90.8% male and 88.5% white. Regarding education, 27.5% were high school graduates, 37.4% completed some college, 22.1% were college graduates, 10.7% completed some graduate work, and 2.3% were missing this information (May et al., 2012). The average age of respondents was 43.38 years. The proportion working primarily in a high school was 59.5%. Regarding training on special education, 58.8% and 56.5% reported academic or in-service training, respectively. The SROs also reported that a majority of their time was spent as a law enforcer (55.70%) versus a law-related counselor (26.51%) or a law-related educator (16.06%). When responding specifically to the behaviors of students receiving special education services, the SROs reported that those students accounted for 36.75% of the law-related incidents. The researchers used a rating scale and found that 55% of SROs agreed that “special education students are responsible for a disproportionate amount of problem behaviors at [their] school” and another 54.3% agreed that “including kids with special education needs in classrooms with other students is detrimental because of the problem behaviors of the special education students” (p. 7). The researchers also asked if students in special education should receive less severe punishments, to which only 16.1% of SROs agreed, and if students receiving special education in their school use their disability as an excuse to avoid accountability, to which 84.8% agreed (May et al.).

These responses suggested a negative stigma towards students receiving special education services. Through further analysis, May and colleagues (2012) found little
difference in demographics and experience regarding these perceptions. However, one possibility for this dogmatic perception may be attributed to the lack of diversity in SRO hiring. With most of the SROs representing one demographic (white and male), the remaining population may adopt a similar mindset – contributing to a shared culture. Another interesting finding with this study was that whether SROs received training on special education-related issues was not significant in predicting their perceptions regarding students receiving those services. The researchers did not have sufficient information regarding the duration or type of special education training the SROs received, thus there was the possibility that their training did not adequately cover the needs of students with disabilities or prepare SROs for frequent interaction with this population. Interestingly, the study did find that SROs who took on more of a law enforcement role compared to a law-related education role were more likely to find the inclusion of special education students in mainstream classrooms as disruptive and deem that population responsible for a significant amount of the problem behaviors. Given this finding, May and colleagues recommended screening potential SROs to determine their ability and willingness to adjust to a less law-enforcement centered role within the school systems. This approach may lead to SROs who can adapt more easily to the school environment and who have fewer negative perceptions of students receiving special education services.

Having only four questions pertaining to the perceptions of SROs makes the May and colleagues (2012) study limited in scope; however, it does provide a foundation for exploring the topic further. Another limitation was the surveying of only one state (despite the high response rate) and the lack of diversity within the sample. This
limitation brings into question if responses would vary based on varying gender, educational, and ethnic and racial backgrounds. There was also the lack of definition regarding the types of disabilities represented within the students receiving special education. There is the possibility that the SROs’ perspectives may shift depending on the type of disability (e.g., emotional disorder vs learning disability vs physical disability). Having more distinction in this definition may also provide insight into what one perceives as a disability, as well as whether they are more likely to associate negative stigmas with one label over another.

**Long-Term Consequences**

Quinn et al. (2005, p. 340) refer to “school failure, susceptibility, differential treatment, and metacognitive deficits” as contributing to the overrepresentation of youth with disabilities within the juvenile justice system. Subsequently, rehabilitative programs take a backseat to punitive policies, further inhibiting the progress of youth with disabilities (Mallett, 2009). Mallett emphasized the importance of identifying disability and the appropriate treatment, while moving away from punitive actions – a process that would include coordination of services across different systems in which the youth may be involved. Mallett identified at-risk youth as receiving services through four separate systems: juvenile justice, mental health and substance abuse, special education, and child welfare. In a sample of 397 probation-supervised youth in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, 123 had experienced placement in a detention center or were incarcerated in a state facility (Mallett). Of these youth, a majority were age 15 years or older, 32.5% were diagnosed with a special education disability as defined by the IDEA (2004). Of that same population, 39.8% were diagnosed with a mental health disorder, 32.4% with a substance
use disorder, and 56.2% had been victims of maltreatment (experienced physical or sexual abuse, neglect, and/or emotional neglect). Of the youth who had experienced detainment or incarceration, their disability statuses were as follows: 39.4% with a special education disability, 68.2% with a mental health disorder, and 49.5% with a substance abuse disorder. For both detained and incarcerated youth, over half had multiple disabilities. These percentages represent a proportion of youth with disabilities that is higher than what is seen in the general population. Based on the results of this study, Mallett found that multiple systems were needed to meet the needs of youth with disabilities and the more systems the youth was involved in there was a decreased likelihood of them successfully completing probation without reoffending. The rate dropped from 63.7% for youth without identified disabilities to 21.0% for youth involved in all four systems (juvenile justice, mental health/substance abuse, special education, child welfare) (Mallett). These results also bring into question how youth are reintegrated back into the community, another factor in the long-term effects of criminalizing youth.

When youth get involved with the justice system, they risk missed education, lower rates of high school graduation, and increased chances of contact with the adult justice system (Zhang & Zhang, 2005). Even if the youth does return to school following release from a detention center, they may be placed in an alternative school with the focus being primarily on behavioral concerns versus any potential cognitive deficits – negatively impacting their special education services (Aizer & Doyle, 2015).

**Counterpoint: Responsibility of School Administrators**

The use of Zero Tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline have been contributing factors to the growing school-to-prison pipeline and to ineffectiveness in
deterring future misbehavior (Fisher & Hennessy, 2015). Fisher and Hennessy completed a meta-analysis of research studies to determine if there was an association between the rates of exclusionary discipline and the presence of SROs in high schools. To conduct their review, the researchers included articles using the following criteria: (a) schools with an SRO, (b) district- or state-wide school data, and (c) data for disciplinary incidents or a comparison school without an SRO. With this meta-analysis, Fisher and Hennessy found that the presence of an SRO correlated with an increased rate of exclusionary discipline. The researchers suggested that the presence of an SRO may increase the detection of problem behaviors (thus resulting in higher disciplinary rates). Actions that were previously addressed or even overlooked by teachers were not under scrutiny by SROs, who may not have employed behavior management techniques but instead used or recommended a more punitive approach (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). Kupchik (2010) stated that student actions that teachers and administrators may have previously considered horseplay are now considered disorderly conduct, leading to harsher disciplinary actions and involvement of SROs. Labeling this behavior as disorderly conduct brings the law into play, especially when considering the existence of varying “disturbing school” laws throughout the country (Bleakley & Bleakley).

So-called disturbing school legislation serves as a means for addressing classroom disturbances and criminalizes misbehavior within schools (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). Of the 22 states employing this law, Bleakley and Bleakley used South Carolina’s Section 16-17-420(a) as an example, which states that it is unlawful for “any person willfully or unnecessarily … to interfere with or to disturb in any way or in any place the students or teachers of any school or college” or for a person to “act in an obnoxious
manner” on school premises within the state. Maryland has a similar law (Section 26-101) that prohibits “willful disturbance of school activities” and states that “a person may not willfully disturb or otherwise willfully prevent the orderly conduct of the activities, administration, or classes of any institution of elementary, secondary, or higher education”. The penalty is a misdemeanor along with a fine not to exceed $2,500, imprisonment not to exceed six months, or both. South Carolina’s law steers the case towards Family Court, depending on the age of the student, with older students facing jail of up to 90 days (Bleakley & Bleakley).

Bleakley and Bleakley (2018) noted the potentially blurred lines in some schools when it comes to who has the authority in behavior management. For instance, if a teacher calls in an SRO due to a student misbehaving in class, the power or authority switches from the teacher to the SRO regarding the type of punishment to assign to the incident. This change often removes or diminishes accountability from the school and places it on the SRO and thus the person to whom a judge turns when needing clarification regarding the incident leading to the student’s arrest (Bleakley & Bleakley). This testimony can impact whether the student ends up incarcerated or is able to return to their school or another suitable educational setting.

May et al. (2018) obtained 3 years of data from the Youth Information Delivery System (YIDS) in a southeastern state to determine if referrals of youth to the juvenile justice system tended to be for less serious offenses when coming from SROs compared to other sources. The results of the study found that number of referrals from SROs were similar to those from law enforcement outside of the school. However, the data highlighted a concern regarding school policies playing a major factor in putting
juveniles into the criminal justice system when it came to less serious offenses, such as truancy. May and colleagues found that school administrators referred over four times as many students to the justice system as did SROs. The researchers suggested finding alternative methods for handling truancy (accounting for one in 10 of the referrals), other than involving law enforcement.

**Zero-Tolerance Policies**

With rising concerns regarding school safety and overall discipline within the classroom, the 1990s saw widespread adoption of zero tolerance policies within the school systems (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Similar to mandatory minimum sentences seen in the justice system, zero tolerance polices resulted in implementation of predetermined consequences regardless of any mitigating factors, thus reducing the chance for leniency among administrators. This stance resulted in higher suspension and expulsion rates for youth with disabilities, particularly those with emotional and behavioral diagnoses (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). The assumption was that removing students who were deemed disruptive would improve the learning environment for other students, as well as deter others from engaging in disruptive behaviors.

Despite the premise for enacting and expanding zero tolerance policies, data examined by the Zero Tolerance Task Force contradicted the justifications outlined for the mandated punishment (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). One such assumption includes consistency in discipline; however, as previously discussed, suspension rates vary across schools and are often guided by the biases of school personnel versus the actual offending behavior. This assumption
regarding improving school climate and deterring further disruption has not been supported through data. Instead, when schools implement higher suspension and expulsion rates, they have been deemed less satisfactory for school climate and demonstrate lower academic achievement (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Additionally, students who face school suspensions are at an increased risk of reoffending and dropping out (Kirk & Sampson, 2013). This factor alone should sway policymakers and administrators to reassess the use of zero tolerance policies. The students are being labeled as delinquent when some are engaging in typical adolescent behavior, possibly causing them to internalize the label and act out based on the expectations of others, particularly if those expectations include the assumption of wrongdoing and result in higher surveillance (Klein, 1986; Smith et al., 1986).

**Discretion of School Administrators**

In October 2015 in Columbia, South Carolina, an SRO was video recorded using excessive force and arresting a student for failing to put her cellphone away (official charge being “disrupting schools”) (Gupta-Kagan, 2017). Another student was also arrested during this incident for objecting to the officer’s actions and encouraging their classmates to record the situation. The video and news of the incident circulated nationally calling into question the presence of SROs in schools and their interactions with marginalized youth (this student was Black). However, as Gupta-Kagan (2017) noted, there also needs to be attention directed towards the teacher and school administrator’s decisions to include the SRO in a minor school disciplinary matter.

These decisions are especially concerning when some SROs do not have specific training related to interacting with youth, especially youth with disabilities. These actions
also fuel concerns that the presence of an indiscreet or untrained SRO increases the criminalization of student behavior that was previously handled by school administrators and ultimately expands the school-to-prison pipeline (Ryan, et al., 2018). As Theriot (2009) noted, “a scuffle between students becomes assault or disrupting class becomes disorderly conduct” (p. 280).

In August 2015, a video was disseminated showing an 8-year-old student in Kentucky with handcuffs around his biceps as he sat in a chair crying. The young boy can be heard exclaiming “Ow, that hurts” and the officer responding that he is “going to have to behave and ask me nicely”. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a federal lawsuit against the officer after the video began circulating and learning that the same officer had handcuffed another student, a 9-year-old 4th grader with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Mierjeski, 2015; Samuels, 2015). As a result, in January 2017 Covington Independent Schools entered into an agreement with the Department of Justice indicating that they will implement new policies to reduce discrimination in disciplinary actions towards students with disabilities. On October 13, 2017, a federal judge ruled that handcuffing the elementary students was unconstitutional and found Kenton County liable for the deputy sheriff’s actions (ACLU, 2017). The case ended in a settlement of $337,000 paid by the Kenton County Sheriff’s Office on November 1, 2018, citing emotional distress for the students involved following both incidents (Samuels, 2018). The decision to address policies that may lead to discrimination may benefit from supplementation of training on how to better address disciplinary situations with students.
Training SROs

The NASRO recommends 40 hr of training in school policing before assigning an officer to a school. The Basic SRO course through NASRO is 40 hr over 5 days and focuses on how law enforcement functions differently within a school, emphasizing the need to understand the teen brain and use de-escalation techniques. The basic training also addresses tools for informal counseling and mentoring students, as well as classroom management and instructional techniques. The content outline of this training is as follows: (a) foundations of school-based law enforcement, (b) ethics and the SRO, (c) the SRO as a teacher/guest speaker and effective presentations, (d) understanding special needs students, (e) the SRO as an informal counselor/mentor, (f) social media and cyber safety, (g) understanding the teen brain, (h) violence and victimization: challenges to development, (i) sex trafficking of youth, (j) school law, (k) developing and supporting successful relationships with diverse students, (l) effects of youth trends and drugs on the school culture and environment, (m) threat response: preventing violence in school settings, (n) school safety and emergency operations plans, and (o) crime prevention through environmental design. This training costs $495 for non-NASRO members and $445 for NASRO members.

The Advanced SRO course is 24 hr over 3 days and has the following objectives: (a) learn strategies for working with school administrators on crime prevention and problem-solving, (b) develop an understanding of what causes and how to solve school violence, and (c) conduct site assessments of school buildings. The content outline of this training is as follows: (a) leadership and working effectively with the school community,
(b) general legal updates, (c) interviewing skills for the SRO, (d) technology and social media online based investigations, (e) threat assessment, (f) incident command system for schools, (g) crime prevention through environmental designs, and (h) skills assessment. This training costs $395 for non-NASRO members and $345 for NASRO members. The NASRO website also lists the following targeted trainings: Adolescent Mental Health and School Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design or school safety officers and school personnel, School Safety Officer Course for non-sworn security officers, and SRO Supervisors and Management for police supervisors and school administrators.

Although the NASRO offers these trainings throughout the year, the website emphasizes that they do not certify SROs, meaning there is no expiration date on their training, no requirements for renewal, and no revocations for misconduct. Participation in the training is dependent on availability within the SROs’ state (or their willingness to travel). This limitation, plus the out-of-pocket cost to the SROs, may serve as a deterrent for some SROs to participate in this voluntary training. Although the U.S. Department of Education provides recommendations, there are no national training requirements for SROs, and only 12 states have laws specifying additional training required for officers to work in the classroom (Keierleber, 2015).

Counts and colleagues (2018) conducted a legislative search of state policies and recommendations regarding how SROs are trained and used within the school systems. The researchers used the U.S. Department of Education Compendium of School Discipline Laws & Regulations by State and JUSTIA law websites to search for state laws pertaining to SROs. Following this search, the researchers contacted state
department of education staff members within each state to obtain additional information on recommendations for SROs – per the department.

As it pertains to certification and training, the results revealed that 32 states had some legislation regarding SROs, ranging from “a ‘recommendation of an MOU/MOA {memorandum of understanding/memorandum of agreement}’ to specific detail regarding the type and length of SRO training, MOU/MOA models, and data driven evaluation processes” (Counts et al., 2018, p. 414). The researchers also found that two states had pending legislation on SROs, nine states only had the requirement for SROs to be certified law enforcement officers, and 18 states had no laws pertaining to the certification, training, or use of SROs.

Counts et al. (2018) also collected data on the use of MOUs or MOAs between schools and law enforcement and found that only 13 states required the use of a MOU or MOA and two states “encourage” writing the use of MOUs and MOAs into law (p. 414). The researchers defined a MOU or MOA as a document that “defines the roles, expectations, and responsibilities of all individuals involved for the purposes of maintaining and increasing safety within school and communities” (Counts et al., p. 414). The results also showed that no states universally employed data-based assessments to evaluate current SRO programs or determined the need for SROs, despite being considered best practice (Counts et al.). School districts the researchers identified as using data-based assessments were those legally required due to their SRO positions being subsidized by government-funded grants (within two states, Arizona and Pennsylvania). Regarding recommendations from state department of education staff members, out of seven states the researchers spoke with, two (Delaware and Wisconsin)
recommended training specifically for working with students with disabilities (Counts et al.). Other recommendations included training in de-escalation, conflict resolution, school safety programs, peer mediation, youth courts, child development, cultural competency, seclusion and restraint, disability, restorative justice, mental health issues, and trauma informed care.

Based on these findings, Counts and colleagues (2019) recommended the following: (a) establish policies for the use of SROs, (b) establish an MOU/MOA outlining the roles and responsibilities of SROs, (c) add behavior management, disability awareness, communication techniques, and child development to SRO training, and (d) establish data collection and reporting systems for SRO program evaluations.

**Justification for This Study**

Based on the Department of Education statistics previously discussed, the disproportionate contact of youth with disabilities with the juvenile justice system can partially be attributed to referral to law enforcement by LEAs. The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods research study is to identify the perceptions of SROs regarding high school students with disabilities, how those perceptions may impact their treatment of these youth, and their perceptions of their training in preparing them for working with youth with disabilities.

**Research Questions (RQs)**

The RQs reflect a mixed methods approach with thematic analysis serving as a basis for the qualitative methods, while the quantitative methods demonstrate an explanatory approach. Each question will be answered using both qualitative and quantitative data.
**RQ1:** What are the perceptions of SROs towards high school students with disabilities as measured by findings in a national survey and interview responses?

**RQ2:** How does the training SROs receive impact their methods for interacting with high school students with disabilities as measured by a national survey and interview responses?

**RQ3:** How prepared do SROs report they are in working with students with disabilities as measured by findings in a national survey and interview responses?
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This explanatory study used a sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to address SRO training and perceptions of high school youth with disabilities. The data collected in the first stage (quantitative) was be used to develop guiding questions for the interviews in the second stage (qualitative). The researcher interpreted each stage separately, then provided an overall interpretation of the combined results. Below is an overview of the proposed methodology.

Figure 1. The Explanatory Research Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 66)

In an explanatory sequential design, data from the qualitative phase are used to expand upon findings from the quantitative phase. With this proposed study, the interviews in the qualitative phase of data collection provided an opportunity to further explain the survey results of the quantitative phase based on perspectives of the interviewees.

Quantitative Approach

Participants

The researcher sampled sworn officers working as SROs from the NASRO, Brothers Before Others (BBO), and National Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) member lists, requesting participation from SROs who were assigned to U.S. high schools. These organizations were selected because they served as a convenient access to SROs working in local high schools. NASRO also provides training for
members and non-members. Per their website, NASRO’s mission is to provide “the highest quality of training to school-based law enforcement officers to promote safer schools and safer children. NASRO is an organization for school-based law enforcement officers, school administrators, and school security/safety professionals working as partners to protect students, faculty and staff, and their school community” (NASRO).

Participants were purposefully sampled from these sources, because their experience allowed for a greater likelihood of gathering sufficient information to answer the research questions of this study. Purposeful sampling is intentional and geared towards sampling a group that is best suited for providing the information needed to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Of the three organizations, NASRO was the only one that is strictly for SROs and has reportedly over 3,000 members (NASRO, n.d.). BBO and NOBLE report 5,000 and 3,000 members, respectively – including non-SROs (BBO, 2020; NOBLE, 2019). It is important to note that some SROs may be members of more than one of these organizations. Using G*Power (2020), the researcher reached an optimal sample size of 111 (effect size = 0.3, α err prob = 0.05, power = 0.95).

Table 2. Description of Sample Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NASRO</td>
<td>This organization consists of sworn police officers assigned to work within schools within the U.S., who elect to become members of NASRO.</td>
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BBO

This charity began as a Facebook group that now serves as a not-for-profit organization consisting of active and retired law enforcement officers. The group provides a space for officers to share their experiences in the field, while the charitable arm provides floral arrangements for families and police following Line of Duty deaths.

NOBLE

This organization focuses on addressing the needs and concerns of law enforcement officers and aiding in the promotion and retention of minority officers.

**Inclusion criteria.** The inclusion criteria were based on the NASRO definition of an SRO, which is a “career law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is deployed by an employing police department of agency in a community-oriented policing assignment to work in collaboration with one or more schools” (NASRO, n.d.). All participants were required to be (a) sworn law enforcement officers (LEOs), (b) working at least part time as an SRO within a high school in the United States (public, private, or charter school) (or worked in the year prior to school closures due to the pandemic), and
(c) proficient in English, as the interviews and survey will be conducted in English only.

For the qualitative portion of the study, all participants had to agree to be audio recorded.

**Exclusion criteria.** Participants were excluded if they (a) were not a sworn LEO, (b) did not work at least part-time as an SRO within a public, private, or charter U.S.-based high school, or (c) were not proficient in English. For the qualitative portion of the study, participants were excluded if they are not willing to be audio recorded although their survey data will be maintained.

**Instrument**

The researcher used Qualtrics (2020) to develop the online survey instrument. This instrument was divided into six sections (see Appendix A). Section I consisted of four multiple choice questions addressing the role of SROs regarding their roles within the schools and knowledge of behavior plans for students with disabilities. Section II addressed training information and consisted of three questions to gain background information of what training the participating SROs have received, when they received it, who provided it, and the subject matters of the training. Section III addressed how the SROs perceived their training prepared them for working in high schools and with students with disabilities. Participants responded to four statements based on a 6-point rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Section IV consisted of two short answer questions and six rating scale statements based on a 6-point rating scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) addressing SROs’ knowledge of disability and their perceptions regarding students with disabilities. Four of these questions were adapted from the May et al. (2012) survey instrument, replacing the phrase “special education students” with “students with disabilities.” Section V addressed SRO
relationships with school administrators and consist of two multiple choice questions and six rating scale statements based on a 6-point rating scale. Specifically, this section sought responses regarding collaboration between SROs and school administrators and school policies regarding student conduct and discipline. The survey was designed to take approximately 10-12 min for the participants to complete, which was below the maximum recommended length of 20 min for online surveys (Revilla & Ochoa, 2017). Section VI consisted of eight demographic questions addressing gender, age, ethnicity, time and rank as a law enforcement officer, and the security measures at the school where they work.

Instrument Definition of Disability

To build upon prior research regarding high police contact, this researcher chose to focus on school-based youth with Emotional Disturbance (Gage, Josephs, & Lunde, 2012), Intellectual Disability, and/or Autism for this study. Per IDEA (2018), the definitions of each are as follows:

- Emotional Disturbance: “a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, (c) inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances, (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems”; includes schizophrenia; “does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted”
• Intellectual Disability: “significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance”

• Autism: “a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences”

Institutional Review Board Procedures and Pilot Testing

All research-related activities required approval by the Utah State University (USU) Institutional Review Board. Prior to dissemination, the researcher sent the survey to four professors on her doctoral committee and two SROs for feedback to improve clarity on the wording and perception of survey items, as well as ideas for new items to include. Feedback from these individuals were incorporated into a modified survey instrument. The researcher then contacted the three national organizations (BBO, NASRO, and NOBLE) via the director and staff emails listed on their websites and through their respective Facebook groups. The emails included the purpose of the study, explained that participation in the survey would be voluntary and anonymous, and provided a link to the Qualtrics (2020) survey for the SROs to complete with the estimated duration. All respondent data collected was stored in Qualtrics (2020) and in a secured USU Box folder with access only granted to the researcher, research advisor, and secondary code. No personal information was collected during this portion of the
study. However, participants were asked to volunteer their contact information through a separate link for inclusion in the interviews that followed the quantitative phase of the study.

**Survey Procedures**

Each of the organizations (NASRO, BBO, NOBLE) have corresponding Facebook groups, through which the researcher provided each of the group administrators with a flyer detailing the premise of the study and how to participate (see Appendix B), as well as a link to the Qualtrics (2020) survey. The researcher requested that the administrator post the flyer within their respective groups and message the members to ensure they are aware of the post. The researcher also emailed members of each organization using the director and staff contact information provided on their respective websites. This email included the same information provided to the Facebook groups but served as another line of contact for SROs who may not be active in the Facebook groups.

Data collection for the quantitative survey was anonymous; however, the participants were given a Doodle link (https://doodle.com/mm/kandacejones/sro-interviews) at the end of the survey that allowed them to sign up for the interview portion of the study. The Doodle link asked for their email address (required) and name (optional) and had the participants select one of the pre-determined interview time slots on the researcher's calendar. The researcher used the provided email address to remind each participant of their respective interview slots and to send the Letter of Consent for their review. All interviews took place via Zoom®.
Data collection took place over approximately 4 months. The researcher sent out reminder messages to the potential participants via email and their corresponding Facebook groups at the 2-, 3-, and 4-week marks following the initial dissemination of the survey. Due to limited responses for both the survey and interview at the 4-week mark, the researcher left the survey open and sent reminder Facebook messages and emails once weekly until the 2-month mark at which point the researcher amended the IRB proposal to allow for a $50 gift card for interview participants. Once approved, the researcher resent the survey and interview invitation weekly to the same three organizations, as well as an additional list of SROs throughout the country (compiled email addresses from three separate internet searches completed one week apart). The emails continued until 10 interviews were completed for at that point the study reached data saturation.

**Data Interpretation and Analysis**

The researcher used RStudio (2017) for data analysis. Due to the limited number of survey responses, the researcher used Fisher’s exact test of independence (McDonald, 2014) which determines the association between two nominal variables. The researcher used this method to compare whether SROs received SRO-related training before and/or after beginning with SRO assignments and their perceptions of high school students with disabilities and perceived preparedness for work.

**Qualitative Approach**

The qualitative approach was based in thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting repeated patterns through the analysis of qualitative data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Lochmiller (2021) identified three components to thematic
analysis: (a) codes, (b) categories, (c) and themes. A code provides a descriptive word or phrase to “summarize, distill, or condense” qualitative data (Saldaña, 2015, p. 5). Codes help identify patterns in the information, develop building blocks for themes, and determine a core idea (Clarke & Braun, 2017). These patterns become the categories that provide substance when describing the relationships between the data and create link between the data and the theme, or overarching statement used to explain the basis of the data. (Lochmiller).

Thematic analysis allows for “flexibility in terms of research question, sample size and constitution, data collection method, and approaches to meaning generation” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). Data collection in thematic analysis may use multiple sources, including interviews, focus groups, and qualitative surveys and allows for variations in sample sizes. For instance, Cedervall and Aberg (2010) conducted a case study of two men with Alzheimer’s using qualitative interviews and observations of the participants, while Holmqvist and Frisén (2012) interviewed 29 14-year-olds in their study on positive body image. Another factor of thematic analysis is the use of a deductive versus an inductive approach (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The deductive approach involves using prior research, knowledge, or theories to develop themes prior to conducting the research. The inductive approach allows the data to determine the themes without any preconceived notions, thus data-driven and typically best suited for topics with limited prior research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017).

In this study, the researcher used the inductive approach to determine what factors influence SROs’ interactions with students with disabilities and obtained the data using semi-structured interviews with questions that aligned with the those from the
quantitative survey while allowing leeway for the researcher to include additional questions based on the responses of the participants. The researcher used the interview protocol in Appendix B, which included presenting the interviewees with the findings from the quantitative portion of the study and asking questions specific to the study’s research questions, such as “Describe how your training may or may not have prepared you for working in a high school with youth with disabilities”. The interviews also included set questions regarding demographics, roles, knowledge of disability, and training background (see Appendix A).

**Selection of Participants for the Qualitative Study**

This study used convenience sampling due to the use of an incentive and available contact information, particularly email (versus randomly selecting from all SROs) (Galloway, 2005). Participants in this study included SROs who volunteered via the Qualtrics (2020) survey provided during the quantitative phase. The researcher confirmed the interview time and methods with the participants via email, based on their responses to the survey requesting their participation. The researcher conducted 10 interviews, although the data achieved saturation at eight (the point where no new information was being presented in the ongoing data collection) (Creswell & Poth).

**Interview Format**

The researcher asked guiding questions regarding the SRO’s role within their assigned high school, training, knowledge of disability, comfort level working with students with disabilities, and working relationship with school administrators (see Appendix A). The researcher encouraged the participants to expand on their answers by asking for examples to correlate their responses. For example, expanding on their
answers involved the aspects of their training they found most helpful for their jobs and how their relationships with school personnel impacted their interactions with students.

**Interview Procedures**

The researcher sent reminder emails to SROs who agreed to participate in the interview 24 hours prior to the interview. For any participants who were late, the researcher waited 15 minutes after the start time then sent a reminder email with the link, as well as an invitation to reschedule. If the participant did not show after 30 minutes, the researcher logged out of Zoom® and sent the participant with the option to reschedule.

Each interview was video recorded and the recording stored in a USU Box folder accessed only by the researcher, the research advisor, and second coder. Prior to starting the recording, the researcher confirmed with the participant that they were agreeing to the recording and gave them the opportunity to turn off their cameras. Once they agreed and were ready to begin, the researcher started the recording and asked again for the record if the participant consented to the recording and continuing with the interview. The researcher completed 10 interviews and reached data saturation. As previously stated, the interview format followed the protocol outlined in Appendix B. The interview questions aimed to probe further into the responses from the survey by using open-ended questions to explore the “why” for the quantitative results. Prior to closing out the interview, each participant had the opportunity to share any additional information they would like regarding their experience as an SRO.

Following each interview, the researcher sent the video recording of the interview to a CITI-certified transcriber not associated with the research study. This person
transcribed all dialogue and shared the transcription with the researcher, research advisor, and second coder. The researcher also conducted member checking by emailing the transcript to the participant to check for accuracy and allow them to provide additional details as needed. To increase content validity, after summarizing the findings of each interview, the researcher offered member check interviews to discuss the interpretations, but the participants did not accept (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

**Coding and Thematic Interpretation**

There are several phases within the thematic analysis process: (a) familiarizing oneself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing and defining themes, and (e) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Chawla, Eijdenberg, & Wood, 2021)

**Familiarizing oneself with data.** The first phase involves reading and re-reading the data to search for meanings and patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend reading the information in its entirety at least once before coding, using the time to takes notes and writes ideas for potential codes. Braun and Clarke also discuss the benefit of transcribing verbal data (such as interviews) in helping researchers develop an understanding of the information, recommending the researcher check transcripts against the original recordings for accuracy.

**Generating initial codes.** Phase two involves grouping the data using either a theory-driven or data driven approach. With a theory-driven approach, the researcher codes based on specific questions, while a data-driven approach depends on the information obtained and typically involves coding the entire data set versus specific information. Some data may fit under more than one code or may be re-coded based on
subsequent themes. It is important to retain the information surrounding the coded excerpt to maintain context (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Searching for themes.** The third phase includes sorting the codes into broader themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers may use a thematic map, similar to Figure 2, to explore the relationships between the codes and determine overarching themes.

Figure 2. *Thematic Map*

![Thematic Map](image)

**Reviewing and defining themes.** During this phase, the researcher reassesses the proposed themes to determine if any can be combined and if there is enough data to support each theme. The researcher may also decide to separate one theme into two or more, depending on the amount of supporting information. There should be a clear relationship between the data under each theme, as well as a clear distinction between different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also reviews the relationships of the themes to the entire data set and if the themes accurately reflect the data set. This is also the time to re-read the data to identify any missed coding from the initial phases. Once the researcher has refined the themes, they will name each theme to provide the
reader and researcher with a clear understanding of what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Producing the report.** This phase provides the outcomes of the data (Chawla, et al., 2021). The write-up tells a story that includes an analysis of the information and examples from the data that justify the selected themes. This narrative also addresses how the data did or did not answer the research question(s) and any underlying meanings or causes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Reliability**

This study addressed interrater reliability in the qualitative phase by first establishing a coding platform. The researcher worked with the second coder to code one interview together to create the coding categories and to ensure that there was consistency in how each coder viewed certain participant statements when categorizing the data. Then the researcher implemented intercoder reliability for the remaining interviews by measuring the percent agreement between the two coders (McHugh, 2012). To do so, the participant’s statements from each interview were numbered and each statement marked with a “0” or “1” based on whether the coders agreed on the category (“0” = disagree, “1” = agree). The difference between the number of agreements and number of disagreements were calculated to determine the percentage of intercoder reliability, 90%. See the Table 3 below for an example.

Table 3. *Percent Agreement Example (McHugh, 2012)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement #</th>
<th>Coder 1</th>
<th>Coder 2</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Zeros: 8
Number of Items: 10
Percent Agreement: 80
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Although 125 SROs started the survey, the number of usable responses was much lower due to many participants not completing the survey and stopping at different points. Most appeared to stop at question 11 – “Who provided the training?”, following the question “Did you receive SRO-related training specific to working with students with disabilities?”. Ultimately, 28 SROs completed the entire survey. The information for the SROs who completed the demographics question is shown in Table 4. The demographic questions were placed at the end of the survey.

Table 4. Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Female, N = 6</th>
<th>Male, N = 22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age in years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>2 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (67%)</td>
<td>9 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>7 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (83%)</td>
<td>18 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time as Police Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (83%)</td>
<td>20 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time as SRO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (67%)</td>
<td>12 (55%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher used RStudio (2017) for all analyses. Due to the small sample size, the researcher used Fisher’s exact test of independence (McDonald, 2014) which is used to determine how the proportions of one nominal variable may impact another nominal variable for small sample sizes. The following analysis includes a comparison of the number of officers who received SRO-related training before or after beginning their SRO assignments and their perceived preparedness for the work, as well as their perceptions of high school students with disabilities – both of which were rated on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Eleven (12%) of SROs reported not receiving training prior to beginning their assignment as an SRO, while 80 (88%) reported receiving training. Using Fisher’s exact test, the question “Based on your SRO training, please rate the following statements. - My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working in a high school setting” (Q25-1) produced a p-value of 0.2. Applying Fisher’s test to the questions “Based on your SRO training, please rate the following statements. - My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working with students with disabilities” (Q25-2) and “Based on your SRO training, please rate the following statements. - I would like more training on working within high schools” (Q25-3) resulted in p=0.7 for each. The question “Based on your SRO training, please rate the following statements. - I would like more training on working with students with disabilities” (Q25-4) resulted in the p-value 0.8. Based on p-value ≤ 0.05, none of the p-values indicate statistical significance between receiving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Received</th>
<th>Did not receive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7 years</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>7 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10 years</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher used RStudio (2017) for all analyses. Due to the small sample size,
training prior to an SRO assignment and perceived preparedness. Therefore, the comparison fails to reject the null hypothesis. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the responses.

Table 5. *Fisher’s Test for Pre-Assignment Training and Perceived Preparedness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No, N = 11</th>
<th>Yes, N = 80</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working in a high school setting.</td>
<td>Q25_1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (12%)</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1 (12%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3 (38%)</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>3 (38%)</td>
<td>12 (67%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working with students with disabilities.</td>
<td>Q25_2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (12%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>3 (38%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>8 (44%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>4 (22%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more training on working within high schools.</td>
<td>Q25_3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>5 (56%)</td>
<td>7 (39%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
<td>9 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more training on working with students with disabilities.</td>
<td>Q25_4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td>4 (22%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>7 (78%)</td>
<td>12 (67%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked about receiving SRO-related training after beginning their assignment, six SROs reported they did not, while 26 reported that they did receive training. Compared to the same questions mentioned above, question 25-1 had a p-value of 0.008. Question 25-2 had the p-value 0.031. Both questions 25-3 and 25-4 had a p-value of 0.6. The p-values for questions “My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working in a high school setting” and “My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working with students with disabilities” indicated statistical significance for each, with post-training contributing to perceived preparedness to work as a high school SRO and with students with disabilities. Due to the p-value being greater than 0.05, the analyses for the remaining two questions failed to reject the null hypothesis. Table 6 provides a breakdown of the responses.

Table 6. Fisher’s Test for Post-Assignment Training and Perceived Preparedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No, N = 6</th>
<th>Yes, N = 26</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working in a high school setting.</td>
<td>Q25_1</td>
<td>Strongly disagree 0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree           2 (50%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree 1 (25%)</td>
<td>2 (9.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree     1 (25%)</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree              0 (0%)</td>
<td>15 (68%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree     0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (9.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown            2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working with students with disabilities.</td>
<td>Q25_2</td>
<td>Strongly disagree 1 (25%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree           2 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree 0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (23%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree     1 (25%)</td>
<td>9 (41%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree              0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree     0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown            2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I would like more training on working within high schools.

Q25_3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No, N = 11</th>
<th>Yes, N = 80</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>10 (45%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>10 (45%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would like more training on working with students with disabilities.

Q25_4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No, N = 11</th>
<th>Yes, N = 80</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>2 (9.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (23%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
<td>15 (68%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SROs were also asked about their preparedness to work with specific disability categories. The researcher used Fisher’s exact test to analyze their responses compared to whether they received training prior to or after beginning their SRO assignment. For the pre-assignment training, the p-values and categories are as follows: autism – p = 0.7, emotional/behavioral – p = 0.5, and intellectual – p = 0.7. The question “I take disability into account when working with students” had p-value of 0.8. Using p ≤ 0.05, none of the p-values indicated statistical significance between receiving training prior to an SRO assignment and perceived preparedness to work with students with disabilities. This analysis failed to reject the null hypothesis. Table 7 provides the responses.

Table 7. Fisher’s Test for Pre-Assignment Training and Disability Preparedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Yes, N = 80</th>
<th>No, N = 11</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q26_1</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My SRO training prepared me for working with students with autism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disagree 2 (20%) 4 (22%)
Somewhat disagree 2 (20%) 2 (11%)
Somewhat agree 3 (30%) 6 (33%)
Agree 2 (20%) 6 (33%)
Strongly agree 0 (0%) 0 (0%)
Unknown 1 62

My SRO training prepared me for working with students with emotional/behavioral disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q26_2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My SRO training prepared me for working with students with intellectual disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q26_3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My SRO training prepared me for working with students with autism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q26_4

For the post-assignment training, the p-values and categories are as follows:

autism – p = 0.093, emotional/behavioral – p < 0.001, and intellectual – p = 0.006. The
question “I take disability into account when working with students” had p-value of 0.3.

The p-values indicate statistical significance for “My SRO training prepared me for working with students with emotional/behavioral disabilities” and “My SRO training prepared me for working with students with intellectual disabilities” – with SROs responding in the affirmative. However, the analysis failed to reject the null hypothesis for the remaining two questions. Table 8 details the responses.

Table 8. Fisher’s Test for Post-Assignment Training and Disability Preparedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No, N = 6</th>
<th>Yes, N = 26</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training prepared me for working with students with autism.</td>
<td>Q26_1</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>8 (36%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>7 (32%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training prepared me for working with students with emotional/behavioral disabilities.</td>
<td>Q26_2</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (23%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>6 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>11 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training prepared me for working with students with intellectual disabilities.</td>
<td>Q26_3</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>9 (41%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (36%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding perceptions of disability, the researcher used questions from May et al. (2012). When comparing the responses to pre- and post-assignment training, none of the p-values indicated statistical significance between training and perception of high school students with disabilities. The results are shown in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. Fisher’s Test for Pre-Assignment Training and Disability Perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No, N = 11</th>
<th>Yes, N = 80</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities are responsible for a disproportionate amount of behavior problems at my school.</td>
<td>Q27_1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>6 (33%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td>3 (17%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td>6 (33%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>3 (17%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Including students with disabilities in classrooms with other students is detrimental because of the problem behaviors of students with disabilities. | Q27_2                                                                 |            |             | 0.5     |
| Strongly disagree                                                        | 0 (0%)                                                                         | 2 (11%)    |             |         |
| Disagree                                                                 | 4 (40%)                                                                        | 4 (22%)    |             |         |
| Somewhat disagree                                                        | 4 (40%)                                                                        | 5 (28%)    |             |         |
| Somewhat agree                                                           | 0 (0%)                                                                         | 4 (22%)    |             |         |
| Agree                                                                    | 2 (20%)                                                                        | 3 (17%)    |             |         |
Table 10. *Fisher’s Test for Post-Assignment Training and Disability Perception*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No, N = 6</th>
<th>Yes, N = 26</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities are responsible for a disproportionate amount of behavior problems at my school.</td>
<td>Q27_1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7 (32%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>6 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>7 (32%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>2 (9.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Including students with disabilities in classrooms with other students is | Q27_2          |           |             | >0.9    |
| Strongly disagree                                                       | 0 (0%)         | 2 (9.1%)  |             |         |
| Disagree                                                                | 1 (17%)        | 7 (32%)   |             |         |
detrimental because of the problem behaviors of students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities should receive less punitive treatment for their problem behaviors than they currently receive in schools.

Some students with disabilities use their disability as an excuse for their problem behavior to avoid accountability for their action.

The results of the quantitative survey alone did not yield significant information to answer the research questions, possibly due to the low survey response rate. Survey questions with *Yes* or *No* responses appeared to divide the respondents and prevented statistically significant results. At minimum, results indicate the need for a more fine-grained qualitative analysis. The following section will analyze the qualitative results from the one-on-one interviews and how they expand on the quantitative results.
Qualitative Results

The qualitative portion of the study reached data saturation after 8 interviews. The specificity of the research questions combined with the relative homogeneity of the sample allowed for quicker saturation. All participants were SROs working in U.S.-based high schools either at the time of the interview or immediately prior to school shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the SROs interviewed, 3 (30%) were female and 7 (70%) were male. Nine (90%) identified as white, while one (10%) identified as Black. The participants represented the following states: Alabama (n=2), Colorado (n=2), Iowa (n=2), with one each from Kentucky, Nebraska, New Jersey, and New York. Table 11 provides the demographics of the interview participants.

Table 11. Interviewee Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Female, N = 3</th>
<th>Male, N = 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age in years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>2 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White or Caucasian</td>
<td>2 (67%)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time as Police Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7 years</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>2 (66%)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time as SRO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7 years</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10 years</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theory – Experience with Disability
Interview findings indicate that several factors influence SRO interaction with high school students with disabilities. These factors include: (a) personal experience, (b) disability training, (c) school training, and (d) rapport building. Based on interview findings, the overarching theory is that provision of disability and school-specific training, along with personal experience with disability and establishing a rapport with school staff, students, and families promote positive interactions with and perceptions of high school students with disabilities. Using statements from the interviews, the researcher expanded each of these factors to develop the following sub-theories. Due to some of the SRO statements containing identifying information and concerns regarding anonymity, the researcher labeled each statement by participant number. While doing so reduces the potential for recognition, it allows the reader to match the statements to the overall experience of each SRO.

**Sub-Theory 1: Personal Experience with Disability**

**Sub-theory.** Personal experience with disability limits misconceptions and provides a non-law enforcement lens with which to view potential problem behaviors. Seven out of the ten SROs reported having family members with disabilities or having worked with people with disabilities in prior employment positions, such as community programs. They stated that their prior experience better equipped them to identify when a behavior may be a manifestation of the student’s disability as opposed to defiance or intentional misbehavior. Participant 8 stated:

*I have one family member on either side of my family that has Down syndrome. And so, by being around them, that helps me understand a little better, away from the job how to deal with things on the job... I think about all of us, at least three,*
if not four, that I know of, we have family members that have those disabilities. So once again, it’s kind of my same thing. But the SRO that’s at that school that deals with those, her nephew has down syndrome. So she is constantly taking care of him and she deals with that all the time.

Participant 4 spoke about how taking care of his son (now 27 years of age) with cerebral palsy has helped with adjusting his approach when intervening for school conflicts, as well as allowed him to build a better rapport with the students. This SRO also mentioned having attended his son’s IEPs meetings made him more aware of the needs and resources for his students. He compared his experience to that of a fellow SRO, stating:

And that’s why it helps me, having some background, you know, I mean I, somebody coming into this new, it’d be interesting to ask the other guy who’s at the middle school because he wouldn’t have the access that I did with my son. You know, I'm sure he's been there four years, he knows what IEPs are now, but did, you know, going in there the first year, did he know what an IEP is? I have no, I don't know. You know, he’s had, he's got three or four kids but, you know, he's got, you know, they're all, they're not, none of them are kids with special needs. In addition to knowing how to interact and respond to the students, SROs reported their personal experience helping with speaking with parents. Participant 5 discussed how her sons’ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) helped her identify possible causes for a behaviors and potential solutions. She stated:

So that’s kind of what we operate on and also, if it’s, because we have a lot of like, ADHD, right? I have two sons of my own that have it. So it’s just great
because I, again, you know. So we’re very, we sympathize with that because we understand that sometimes the impulsivity is so real. So when we go to explain to another parent where they like want to fly off the cuff and automatically, they see police, arrest, police, arrest. We say, pause for a second. If they weren’t able to get this and they just kind of blacked out, let’s try to see if we could have a conversation about this. And then we’re able to, okay, we’re gonna squish it, you know?

This SRO also talked about the legal troubles of one of her sons and how it influenced how she engaged with the students, expressing the conflicting feelings about her son dealing with the juvenile justice system. She stated:

I personally feel like the juvenile justice system is a broken system. And specifically, again because of my experience. My son, who was on probation for juvenile, right? Dealing with stuff now, he could have been helped if they would have done a little bit more, right? And so, the system has failed him. But the flipside of that is, it helped him and it failed him and I don’t, I never feel like that is the answer unless I could use it as leverage. So in my specific piece, I want a juvenile, the probation officer to say, you’re mandated to go to drug treatment. You have a drug problem, right? Not, you’re going to be locked up. Because I don’t feel like that’s the answer.

Other SROs mentioned family members and friends with disabilities, experience volunteering with disability-centered sporting leagues, and prior time as a patrol officer as contributing to their increased understanding of disability. Participant 6 reported:
Most of the disabilities I used to work with was abled versus not abled-body...before I came, became an SRO, I was obviously on patrol and we saw a lot of the mental health aspect. And I kind of worked a lot more on the juvenile base cases. So I got to see especially a lot of the kiddos with mental health or brain health issues prior to even being in that school setting. So it changed my opinion on those students because I got to see them from my 8 to, or 7 to 3 as opposed to when they are in, typically in trouble, or I'm trying to patrol around them to keep them out of trouble, keep them, prevent them from getting into trouble. So yes, I guess it has changed my mentality on that because you kind of learn that what you saw on the streets, or kind of some of their minor behaviors in a school isn't really who they are.

Four SROs also reported seeking or having attained higher education in areas such as education, youth development, and applied behavior analysis. Participant 2 had prior experience as a teacher, which he reports helped development positive working relationship with school staff once he became an SRO. He stated:

So the really cool thing about what I do and the way that I do it is, my undergrad is in education. I was a high school agriculture teacher before I transitioned to law enforcement, so I really got to know how schools worked when I was doing that and I can speak the same language as the admin and the teachers and get into all of that stuff...In the education world, it's code switching. So code switching between law enforcement speak, and code switching to education speak. For me I'm more comfortable actually being around educators than I am with law enforcement. Because that's the background that I have, and that's where my
wife’s at, is in the education field. So it’s, I gravitate more towards teachers than I do cops in my personal life, so.

This comfort within the schools and understanding education terminology relates to the other sub-theories regarding school training and rapport building with staff to be discussed later.

**Sub-Theory 2: Training Specific to Youth with Disabilities**

Sub-theory. Disability training for SROs may increase awareness of different types of disability, how they may present in a school setting, and appropriate responses in a disciplinary situation. Even though most of the participants had personal experience with disability, they tended to focus on visible disabilities such as cerebral palsy and Down syndrome. The SROs also tended to reference self-contained classrooms when asked about their interactions with students with disabilities, unless the researcher specifically asked about mainstreamed students. However, the SROs stated that their personal experiences helped make up for the lack of training some received prior to being assigned as an SRO. Statements included:

*Participant 6:* When I first went into the school, with the department I worked with, I had no training at all. I was basically told there was an open SRO position, I applied for it, and got it. I had no training going into it. Didn’t know what to expect other than I was going into an elementary school with third and fourth grade kids and, have fun.

*Participant 3:* Zero training. Zero, zero, zero. We have begged for training, we have asked for training. I’m sorry, let me clarify. I had one four-hour training session this year. That was my, I set that up because I’m tired of not getting any
training. So that was all we had and they basically, was just your SRO functions. So that’s all that I’ve had ever...We all are, in my county, we are all retired law enforcement officers, so we are what we call post-certified, or have been to the training, the police training academy, but there’s no formal SRO training other than our annual firearms training.

The time during which they became SROs also played a factor in whether they received training. Participant 9 reported:

Well, at the time 27 years ago, that type of thing wasn't at the forefront. You have to understand, law enforcement was very different 27 years ago. Not necessarily for the, you know, some things we definitely need to improve upon, and then other things just weren't in the public spotlight yet, you know. The only thing I can tell you is what the new recruits or the new offers to come on the department, all of the officers, the type of training they get before they go when they work in whatever capacity for the department. So this will also be material that the future school resource officers would get, but at the time that I came on, that wasn't available. We didn't have a training curriculum like that. So dealing with things that would relate to students, you know, that's very specific. And so, I can't say that, you know what, this is the exact piece that we learn dealing with students that have emotional disabilities, or they have physical disabilities, or they have, you know, something else going on. We got like 12 to 16 hours of Verbal Judo is what they get at the police academy. Which is, you know, that kind of parleys into de-escalation. They had 40 hours, they get 40 hours of crisis intervention techniques dealing with different situations...So we also do 8 to 16 hours
depending upon the actual academy that they go through of de-escalation training, which is beneficial to try to de-escalate the situation. That's something that didn't exist 27 years ago. It was kind of, as a police officer, you were there, you dealt with the issue, and you weren't retreating from anything, or you weren't trying to talk down certain situations. So it's changed a lot more for the better I think. And then we have a few hours of talking about mental health with one of our local professionals that works with police department that's a psychologist, Dr. Ashman, which is beneficial. And then, annually in-service training, we have 2 hours of de-escalation training every year just to try to make people up to speed. And then we have one to two hours of mental health awareness a year. Probably is not enough and I'd like to touch on the reasons why we don't have any more training than that if I can.

Participant 6 stated that she was not sure any training would have adequately prepared her for her current assignment at an alternative school for youth with mental health diagnoses. When asked about receiving training before starting her position, she reported:

Yes and no. I mean, you know, just different avenues of my background I feel like has helped prepare me for this position, this gig. But when it comes to like formal training or anything like that, I haven't had any of that. So, and I'm in a behavioral school. So I don't think there's really any training that can get you ready to go into a school that is major behaviors.

Four SROs reported receiving training prior to working, two SROs completed the basic training through NASRO while the other two took mandated training in their respective states. However, disability-focused training was limited. Two SROs stated the following:
Participant 7: When I went to the basic SRO course, I mean it touched on working with disabilities and stuff but I had prior training to that. I instruct crisis intervention training for new officers. Which instructs them how to interact with people with any type of cognitive or physical disability. So I had that training already. As far as learning to work in a high school, I think that the basic school helped us be prepared to work with students of all ages.

Participant 4: I took the NASRO training which is the National Association of School Resource Officers. I took their 40 hour course here locally, and then I've been to numerous active shooter trainings, trying to think what, nothing related to dealing with kids with special needs though....I'm not aware of any training I've seen, like come across my computer to go to this, I get them all the time to go to this training, that training, but I've never seen anything that I can recall related to, you know, training regarding kids with special needs...Annually? No. Everything I attend is pretty much voluntary. Yeah, I mean besides qualifying for shooting.

The officers emphasized implementing shadowing and field training for new SROs.

Participant 5: It’s more of telling them watch me, learn from the teacher and do it. There’s nothing specific...So if I have a seasoned officer that was crisis intervention certified, it may just be for like the first month or two months. If it’s someone that, like the officer that’s with me now, he’s only an officer for three years, so he’s very moldable, which I like. So I pull him into like, everything. I’m like, you’re staying with me. Even though he’s able to be by himself, I’m like,
come back, just be with me and learn. But typically what I would do is, any time there was like a mediation or a certain class, I will pull them in.

Participant 1: We have field training officer time. So when we get anybody in, we FTO them. And that is also time and that specific to dealing with children with disabilities. So there's mandated state training, and then I require our officers to receive additional training because there's things specific... Obviously there's more education-specific terms and things that you would not get in the other police training that we try to... That way we can know our role and then also know what the district is doing as far as our... They're just general education terms, and in terms of special ed or other disabilities, that we need to know or at least be familiar with.

The SROs also discussed their experience providing training and where they wish to expand. Participant 2 stated:

So the formal training of becoming an officer is, let’s put it this way, we had 8 hours of training on the youth justice system. And those 8 hours were spent on procedurals. It wasn’t spent on youth development at all. The further training I’ve had is I’ve been through NASRO’s course, amazing course. Probably the number one thing that focused me into what I’m doing. And then I’m also an instructor for strategies for youth, facing your teen brain. Those would be the two best courses I, every SRO should have those two courses if you ask me. They should have those two courses because they focus you on why kids are doing what they’re doing. I think at the very beginning before I was able to get those, if I go back seven, eight years ago, I think I relied more on my education, like my education, education
how to be a teacher to try and work through it. But then that’s, it’s different than being an SRO. It’s how do you get kids to complete work, how do you get them to do this, how do you get them to do this. Now with the policing the teen brain and understanding how the mind works and how, where the kids are at developmentally, that you get a kid who’s 15 and continuing to run away, well, what’s going on? Why are they running away?...So I think those things have helped me more recently with being an SRO and understanding how the kids are developing because then you can look at a parent too who’s saying, my kid’s just such trouble, he’s just doing this, this, and this, and you can look at them and say you’re kid’s exactly where he’s supposed to be. This is what they’re supposed to be doing at this age. They’re supposed to be pushing back. It’s how can we as parents, and then helping the parents problem solve through it, how can we allow them to safely push back? Given other things that we don’t care about, so.

Participant 7 mentioned wanting to expand the trainings to include fellow officers (non-SRO) to help with assessing situations in the community. He stated:

*It’s one of the things that I want to do for not just SROs, but fellow officers in general is, you know, put in some sort of program that I, because we have two clinicians who ride with deputies...So we, I want to work with them to come up with something to have an instructional block for deputies to get SROs or free deputies on, you know, interacting with folks with, say, autism or stuff like that. Because, like, I try to explain to them is, you can be dealing with someone with autism or, say, Cerebral Palsy, who, they get overexcited and they freeze, all of a sudden now, you think this is a defiance behavior and you can take actions that*
don't need to be taken because you didn’t take a minute to take a breath and say, “Whoa”, or you didn’t have the knowledge to be able to say, “Okay, hold on, something’s not right here. What’s going on? Talk to me” and working through the problem. So I think that’s what I would like to see.

**Sub-theory 3: Training Specific to Schools**

**Sub-theory.** When preparing SROs to work in schools, training can address the differences between policing in the streets and policing in a school, as well as the school culture specific to where the SRO will be assigned. Including this training allows the SRO to start their assignment with some base knowledge of what their job entails. Factors that impact the SRO—school personnel relationship include understanding: (a) education terminology, (b) school laws, and (c) roles and responsibilities. By receiving training specific to school expectations and requirements, SROS may develop a better working relationship with the school, thus improving their interactions with students.

**Education Terminology.** Teachers and school administrators spend years learning about education-related terms, such as *self-contained classroom* or *least restrictive environment*, and are accustomed to using abbreviations like IEP and FERPA with the assumption that everyone else in the conversation has contextual understanding. Add to the issue that many of these terms represent laws regulating use of procedures, someone with no background knowledge may have difficulty grasping the information shared and how to proceed accordingly. Participant 10 reported how training helped with his understanding.

*But as I have progressed and gone into some more training, it’s invaluable. I mean, you can't put, you cannot put a price on being able to know what the school*
is talking about in terms of educational terms and terminology used, you know, and how we're dealing with kids, the adolescent mind, how it works, what they're thinking about, you know, the way they rationalize things. It's great. I loved my training.

Participant 1 reported this concern, which led to him requiring additional training for his SROs regarding education and disabilities. He stated:

Now, I can't say that everyone feels that comfortable... Obviously there's more education-specific terms and things that you would not get in the other police training that we try to... That way we can know our role and then also know what the district is doing as far as our... They're just general education terms, and in terms of special ed or other disabilities, that we need to know or at least be familiar with.

When asked about one thing he wished he had known prior to working in a high school, he stated the following:

I think I didn't understand the magnitude or how many different types of IEPs or 504s or... I guess we all have in our mind what someone with a certain disability... and that's probably, I guess, our implicit bias we carry into it. But there's so many different conditions of disabilities that some may be identifiable by sight and some may be identifiable, or you may become aware of later that you might not be instantly.

This statement ties into the need for disability training to create awareness of the various disabilities and how people can share a diagnosis but with different effects based on the impact of the disability, as well as available resources to address their needs.
School Laws. The SROs mentioned needing to adjust from their understanding of patrolling on the street and working in a school, particularly as it related to legal ramifications. Participant 2 stated:

Other things that kind of get blurry is with FERPA. FERPA is pretty challenging at times as we go through it because, like, looking at video, I don’t have access to any video for fights or anything on those lines, so I have to take the admin’s word until I get a subpoena to see the video, which, when they’re suspending a kid for five days and I don’t have access to make my decision on whether or not I want to make a referral, juvenile referral, or at that point in time where that family is really pushing me to make a juvenile referral, and not having all the information, it gets a little challenging at times there. So planning workarounds for that and going off, trusting them enough to say, hey, they’re right, or they’re on the lines. And then getting that subpoenas to verify, because that counts for referrals to my county attorney if I need to, so.

When asked what they wished they had known prior to starting their assignment, Participant 8 stated:

Probably the constitutional or the legal sides of things. Whereas, what our limits are able to do inside of school, or what we can’t. Not that there was ever a time where that was questionable, but I feel like when I learned what that was, it was kinda like, oh, you know, this could have gone south really quick if something would have happened...Like interviewing students. You know, truly, truly interviewing them. You know, there are, though I knew on the road what the constitution said, what Miranda says, you know, as far as dealing with juveniles,
even dealing with them in a school, is a different setting to me. That's a completely different animal. So we gotta be careful that we're not acting as a school administrator, you know, just trying to figure out what happened in, you know, in a scuffle in the hallway, you know, we are actually law enforcement, you know, we still have to follow those same laws, but we’re in a school.

**Roles and Responsibilities.** Training specific to the school in which the SRO works provides an opportunity for the school and SROs to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each party and develop a working relationship that will benefit the students. A few SROs reported a learning curve regarding what they could and could not do. Participant 3 stated:

> I have been, not me but we are all, don’t know how to deal with special needs kids, okay? They don't want to putting our hands on special needs kids. We understand that, but we need somebody to give us a policy or procedure or to tell us, this is what you can and cannot do…I think the sheriff’s department needs to realize that if we don't have any training, that could be a huge, huge liability issue. Well why did you spray or taze this mentally incapacitated child? Well he was beating up the teacher. Well we're not supposed to do that. Well nobody told us. So, we’re going to run into liability issues if we don't get some type of training. Just in general.

Participant 10 discussed SROs needing to learn to flow between the different roles.

> When recruits come out of the academy, they go through what’s called field training. And with my agency it’s a four month process where they ride with a trainer for four months straight. And we actually have a field training program
with the SROs. So I currently have a recruit, I am a field trainer, so I have a new SRO who’s with me every once in a while and we talk through scenarios, I, we go out in the lunch room, my kids all know me and I introduce them to him and everything. And, you know, I make sure that he’s interacting with the kids and not just kind of standing off to the side. Cuz they can be, you know, a lunchroom of a bunch of teenagers can be kind of intimidating. But, you know, he’s doing really well. So, but that’s a big part of it is, you know, you work through a scenario and it’s not just, kind of like what you said with the four, with the three different roles, you know. He’s good at the police side of it and I know that because he’s been an officer for a while, but making sure that he can step into those other two roles seamlessly is, you know, and talking through that and when to take on those other roles, and how you can do that, and that sort of thing.

There is also the concern of knowing who can access what information which varies across states and school districts. Participant 3 reported:

*It was with the camera system. Not with a violent student but I was called to the principal's office, and after she explained that I was not supposed to allow the teacher to see the camera that we look at, I’m like, well nobody ever told me. Nobody gave me any training. Now that I know, no problem.*

Due to a change within state regulations, this SRO reported having access to all student and school information:

*So I have access to everything. According to the memorandum of agreement, if you need to pull actual footage, the board of education needs to like, deputize someone as a law enforcement unit that’s not anything to do with police. So for*
instance, in [city] it’s the school safety specialist is deputized as the law enforcement unit. So when we need, we created a Google form so that if the detectives, cuz usually it’ll be the detectives that are looking into something. Not specifically related always to our students, but could be anything, like our outside cameras, or it could be a fight inside the school, right? To keep the chain of custody, what happens is they fill out a request form and say, I need this camera, I need to look into blah blah blah, and that school safety specialist will send it. So there’s a chain of custody. I can personally view everything, like I see, I have all my cameras up right now and if I need that because I need it for a report, I too would go to the school safety specialist, he would bring it back to me, and then we would put it into our evidence... two years ago they actually changed it in the memorandum of agreement.

Regarding having access to student records, Participant 7 reported:

I have through the school, or through parents, basically I’ve been, I have signed releases, and I talk with the parents so that I have more insight on what’s going on with them. You know, I know about their IEPs, I know if they’re just the emotional social disabilities or what. So that helps me which I feel is important as an SRO, to know that information. So if that child does have a situation go on, then you’re better prepared to react to that situation, than going into it not knowing what this kid’s diagnoses, or what his issues are.

Participant 4 also raised concerns about administrators not informing him of potentially criminal acts immediately:
I’ll give you an example straight up. Found out, at 8:30 in the morning, parent calls up, this is 2 years ago, before COVID. Parent calls up, I don't feel my daughter’s safe in that building. I said, and she talked to administration. I had no knowledge of this. 8:30. What happened? A sexual act was performed in the elevator....So they decided, I found out about this 7 hours later. I was never informed of it. They saw, and that's just one example. It's an ongoing battle of, you know, them trying to solve issues on their own. They actually talked to all the kids involved. The guidance counselors, they did all this and didn’t bring me in at all. But then 7 hours later they bring me in, and then they bring me in 7 hours later...So that, in that case at 3:30, then they decided that we need to call the police. You know, but for 7 hours I was in the dark about this...I think I should have been notified right away. I mean, you know, I’m not saying, you know, what, you got somebody that was a police officer for 30 years. I mean, you know, why aren’t you getting my perspective on this?

Within understanding roles and responsibilities, the SROs identified the need to be aware of available resources, especially in instances that may not be a criminal matter.

Participant 1 stated:

But that’s specific police training to deal with calls with mental behavioral health disorders and/or the like, so maybe it also kind of crosses over to if there's any other disabilities. And it really does teach us that. "Let's slow down and assess. Is this a criminal matter, or is this something that's mental behavioral health initiated or a disability?" Because obviously a lot of times a criminal or a typical police response is not appropriate at all. And we want to make sure that we take
time, slow down, assess, and then get other people involved. If it's not police, counselors, district mental health people, other teachers that may know the student and have relationship with the student if we do not, and bring them in to really collaborate on the best response.

Participant 5 also emphasized the need for evaluating the situation and working together to identify the best approach to prevent the issue from recurring.

Because the goal is never, obviously, to never suspend and obviously to learn, because what they do have here at the high school level is a restorative justice. So they do work on that with the children and they try to tie in and bring in the disabilities as well. However, they can work on that to try to get the point across, like hey this wasn’t okay, right?

Regarding restorative justice, the SRO mentioned the program was getting underway right before the COVID shutdowns (partial in this case as schools remained open at 50% capacity) and focused on counseling and community service, such as having the high school students read to younger kids. The SRO reported confidence in the program, especially as it includes the student in brainstorming and planning how they can improve.

Other SROs also reported restorative justice or second chance program to reduce the likelihood of a student getting a permanent record. Participant 6 described their program:

So, especially in the area that I am in, the students get what we call a diversion class. So just about every simple misdemeanor, and even some, yeah most simple misdemeanors will get a second chance. So whether it’s tobacco, fights, thefts, I mean the list goes on, we always offer them a diversion class of some sort. Now
it's up to them and the parents to decide if they want to participate in that. But if, as long as they don't have a former record, then they have the opportunity to participate in that.

Sub-theory 4: Rapport Building

Sub-theory. Developing a rapport with school staff, students, and families allows for SROs to better understand the students and their diagnoses and limit the need for justice-based punitive action.

Schools. When asked about his relationship with school administrators, Participant 3 stated:

There is one principal that will not work with me. It's not me personally. It's his attitude, philosophy. He wants to do everything himself. We caught a kid with marijuana at school last year and it was taken care of internally, by him. I was not allowed to be involved. That is one man, one policy. He wants to be the head honcho and take care of everything himself internally. And I struggle with that so you know what, I'll stay out of his section of the school or focus on the other two sections.

A common concern the SROs mentioned was the need for communication both prior to and after an SRO is assigned. Participant 6 stated:

But I feel like shadowing the former SRO would have helped me a lot transition, because then I would’ve had, I would have known, kind of like, what they did, how they kind of went about things. Maybe would’ve met some of the staff earlier, known some of the kiddos that I would deal with often. So I wish I would have had at least that portion of it.
Even those who reported a positive working relationship with their assigned schools, they acknowledged that the relationship took time to develop. Participant 5 reported:

*I just wish like the communication was better with the schools and the police department because you don’t really know about the schools until you’re in it or until you have children in it... Right, and just, right, because from the, looking, from the outside looking in, just in general, right? The regular police officer on patrol doesn’t necessarily understand how things work in a school. So they’ll always come to me and say, well why did this happen, or why? You know, even just, not even so much with jobs, but also on their own, like personal, right? Which I guess is probably just something you can’t help at all, but they always seem to not get it. Like, you know, hey there was this fight, why was this kid suspended, or why was he not suspended? Or, you know, and everything’s different, specific to policy, right? So in Hoboken, when you get into a fight in school, it’s an automatic 10 day suspension for both. Unless you’re able to point to someone being the true victim and the true attacker, which means the victim would be in the corner, you know, like huddled into a ball and the other person is just, you know, roundhousing them to the neck, right? So sometimes they’ll be frustrated and say, well why, how come both of those kids got suspended? This kid’s getting bullied and blah blah blah, and then you explain, well, until they can point to that, right? So it’s frustrating when you look from the outside in, when you’re trying to help a family and not understand the ins and outs. Which can go in any profession, right? People say, that’s a police officer, how come this happened to that person? Unless you know what our policies are, you don’t get it.*
This SRO’s statement highlights another reason for SROs to be well-versed in the policies of their assigned school, as well as any legal ramifications – being able to explain to a caregiver and even the student why certain consequences were applied.

Even when legally not being permitted to access specific student information, the SROs reported still wanting to be involved in the general conversations regarding student behavior and how to address it – going back to the need for communication. Participant 4 stated:

“It’s an ongoing battle. I know this was new because they never did it before, but, and hopefully, we just got a new superintendent who’s only 40 years old, so maybe things will change. I haven't even met him yet he's only been there a month. But I am not, they don't even have me, they do weekly meetings with the guidance counselors and administrators of the kids that are, and I hate to be brutally honest, but you know, I've been, this is an ongoing battle. They meet every Monday with the guidance counselors and administration going over the kids that are at, high risk kids, or at-risk kids, and I’m not in that meetings.

When asked about his relationship with the teachers, he stated:

Those teachers are like, all on, like I can go down their hallway and they’re all like, they’ll talk to me for ten, fifteen minutes. You go in other parts of the building and it's like, it's not like that. And I had the one social studies teacher told me, he goes, you do know there's colleagues of mine in this building that do not want you in this building. And I said, yeah I know that...So yeah everybody's, you know, you got different political views, and different thoughts on having somebody armed in the building that, you know. But I would say, I can sorta
recognize who those people are, but, you know, and that’s whatever, I don’t hold anything against them. But I would say that I think after 4 years, I've even won some of them over. You know that they’re, you know, they can see where I’m coming from. That I’m, you know, I'm not there to arrest, you know, kids for whatever.

While this SRO went on to state that he is beginning to feel more accepted in the school (after 4 years), he brought up an important discussion point of teachers (and some community members) questioning the need for police officers in the schools. Participant 10 discussed combatting the stigma of SROs when in a previous school due to one of the administrators painting her as the bad guy. She stated the following:

“One of the biggest issues I had at a previous school, at a different agency was one of the administrators used me as a common enemy with her and the students in order to become closer to the students. So she would tell them, she could tell them things along the lines of, you can either tell me or I can call the cop in here and she’s going to arrest you. And I don’t want her to arrest you. And that kind of stuff. When this was not something I would have ever arrested somebody on. So that was addressed very quickly as soon as I found out that happened. Because that’s not the purpose of my role. I don’t, I’m very upfront about that. I’m not there to scare the kids. I don’t do that kind of stuff. So that was a huge step in the wrong direction for me for a little while, between me and my kids, but we were able to kind of work on it.
**Students and Families.** The SROs discussed the importance of building a rapport with the students and families to develop trust and a deeper understanding of what it means to be an SRO. Participant 3 stated:

*We’re a rural county school. We’re a poor school, they come from dysfunctional families. I want these students young, to realize that law enforcement is your friend. We don't put kids in jail. I don’t care that mom says we’re the bad guys, I'm trying to teach them that I’m the good guy. I’m here to keep you safe. I’m your friend. So that's my biggest role that I play, mostly down in elementary.*

Participant 1 mentioned:

*And I think a lot of times we can come to some sort of common ground with students that, you know, "Here's our purpose and our function." It's certainly not to put people in jail or to promote a school-to-prison pipeline, but really to make them successful.*

Participant 6 also explained that being able to build a rapport with the parents helps increase participation in a diversion program, as she explains the benefits and the potential long-term impact of the student having a record.

*A lot of it for me is just explaining why that diversion program is so beneficial for their student. To me it doesn't make any sense why you wouldn't do it or try it. I mean, you can always try it and if you decide you don't like it, then you can always leave. But to not try it, it’s, I mean, they have an option of trying it and not having a record or just going with the record. So it doesn't make sense. So a lot of it is building that rapport with the parents to explain to 'em that there's no point in your kid getting a record for a stupid fist fight that happened, or a theft that*
occurred. You know, just return the property, come to this class, and things will be okay. And then it's a second chance for the student. They don't have to have that, you know, like it, that label of thief attached to ‘em, or, this person’s a fighter, or you know, they don't have to have that label attached to them. You know, they can right their wrongs and show everyone that this isn't me.

The SROs reported taking on a counselor or educator role, over one of law enforcer when interacting with students. There were statements, such as: *In my school day, I'm anything but a police officer...I feel like I am more of a conflict resolution support* (Participant 5) and *So it was very much a counselor at times, you know...I would say sometimes we fit the role of educator* (Participant 9).

Participant 7 stated:

> Well, you know, the thing I want people to understand, and you know, you’re talking about the punitive and all this, I just want people to understand that in this job, you know, law enforcement is truly only maybe ten percent of my job. Ninety percent of my job is mentoring and counseling. I mean, you do a lot of that with these kids, I mean, you spend a lot of time with them, you know, and, matter of fact, I had one of our kids who was an ODD kid just came back two days ago to visit me. He’s been, he was in a home and some other stuff and now he’s back with his family and he’s doing well. And it kinda makes you feel good when they come back to see you and let you know how they’re doing.

Participant 10 mentioned:

> The most commonly used one for me is counselor and mentor. That is definitely one that I find, I kind of consider the triad, or the three different roles kind of the
different hats we can wear at any given moment. What I’ve found is that even if I’m doing one of the other two, I will still be in that counselor role in addition to one of the other two. So that’s the one that I find that I will fall into the most common with kids.

She went on to discuss the lectures she has provided, allowing her to bring her law enforcement experience into teaching.

*I actually spent about a year teaching a curriculum in my county that was specifically aimed toward, like digital responsibility, substance use, and relationships. So I taught that for about a year. Now that I’m back in the schools as an SRO, I really enjoy going into classes. So I’ve, today I actually taught in a math class, which was crazy. I never thought I’d say that. So I will try to do appearances everywhere. I’ve taught in English classes the importance of being able to articulate through writing because of all my reports. I’ve taught in social studies classes. I’ve taught criminal law classes when they talk about the amendments that are relative to me. I’ll go in and talk to the kids about that, let them ask questions and everything. So I love teaching and luckily I work in a school that really embraces that.*

When asked about national discussions on removing SROs from schools, Participant 3 stated the following:

*We’re your friends, and we’re here to keep you safe because there’s so much negativity among law enforcement. Anti police movements. And we want to teach these kids that that’s not true. We’re trying to reverse that thought process.*
Communities. The officers also discussed the importance of being involved in the communities in which they are policing.

Participant 1: If we choose to get out and build these positive relationships and be active in our community, then we're going to be more effective, and our job satisfaction is through the roof because we get to do these things.

Participant 2: The goal with, the being seen, we’re not being expected is when I try to get out to see the rest of them. Just say good morning in the hallway, try and build that...May as well be part of the school and be part of that community. The goal is to build yourself into the community and know as many as you can, or at least recognize as many as you can.

Participant 7 discussed involving other SROs in their community activities:

Oh yeah, no the guys that I work with, they will come to my unified basketball, they will do stuff with the kids with me. I mean, I have a great support, I mean like last year, I wanted to raise money to buy t-shirts for the kids so that they could have like their school t-shirt and the guys that I work with came together, and I was only wanting, like, to maybe put together two hundred dollars and I wound up with nine hundred dollars. So these guys all put in, all of them were excited that we got this. Most of them got the t-shirt themselves and they’ll wear it to the games very proudly. I think through me and working with these kids and bringing those guys in to be involved, they have a great perception and look at these kids as just another citizen in the community and want to interact with them as much as possible.

Participant 6 emphasized how her race and gender play a part:
I think being a black female has helped me tremendously because I feel like a lot of the troubled youth are usually of minority, it seems like. Here I live in a predominantly white community, so it's not predominately all of the youth are, you know, minority kids, but I would say still a pretty good part of that is. So it's just being able to connect with, I have the extra connection to connect with the minority youth. And then also explain to my story and let them know that I am not different from them at all. Like, I ran the streets when I was younger. I was in a gang. Like, just, I had this background to me that helps me relate to them as well. I'm just saying like, listen, you don't have to do the things that you're doing. There's other avenues you can go. So yes, I think my race and gender has helped me more than anyone else, any other white male starting off.

She went on to say:

And helping with, being able to relate, and also taking away, part of like, one other person I actually brought up, is that implicit bias, cuz when you don't look like the people that you're policing, and vice versa, they look at you like, what do you know about me? Like, I'm not going to listen to you. So, okay. Well I'm glad that it has helped you cuz I do wonder if people, if being black like you feel more pressure because of what's going on and it makes it harder for you, like with, like the political climate. Especially cuz, if it's either from other communities, or from your own community, or if you feel like that's more so helping you relate to them because you look like them. So I just was wondering like, the different experiences people are having.
Participant 9 mentioned the importance of employing SROs from the communities in which they work.

Well, the first thing is, I think, school resource officers need to be representative of their community that they're serving, which means that the officers shouldn't look like me. There's officers, you know, a third of our population is African-American that's in the school. And so I'm proud of the fact that I had a very diverse unit. More diverse than my police department. So I think that's one of the first things, one of the first barriers. Cuz let's face it, a kid that doesn't look like me that has some mistrust because he doesn't know who I am, I'm going to have a hard time as an old white guy breaking down that barrier. One of my younger officers that might be of color, he has one less implicit bias that he has to deal with to be able to effectively communicate with that child.

The SROs also discussed the need for recognizing the right fit when hiring:

Participant 1: And like I said, it goes back to hiring. That's what we look for in a candidate, somebody that cares about the students, cares about the community, and polices that way, that if they have to take traditional police activities of taking someone into custody or charging something, then that can happen. But primarily we want to just set them up for success in the classroom or on the sports field or in a club or wherever that is until they can take that with them when they leave school.

Participant 2: We, the choosing the SROs is, not a lot of people in our department want to be SROs. When I go and talk to other officers, they're like, yeah, no I don't want to deal with kids. I don't want to do it. I don't know how you do it.
They just don’t, they don’t see the value in it. Where out of the 12 of us who are SROs, we’re about 50/50, those of us who are here for the kids, and those of us who are here for the days off. So it’s hit and miss sometimes. They choose people who would be good with kids, if, and some of them need to get their mind set correctly to work with kids and start thinking about, I gotta do things that I wouldn’t normally do as a street cop to benefit the kids.

SROs also discussed the need for continued communication with community members, especially with debates around removing SROs from schools. Participant 1 stated:

Yeah. So I think recently we had a group that is affiliated with the Counselors over Cops movement. It's a change.org. And here's the thing. The students... It showed a lot of initiative because they really came together in our area during a pandemic where they weren't even face to face. And they really did a lot of research and work. And then we had some Zoom conversations with the students involved, their leaders, the adult leaders, as well as student leaders. And there were some things where there were some inconsistencies or things that weren't necessarily true about us, and maybe on a national stage there's things that were accurate. And so we were able to kind of clear the air on some things that, like I said, they're not always going to still like us or agree with us, but I felt like that has come about more so in the last three years than in my first several years, where there's been more pushback... I think so. I think that the thing is is that we like to be transparent and open and honest. And so we can communicate that to our communities and our students and our staff. And if they've got a problem or a
concern with us, I'd much rather them bring that to me or one of my officers than just let it fester or build or grow legs when it's something that we're not afraid to answer for what we do.

The SROs expressed concerns about removing SROs from schools would likely increase arrests of students due to patrol officers not being familiar with the youth. SROs stated:

Participant 9: *When you have an officer that’s devoted to that school, and you've made the right pick, in having that officer in the school. In other words, that's the right officer for developing relationships, at times, having to do what he has to do in law enforcement, enforce the law, having discretion, and having the time to do that. Versus an officer that is on the street that gets that call for service, now he goes to the school to respond to the school, and he literally, his day consists of taking calls for service, after calls for service, after calls for service. And so he's not going to have that personal touch. He's not going to know those students. He's not going to know that this student might have a disability, might have a mental disability that they're dealing with. He's not going to know that this student might be autistic. And so, when he shows up at the school and he sees this student maybe actively involved in something that he considers violent, he's going to approach, he or she is going to approach it in a different way than the school resource officer would have that has prior knowledge, so that also concerns me.*

Participant 6: *I feel like removing the SROs does not do it justice because the way we look at it as, especially in my school is a great example of this. I have a lot of students with major behavior issues, right? So we're going to have problems.*
We're going to have criminal mischiefs. We’re going to have fights. We’re going to have tobacco violations. We’re going to have a wide range of different offenses, right? And as a SRO, and knowing the student, and knowing the administration, I can come in there and we can figure out the best plan for that student specifically. Whereas, you take away the SROs, now we have, not very, we don’t have as much knowledge about either that student, or the administration and things like that. So as officers from patrol, we're going to come in, if they ask us to fix the problem, we're going to fix the problem. And usually it doesn't involve a lot of the avenues that revolves around that specific kid. It’s every kid will be treated the exact same, and that's probably going to result in charges.

Participant 3 also reported their presence as a huge deterrent. That's, that's what I'm going to use. We are a deterrent and realize that. It's kinda like having a security guard at a business after hours. It's a deterrent.

**Mixed Analysis**

This mixed analysis will focus on how the interview responses align with the quantitative outcomes that rejected the null hypotheses. When compared to SROs who received training after beginning their SRO assignment, responses to the following questions were found to be statistically significant.

1. “My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working in a high school setting.”
2. “My SRO training has adequately prepared me for working with students with disabilities.”
3. “My SRO training prepared me for working with students with
emotional/behavioral disabilities.”

4. “My SRO training prepared me for working with students with intellectual disabilities.”

SROs reported that their post-training helped them in the aforementioned areas, which coincides with statements from the SROs in the interview portion of the study. Although some did receive mandated state training before working as an SRO, that training did not always involve a focus on disability. Also, the SROs interviewed reported learning on the job and finding training on their own after being placed in the schools as contributing to feeling better prepared to handle conflicts regarding students (with and without disabilities) and develop a rapport with the students.

Regarding the research questions, more information was gained from the interviews than the quantitative analysis. Below is a breakdown of how the responses contributed to answering each of the questions.

**RQ1:** What are the perceptions of SROs towards high school students with disabilities as measured by findings in a national survey and interview responses?

The SROs spoke positively of students with disabilities, even when acknowledging their initial difficulties with learning to navigate the school system and its expectations. The SROs reported wanting their actions to benefit the students and wanting the students to feel as though SROs were friendly and another means for support. One SRO stated:

*The majority of us love to work with students with disabilities because they like us. When we, if we’re not looking at the mainstreamed IEP kids, if we’re looking at the ones in the self-contained classrooms. Students with, in the self-contained,
they love us. It’s great. And sometimes it’s good just to get a pick-me-up when you’re having a rough day because you can walk in the classroom and ten kids are going to love you.

**RQ2:** How does the training SROs receive impact their methods for interacting with high school students with disabilities as measured by a national survey and interview responses?

Overall, the SROs reported wishing they had more training (or any at all) prior to starting their assignments. Some referred to their personal experiences when trying to handle a difficult situation with a student due to not having the necessary formal training. The SROs reported receiving additional training after they started working but emphasized that it was often voluntary, and they had to find it on their own. Possible reasons for the limited training, as noted by the SROs, were lack of funding, limited coverage, and lack of awareness or buy-in from administration regarding their training needs. Whether from training or experience, the SROs reported learning to slow down and assess a situation to determine if disability is a factor and try to determine alternative methods for handling the issue that were not necessarily punitive.

**RQ3:** How prepared do SROs report they are in working with students with disabilities as measured by findings in a national survey and interview responses?

Prior experience with disability (whether personal or professional), as well higher education relating to disability or youth development appeared to contribute to SROs’ feelings of preparedness (based on interviews). However, disability training was not the only concern of SROs. They also expressed how they would have benefited from training specific to education terms and school laws prior to working and even still, as they tried
to pick up the information through their day-to-day duties. The SROs mentioned wanting to communicate effectively about and have greater awareness of the needs of the students and resources available to them. Some also expressed concerns about not knowing what they are allowed or not allowed to do until after an incident occurs and wanting to be able to prevent future issues.

**Summary**

Several factors impact how SROs perceive and interact with high school students with disabilities. As displayed in the interview comments, these factors also influence one another – with rapport and training needs frequently mentioned in responses. SROs would benefit from pre-service training as it relates to disability and working in the school system, along with recurring training to address policy or law changes and to learn or refresh skills such as de-escalation. Additionally, developing a rapport with school staff, students, and families may increase trust in the SRO and foster a team effort in addressing the needs of the students and mitigating any unwanted behaviors.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to conduct a survey and follow-up interviews to analyze SROs’ perceptions of high school students with disabilities and reports of training they had received to support and manage with those students. This study focused on how SROs described the training they received and the impact on theirs jobs and interactions with students, particularly those with disabilities. This discussion will address the following: (a) key findings, (b) practical implications, (c) study limitations, and (d) future research.

Key Findings

Based on quantitative and qualitative analyses, four factors contributed to developing the theory on SRO preparedness and perceptions of high school students with disabilities. Those factors included: (a) personal experience with disability, (b) training specific to youth with disabilities, (c) training specific to schools, and (d) rapport building. Following is a summary of each finding and how they relate to current research.

Personal Experience with Disability

Research shows that quality interactions with people with disabilities increase the person’s positive perception of disabilities (McManus, Feyes, & Saucier, 2010; Seo & Chen, 2009). The SROs interviewed in this study mentioned their experiences with family and mentees with disabilities as influencing their interactions with the high school students at their respective jobs. These personal relationships prompted SROs to carefully evaluate conflict situations based on being in similar circumstances with their loved ones, often resulting in a more mannered approached such as taking the student outside to yell until they felt calmer or speaking with a slower, quieter voice. Some SROs reported that
because of their children’s disabilities, they were able to recognize signs of a disability in students despite not knowing their histories – again tapping into their personal experiences to determine the best next steps. These same SROs also reported having a better understanding of the special education system due to having to navigate it with their children. These relationships served as informal training for the SROs, which proved useful since they did not find their formal officer training adequate in preparing them for their positions. However, relying on personal experience to gain familiarity with students’ disabling conditions can have detrimental effects given the inconsistencies across experiences and the absence of structured and standardized educational opportunities. No SRO should have to rely on individual experience with a child or the educational system. Indeed, it is no substitute for formal training.

**Training Specific to Youth with Disabilities**

Consistently, the SROs reported not receiving enough disability-related training prior to working in schools, and some were still trying to get mandated annual training implemented in their respective states. Their motivation to learn more about students with disabilities was evident when some resorted to seeking out their own training or learning on the job. According to Strategies for Youth Survey (2013), less than 1% of training in police academies cover juvenile issues; and there is limited legislation on training procedures for SROs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The SROs who did receive training reported improved interactions with students and increased feelings of preparedness and comfort on the job. However, these same SROs also reported not realizing how vast disability was and the variety and extent of services available to students. There was also a consensus that disability training should be extended to all
police officers, not just SROs. Essentially, the training of SROs relative to students with disabilities was woefully inadequate and in dire need of improvement. Such training would likely be associated with improved service to students with disabilities.

**Training Specific to Schools**

The SROs were aware of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) preventing suspension of a student with a disability for more than 10 days; however, they were less confident in their understanding of the remainder of IDEA and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974). Typically, the level of access to school records depends on whether the SRO is considered a school employee (Merkwae, 2015). However, even with the SROs interviewed, there were inconsistencies in how that law was implemented, such as with school security cameras and student attendance records. One state used memorandums of understanding between the schools and police districts to specify what information could be shared, which were optional across school districts – thus still allowing for inconsistencies. Another SRO had parents sign releases of information so he could be involved in planning meetings for the students. Based on the findings of this study, SROs need to be informed of what information they are allowed to access and of any rights awarded students with disabilities (and students in general) that may impact their interactions.

**Rapport Building**

All but one SRO reported not taking the primary role of law enforcer when in the schools, instead serving as counselors or educators. However, all stressed wanting to find non-punitive ways to address conflict and problem behaviors, which typically required having a rapport with the students and even their families to gain buy-in to the alternative
approaches (e.g., writing an essay about how they plan to improve or reading to a younger student). These SROs also spoke candidly with students and families about potential consequences of continuing certain behaviors, bringing awareness to a serious matter and creating a space for open dialogue. With day-to-day interactions, the SROs worked to develop a rapport by participating in school and community activities, visiting and teaching in classrooms, and greeting students with intention as they walked the halls. Theriot (2016) found that increased SRO interaction led to students having more positive perceptions of SROs and a greater sense of safety, similar to the research on interactions with people with disabilities. Although Theriot (2016) focused on quantity as opposed to quality, the increased contact may have developed a greater understanding of the role of an SRO for the students versus only observing them when arresting a peer. A common concern among the SROs was a lack of understanding of what their job entails. They wanted their respective communities to recognize that they were not solely in schools to punish students but were genuinely interested in their success.

The SROs also worked to build relationships and foster communication with the school personnel, viewing their positions as SROs as part of team in ensuring the safety and success of the students. Finn and colleagues (2005) discussed the culture clash between school administrators and SROs due to differences in communication and methods of disciplining students. The researchers discussed conflicts with distinguishing between typical teenage behavior and criminal activity and who should make the final decision on how to respond to the incident. The SROs in this study stressed the importance of constant communication with the school personnel and discussed the strain
when they did not feel accepted, sometimes leading to fewer interactions with students
(as SROs would avoid certain areas of the school).

**Practical Implications**

**Recruitment**

Finn et al. (2005) suggested including school administrators in the recruitment
process of SROs. Doing so can help gain support from administrators and foster a
collaborative environment. Their involvement provides an opportunity to explain to the
SROs and police district the school’s primary concerns, which may factor into the SRO
selection. SROs would also have the chance to meet the people they would be working
with and gain a better understanding of expectations prior to starting. The expectation for
all parties should also include consistency, having an SRO who can work Monday
through Friday during school hours to develop a rapport with the students and school
staff.

Police departments should also seek out officers who are interested in the job.
One SRO in this study stated that about 50% of the SROs he worked with did not want to
be in schools. Having someone in this position who does not want the job could
negatively impact their performance, which affects the students. There runs the risk of
having more SROs focused on punishment versus counseling and teaching the youth if
the SRO does not value the job.

**Training**

All incoming SROs should receive training covering topics such as: youth
development, disability, juvenile laws, conflict resolution, and defusing crisis situations
to help them be more effective at their jobs. This training should include classroom and
field work, so they can observe more seasoned SROs working in the schools and apply the classroom information learned previously with the benefit of another SRO to guide them. Additionally, assigning new SROs mentors for at least the first year may serve as an ongoing support system and learning opportunity for the new SRO. The mentor can be a resource to consult with on difficult matters regarding the job, as well as another source of information based on their experience working in the school system. For formal training, police districts and schools should implement annual SRO training that includes the same topics previously mentioned. This yearly training can help refresh skills and address new issues that arise, such as a new law or recent problem behaviors among students.

Collaboration

All the adults in a school building are responsible for the students, thus presenting a united front may promote consistency for the students regarding the school’s expectations of them and model a supportive, team-like environment. Effective collaboration includes clearly defining roles and responsibilities, such as what requires SRO involvement versus the principal. This collaboration would also improve communication, allowing for sharing available resources for students and developing alternative responses to problem behaviors in lieu of punishment when appropriate. Related to resources, the SRO can work with the school staff to teach their own course and/or provide counseling services for the students.

Table 12. Recommendations for the Field

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<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Include school administrators in SRO Recruitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Recruit officers interested in being SROs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide pre-service and recurring post-service training to include (but not limited to) youth development, disability, de-escalation, and school laws</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide mentorship for new SROs</td>
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**Study Limitations**

Due to the limited number of responses to the quantitative survey, this researcher was not able to gather statistically significant data for all questions. Regarding the interviews, by design qualitative research is not transferable to the population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the interview participants being 70% white males and primarily representing predominantly white suburban and rural areas, the results may not be applicable to SROs in other parts of the country.

The low participation may stem from three factors: (a) lack of buy-in from NASRO, (b) hesitancy from SROs with speaking to someone unknown due to the political climate, and (c) timing. Although some officers and NASRO members forwarded the study participation, that garnered limited responses, leading this researcher to email individual SROs throughout the country. Essentially, the SROs were receiving a
study participation request from an unfamiliar source, hence the apparent hesitancy. Even for the SROs who agreed to interview with me, three SROs mentioned their tentativeness at the start of the interviews (only participating after receiving several requests) with two wanting to be sure that their responses would be anonymous (and opting to remain off camera). Another SRO stated that he only agreed because he was retiring within a few months, implying that there would be no retribution from his police department.

Regarding timing, survey collection started during the pandemic when many schools were still closed, and SROs were pulled for street patrols. The survey invitation mentioned SROs who were working immediately before school closures; however, many may have disregarded a school-related email or were not checking their school email addresses during this time thus further limiting potential responses.

Another limitation may be researcher bias. The survey and interview questions were developed based on background research focused primarily on training needs, excluding other significant factors that were discovered during the interviews such as rapport with students, families, and communities. The researcher asked follow-up questions and used the information gained from each interview to adjust the approach as needed for following interviews to ensure saturation; however, having a broader set of questions for the survey may have garnered more significant information for the quantitative portion of the survey and subsequently allowed for deeper analysis in the qualitative portion.

**Future Research**

This study focused primarily on how training impacted SRO preparedness for working in schools and their perceptions of high school students with disabilities. The
results revealed that more research is needed into the effectiveness of SRO trainings on
the following areas: (a) student engagement, (b) reduction in juvenile referrals, (c)
acceptance of SROs (both within the school and communities), and (d) job satisfaction. A
more extensive and deeper analysis of the effects of SRO training would schedule pre-
training assessment and post-training assessment of SRO interactions with students,
methods used to defuse crisis situations, and perceptions of both students and SROs
regarding the other party. Additional areas that can provide clarification both within
research and on the field regarding their effect on students: (a) SROs as school
employees, (b) whether the SRO chose the position, and (c) calls for police reform.
Regarding SROs as school employees, the study can explore how access to information
affects the SROs job performance and subsequent impact on the students. For choice in
becoming an SRO, how is their job satisfaction and in what ways does that influence their
interactions with students. With calls for police reform, what emotions or concerns does
that bring up and what areas (if any) do they believe require reform. These topics are a
few of many directions additional research can go. The hope is that the research can
guide practice to create a suitable environment for students.

Conclusion

Becoming an SRO requires a more nuanced set of skills and temperaments
compared to other positions held by police officers. The training they receive in their
police academies do not translate to the schools and additional training is often not
required, leaving many SROs ill-equipped to handle their new roles. This study focused
on how training, or lack thereof, influenced SROs perceptions and preparedness with
working with disabilities; however, the results revealed that, in addition to disability and
school-specific training, personal experience with disability and establishing a rapport with school staff, students, and families left SROs feeling more prepared to work in schools and resulted in positive perceptions of high school students with disabilities.
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Quantitative Instrument – Qualtrics (2020)

School Resource Officers' Perceptions and Training

Start of Block: Block 9

Q1 Copy of Letter of Intent

Q2 Informed Consent If you agree to participate in this study, please acknowledge this by clicking on the appropriate selection below. In so doing, you indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records; you can save or print the letter of information before completing the survey.

- I understand my participation is voluntary, all responses will be kept confidential, and I AGREE to participate. (1)
- I choose not to participate. (2)

End of Block: Block 9

Start of Block: Qualifying Question

Q3 Are you a sworn law enforcement officer working at least part-time in a United States based high school (or were working at the time of school closures due to the pandemic)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Qualifying Question
Start of Block: Role of an SRO

Q4 Which role(s) below do you fulfill as an SRO within your assigned high school? (check all that apply)

- Law Enforcement Officer (1)
- Counselor (2)
- Educator (3)
- Other: Please specify (4) _______________________________

Q5 In which single role do you spend the majority of your time within your assigned high school?

- Law Enforcement Officer (1)
- Counselor (2)
- Educator (3)
- Other: Please specify (4) _______________________________

Q6 Do you have access to the behavioral plans for students with disabilities in your assigned high school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Sometimes (depends on student circumstances) (3)

Q7 Do you review the behaviors plans with a teacher or school administrator?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- In certain circumstances (3)

Q8 Do you have access to the police records of the students in your school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Role of an SRO
Start of Block: Training Information

Q9 Did you receive SRO-related training prior to beginning your high school assignment?
   o Yes (1)
   o No (2)

Skip To: Q14 If Did you receive SRO-related training prior to beginning your high school assignment? = No

Q10 Did you receive SRO-related training specific to working with students with disabilities?
   o Yes (1)
   o No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Did you receive SRO-related training specific to working with students with disabilities? = Yes

Q11 Who provided the training? (check all that apply)
   □ NASRO (1)
   □ Police District (2)
   □ School District (3)
   □ Community Agency (4)
   □ Other: Please specify (5) _______________________________

Q12 Total duration of all trainings?
   o 0-10 hours (1)
   o 11-20 hours (2)
   o 21-30 hours (3)
   o 31-40 hours (4)
   o Over 40 hours (5)
Q13 What subjects were covered in training? (check all that apply)

- Child Development (1)
- De-escalation (2)
- Conflict Resolution (3)
- Bullying (4)
- Minority Populations (5)
- Other: Please specify (6) _______________________________

Q14 Did you receive training after beginning your high school assignment?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Did you receive training after beginning your high school assignment? = No

Q15 Who provided the training? (check all that apply)

- NASRO (1)
- Police District (2)
- School District (3)
- Community Agency (4)
- On-the-Job Training (5)
- Other: Please specify (6) _______________________________

Q16 Total duration of all trainings?

- 0-10 hours (1)
- 11-20 hours (2)
- 21-30 hours (3)
- 31-40 hours (4)
- Over 40 hours (5)
Q17 How often do you receive training for your position?
  o Quarterly (1)
  o Twice a year (2)
  o Annually (3)
  o Never (4)

Q18 What subjects were covered in training? (check all that apply)
  □ Child Development (1)
  □ De-escalation (2)
  □ Disability (3)
  □ Conflict Resolution (4)
  □ Bullying (5)
  □ Minority Populations (6)
  □ Other: Please specify (7) _______________________________

Q19 An intellectual disability (formerly known as "mental retardation") is defined as subaverage intellectual functioning, displaying deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period. This disability adversely affects a child’s educational performance. How many hours of training did you receive at any point on intellectual disabilities?
  o None (1)
  o 1-5 hours (2)
  o 6-10 hours (3)
  o 11-15 hours (4)
  o 16-20 hours (5)
  o Over 20 hours (6)

Q20 What subject matters were covered regarding intellectual disabilities? (check all that apply)
  □ Comprehension (1)
  □ Communication (2)
  □ De-escalation (3)
  □ Possible Characteristics (4)
  □ Other: Please specify (5) _______________________________
Q21 Behavioral disorders or emotional disturbance is defined by an inability to learn that is not explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. This can also lead to difficulties with interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers and present with disruptive or inappropriate behaviors. How many hours of training did you receive at any point on behavioral disabilities?

- None (1)
- 1-5 hours (2)
- 6-10 hours (3)
- 11-15 hours (4)
- 16-20 hours (5)
- Over 20 hours (6)

Q22 What subject matters were covered regarding behavioral disabilities? (check all that apply)

- Comprehension (1)
- Communication (2)
- De-escalation (3)
- Possible Characteristics (4)
- Other: Please specify (5) _______________________________

Q23 Autism is a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and can impact educational performance. This disability may also be characterized by repetitive movements, resistance to change, and unusual responses to sensory experiences that is not defined by an emotional disturbance. How many hours of training did you receive at any point on autism?

- None (1)
- 1-5 hours (2)
- 6-10 hours (3)
- 11-15 hours (4)
- 16-20 hours (5)
- Over 20 hours (6)
Q24 What subject matters were covered regarding autism? (check all that apply)

☐ Comprehension (1)
☐ Communication (2)
☐ De-escalation (3)
☐ Possible Characteristics (4)
☐ Other: Please specify (5)

End of Block: Training Information

Start of Block: Training Perspective

Q25 Based on your SRO training, please rate the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (4)</th>
<th>Disagree (5)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training has adequately</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prepared me for working in a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school setting. (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training has adequately</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prepared me for working with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students with disabilities. (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more training on</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working within high schools. (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more training on</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working with students with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disabilities. (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q26 Based on your experiences with students with disabilities, please rate the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (4)</th>
<th>Disagree (5)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training prepared me for working with students with autism. (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training prepared me for working with students with emotional/behavioral disabilities. (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My SRO training prepared me for working with students with intellectual disabilities. (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take disability into account when working with students. (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End of Block: Students with Disabilities
**Start of Block: Perceptions regarding disability**

Q27 Based on your experiences with students with disabilities, please rate the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (4)</th>
<th>Disagree (5)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities are responsible for a disproportionate amount of behavior problems at my school. (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including students with disabilities in classrooms with other students is detrimental because of the problem behaviors of students with disabilities. (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities should receive less punitive treatment for their problem behaviors than they currently receive in schools. (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students with disabilities use their disability as an excuse for their problem behavior to avoid accountability for their action. (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
End of Block: Perceptions regarding disability

Start of Block: Relationships with School Administrators

Q28 How often do you meet with school administrators to discuss discipline and problem behaviors with ALL students within your assigned high school?
   - Weekly (1)
   - Monthly (2)
   - Quarterly (3)
   - Twice a year (4)
   - Yearly (5)
   - Less than yearly (6)
   - I have never met with my school administrators regarding this issue (7)

Q29 How often do you meet with school administrators to discuss measures to address problem behaviors with students with disabilities within your assigned high school?
   - Weekly (1)
   - Monthly (2)
   - Quarterly (3)
   - Twice a year (4)
   - Yearly (5)
   - Less than yearly (6)
   - I have never met with my school administrators regarding this issue (7)
Q30 Based on your experiences with administrators, please rate the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (4)</th>
<th>Disagree (5)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel welcomed by the school administrators.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school administrators rely on me to discipline the students. (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am the primary contact to handle disturbances within classrooms. (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance policies are too harsh for ALL students. (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance policies are too harsh for students with disabilities. (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school administrators are prepared to work with students with disabilities. (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers are prepared to work with students with disabilities. (7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End of Block: Relationships with School Administrators
Start of Block: Demographics

Q31 Gender

- Male (5)
- Female (6)
- Non-binary / Non-conforming (7)
- Transgender Female (9)
- Transgender Male (10)
- Not listed (11) _______________________________
- Prefer not to say (8)

Q32 Age

- 18-24 (1)
- 25-34 (2)
- 35-44 (3)
- 45-54 (4)
- 55-64 (5)
- 65 or older (6)

Q33 How would you best describe yourself? (check all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- Asian (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- Hispanic/Latino (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)
- White (6)
- Other: Please Specify (7) _______________________________
Q34 Time as a law enforcement officer
- Less than 1 year (1)
- 1-3 years (2)
- 4-7 years (3)
- 8-10 years (4)
- Over 10 years (5)

Q35 Time assigned to a U.S. high school as an SRO
- Less than 1 year (1)
- 1-3 years (2)
- 4-7 years (3)
- 8-10 years (4)
- Over 10 years (5)

Q36 Number of SROs at your high school assigned during your shift (including you)
- 1-2 (1)
- 3-4 (2)
- 5-6 (3)
- More than 6 (4)

Q37 Security measures at your assigned high school (check all that apply)
- Armed police officers and/or security guards (1)
- Unarmed police officers and/or security guards (2)
- Metal detector (3)
- Secured entry (4)
- Other: Please specify (5) _______________________________

Q38 Average weekly hours working at your assigned high school
- 1-10 (1)
- 11-20 (2)
- 21-30 (3)
- 31-40 (4)
Q39 State or U.S. territory in which you work as an SRO

- Alabama (1) ... I do not reside in the United States (53)

Q40 Are you a member of NASRO?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q41 Are you a member of another SRO-related organization? If so, please specify below.
- Yes (1) _______________________________
- No (2)

**End of Block: Demographics**

**Start of Block: Interview Participation**

Q42 1) Would you like to participate in an interview with the researcher regarding your experience as an SRO?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If 1) Would you like to participate in an interview with the researcher regarding your experience... = No*

Q43 Are you willing to be audio-recorded?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Are you willing to be audio-recorded? = No*

Q44 Preferred day for the interview:

- Sunday (1) ... Saturday (7)
Q45 2nd choice for interview day

▼ Sunday (1) ... Saturday (7)

Q46 Preferred time range for interview (please allow for a minimum of 30 minutes to complete the interview):

▼ 8am-12pm (1) ... 4pm-8pm (3)

Q47 2nd choice for time range

▼ 8am-12pm (1) ... 4pm-8pm (3)

Q48 Best email address to use to schedule interview

_______________________________

End of Block: Interview Participation
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol (adapted from Brady, 2017)

- Using the “Share Screen” option in Zoom®, review the informed consent form with the participant and ask if there are any questions. Remind the participant that the interview will be audio-recorded. Receive verbal consent before moving forward with the interview.

- Explain the researcher’s background and interest in completing the study. E.g. “I am interested in the prevalence of youth with disabilities in juvenile detention centers and would like more insight into what happens prior to the youth being committed”.

- Provide the purpose of the study and collect demographic information using the same questions from the Qualtrics survey.

- Re-direct any probing questions regarding researcher by stating, “I understand your question; however, that goes beyond the scope of today’s interview”.

- Begin with obtaining demographic information, using the same questions from the Qualtrics survey.
  - Describe how your training may or may not have prepared you for working in a high school with youth with disabilities.
    - What is one thing you wish you had known prior to working in a high school? With youth with disabilities?
  - Tell me your thoughts regarding SROs’ perceptions of high school students with disabilities.
    - How do your perceptions align with those of the other survey participants?
    - What would say influences these perceptions?
  - Describe your relationship with school administrators and teachers?
    - How might your relationship with them impact your interactions with students with disabilities?
    - What are your thoughts on administrators’ and teachers’ abilities to work with students with disabilities?
    - How does school policy impact your interactions with youth with disabilities?
Kandace T. Jones, Ed.S., CRC, LGPC
Kandace.t.jones@gmail.com | 757.448.8474 | Gambrills, MD

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in Disability Disciplines
Utah State University, Logan, UT
Expected: May 2022

Education Specialist in Special Education
The George Washington University, Washington, DC
Awarded: August 2015

Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling
The George Washington University, Washington, DC
Awarded: August 2013

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Certificate in Health Policy
Duke University, Durham, NC
Awarded: May 2009

CERTIFICATIONS

Certified Rehabilitation Counselor
Certification Number: 00117500
Expiration: March 2023

Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor
License Number: LGPC00821
Expiration: December 2022

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Veterans Benefits Administration | Washington, DC
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor | April 2021 – Present
Grade: Start – GS09, Current – GS11 | 40 hours/week

- Provide outreach services for University of Maryland Global Campus students through the VetSuccess on Campus program
- Train on the process for authorizing monthly subsistence allowance to veterans
- Complete and reconcile purchases for veterans needing training supplies
- Authorize payment for training programs
- Provide veterans with counseling and guidance on career goals
- Conduct group orientation for applicants to VR&E services
- Collect, write, and maintain data and appropriate documentation
- Interpret disability documentation and determine entitlement for VR&E services in accordance with federal guidelines and regulations
- Assess functional limitations and the impact on access to gainful employment to determine an appropriate rehabilitation plan or referral to other services
- Develop, implement, and monitor rehabilitation plans based on needs and progress, while authorizing services regarding training, employment, assessments, and other supports
- Provide guidance on requesting reasonable accommodations for training and employment
180 Urban Wellness | Washington, DC

Contract Behavioral Health Clinician | November 2020 – Present

- Provide individual, group, and family psychotherapy sessions for adults
- Employ cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing techniques
- Maintain appropriate documentation
- Provide crisis intervention as needed
- Consult with other treating professionals as needed

AprilMay Company, Inc. | Washington, DC

Clinical Specialist I | November 2020 – June 2021

- Partnered with DC Prep Public Charter Schools to provide school-based counseling services
- Collaborated with parents and school administrators regarding holistic care for students
- Conducted intakes and depression and anxiety screenings
- Developed and implement treatment plans
- Employed cognitive behavioral therapy and art therapy techniques
- Participated in classroom observations

Bridgeway Rehabilitation Services | Plainfield, NJ

Wellness Clinician | May 2020 – October 2020

- Provided individual counseling services
- Provided outreach and wellness services for individuals with mental health concerns
- Approved case documentation
- Monitored client records for compliance
- Supervised wellness specialists providing outreach services

Occupational Assessment Services, Inc | Lodi, NJ

Vocational Expert, Life Care Planner | November 2019 – March 2020

- Conducted vocational evaluations of people in personal injury, wrongful death, workers’ compensation, and social security cases
- Determined pre- and post-injury earning capacity
- Developed life care plans

Reliant Services, LLC | Midvale, UT

Employment Specialist | August 2017 – January 2019

- Provided job development, placement, and coaching services
- Networked with local businesses and service providers
- Provided guidance and expertise based on factors such as disability, education, experience, and other factors that may affect employment
- Managed relationships with business and community partners
- Maintained documentation in designated case management system
Utah State University | Logan, UT
Teaching Assistant/Researcher | August 2017 – April 2022
- Conducted lectures for the Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling program
- Developed, assigned, and graded assignments
- Provided student consultations
- Conducted research studies around transition-aged students with disabilities
- Provided state and national conference presentations on completed and ongoing research

DC Department on Disability Services | Washington, DC
Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist/Vocational Evaluator | December 2014 – August 2017
Grade: Start – CS11, Final – CS12 | 40 hours/week
- Supervised vocational evaluators and eCASAS proctors
- Provided comprehensive vocational evaluations and eCASAS testing
- Counseled clients and their counselors on determining appropriate job goals and career paths
- Provided case management and comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services for ex-offenders and individuals with disabilities
- Conducted intakes and orientations regarding RSA services
- Engaged in networking to expand community partnerships with equal opportunity employers
- Participated in interagency collaboration to ensure adequate services
- Collected, wrote, and maintained data and appropriate documentation
- Interpreted disability documentation and determined eligibility for VR services in accordance with Federal and District government laws
- Assessed functional limitations and the impact on access to gainful employment
- Developed, implemented, and monitored an Individualized Plan for Employment, while authorizing services regarding training, employment, assessments, and other supports
- Assisted in implementing accommodations for successful employment
- Collaborated with Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide customized and supported employment services

Didlake, Inc. | Manassas, VA
Employment Specialist III | March 2013 – December 2014
- Developed community partnerships with equal opportunity employers
- Provided guidance and expertise based on factors such as disability, education, experience, and other factors that may affect employment
- Participated in interagency collaboration to ensure consumer received adequate services
- Managed a caseload of 35 consumers independently
- Coordinated authorizations from funding agencies and secured approval for services
- Conducted intakes of applicants and developed and monitored Individualized Service Plans
• Assessed individual needs in relation to successful job placement
• Managed relationships and contracts with business and community partners and referral sources
• Collected, wrote, and maintained data and appropriate documentation
• Coordinated and implemented the use of assistive technology and environmental modifications
• Conducted situational assessments, job development, job placement and training, and follow along support for individuals with severe disabilities
• Provided travel training and assistance to maximize the safety and mobility of all consumers
• Conducted job orientation on-site at commercial or government work sites
• Provided rehabilitation counseling and crisis intervention

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services | Fairfax, VA
Graduate Intern, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist | August 2012 – May 2013
• Assisted in providing VR services for a transition caseload of over 220
• Provided VR information sessions at Fairfax County high schools
• Connected clients with job coaches and assistive technology services
• Shadowed adult mental health and substance abuse counselors meeting with clients in the community for intakes and follow-ups
• Provided guidance and counseling on interactions with employers, peers, and coworkers
• Created and managed a weekly job club of 4 transition-aged clients and assisted with job clubs of 20 clients for other offices
• Maintained client records through the AWARE case management system by writing case notes, determining eligibilities, creating employment plans, and updating client information

The George Washington University Counseling Center | Washington, DC
Mental Health Counseling Intern | August 2012 – May 2013
• Conducted intakes for new clients
• Provided career and personal counseling to clients coping with anxiety, PTSD, and depression
• Conducted depression and mental health screenings in the community

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Utah State University, Rehabilitation Counseling Master’s Program | Logan, UT
Human Growth and Development in Rehabilitation Counseling Instructor | Fall 2019
• Taught an online hybrid course with alternating synchronous and asynchronous weeks
• Created a syllabus by selecting the required readings and assignments
• Completed all grading and student consultations
Group Counseling Theories and Processes

**Teaching Assistant | Summer 2019**
- Lecture: Basic Skills for Leaders in Group Counseling
- Working with Specific Populations
- Supervised group counseling sessions and provided feedback on skills used and possible next steps in the counseling process

Interview Skill Development in Rehabilitation Counseling

**Teaching Assistant | Summer 2019**
- Lecture: 5 Stage Counseling Session Using Only Listening Skills
- Lecture: Self-Disclosure and Feedback
- Lecture: Influencing Client Actions and Decisions
- Supervised individual counseling sessions and provided feedback on skills used and possible next steps in the counseling process

Theories of Counseling

**Teaching Assistant | Spring 2019**
- Graded case conceptualization assignments and provided feedback on the students’ use of specific theories

Ethics in Counseling

**Teaching Assistant | Fall 2018**
- Lecture: Suicide
- Lecture: Professional Relationships
- Graded and provided feedback on case conceptualization assignments

Job Development and Placement

**Teaching Assistant | Fall 2018**
- Lecture: Employment Related Legislation and Policy

Group Counseling

**Teaching Assistant | Summer 2018**
- Lecture: Working with Specific Populations
- Lecture: Principles of Group Leadership
- Supervised group counseling sessions and provided feedback on skills used and possible next steps in the counseling process

Job Development and Placement

**Teaching Assistant | Fall 2017**
- Lecture: Supported and Customized Employment
CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Oral Presentations
Currier Kipping, K. & Jones, K. (June, 2019). *Interdisciplinary collaboration to reduce the rate of dropout among students with disabilities*, Utah Transition Conference, Provo, Utah.


Poster Presentations


PUBLICATIONS

