

SERVING TOGETHER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE SCHOOL
RESOURCE OFFICER AND PRINCIPAL PARTNERSHIP

by

Eric J. Nelson

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Dissertation Chair: Dr. Letitia Basford
Reader: Dr. Jillian Peterson
Reader: Dr. Steven Gibbs
Peer Reviewer: Xavier Reed

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To Chris and Julia:

This work was only possible with the love and patience that you provide to me every day.
I hope that my efforts reinforce the power of education and stoke your curiosity and
lifelong learning.

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ABSTRACT

Nelson, E. (2023). *Serving Together: A Phenomenological Study of the School Resource Officer and Principal Partnership*

The increased presence of school resource officers (SROs) in schools places them in direct contact with school principals. This study examined how SROs and principals in six Minnesota public secondary schools describe their partnership. Data was collected using a series of semi-structured interviews between pairs of partners representing rural, suburban, and urban school districts. Participants identified challenges related to a lack of partnership vision, role clarity, and critical preparation and training prior to partnering. Participants reported that their partnership increased the sense of safety in school, provided needed resources, and increased positive connection between law enforcement and students. These findings suggest that SRO and principal partnerships benefit from clarifying roles, engaging SROs in non-law enforcement functions while in schools, including principals in SRO selection, separating SROs from school policy enforcement, engaging in mutual professional development, and utilizing meaningful program evaluations.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On April 20, 1999, two students in Columbine, Colorado, perpetrated a shooting at the town's high school, killing twelve classmates and a teacher. The crime shocked the nation despite several other school shootings that occurred earlier in the decade. Thirteen years later, a single gunman entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and committed another horrific act of violence that led to the deaths of twenty students and six staff members. Incidents like these have forced school districts and law enforcement agencies to reconsider and address how they protect students. More than two decades after Columbine, lockdown drills, secured entrances, and increased surveillance have all become routine in most schools. The placement of police officers and sheriff's deputies in public schools has also been used to promote school safety. Often referred to as *school resource officers (SROs)*, these law enforcement personnel provide a police presence and act in various capacities while serving their assigned schools.

Principals are expected to maintain a safe school environment, but many lack the skills needed to meet this responsibility without the assistance of law enforcement (Weiler and Cray, 2011). This need resulted in a significant increase in school resource

officer programs in public schools since Columbine and the other school shootings of the 1990s (Kennedy, 2001). It is no longer unusual to find an armed officer in schools. That said, it would be wrong to view the officers' assignments in schools as nothing more than armed guards. Many principals have come to recognize SROs as assets and key members of school communities (Myrstol, 2011).

A school resource officer's presence is intended to support school safety and increase positive interactions between students and law enforcement at elementary schools. This early contact is meant to play a preventative role and reduce negative behaviors (Barnes, 2016). At the secondary level, SROs continue to support school safety, but also frequently engage in interactions with students that involve mentorship and advising (Coon & Travis, 2012). For example, one Minnesota SRO interviewed for this study shared that he can regularly be found welcoming students in the morning, assisting theft victims, providing safe driving tips, and connecting impoverished students to county services. That officer's additional roles go beyond the school safety goals that initially led to the development of an SRO partnership, and are representative of the wide range of services that many SROs now provide.

The inclusion of police officers in schools is a significant change to traditional school safety approaches. Schools with school resource officer programs bring students in immediate proximity with officers sworn to uphold the law. Lynch, Gainey, and Chappell (2016) cautioned that SROs have the potential for routing students directly into the criminal justice system for matters that have traditionally been handled by educators. In the past, principals might have addressed the possession of a small amount of

marijuana or an incident of rough-housing with school-assigned consequences. With the inclusion of SROs, that same situation with marijuana might lead to a drug charge and the rough-housing incident may be classified as disorderly conduct (Fisher & Hennessey, 2015). This study explores these kinds of issues as they pertain to the experiences of principals and SROs within this unique educational partnership.

Professional and Personal Context

I am proud to come from a family that includes both educators and law enforcement officers. The members of both professions provide critical services to the students in their communities. I believe that the efforts of educators and law enforcement officers can protect young people and help guide them toward the development of knowledge, skills, and ethical behaviors.

Having spent twenty-eight years in education, including twenty-one as a dean, assistant principal, and now principal, I have extensive experience working with law enforcement in schools. Over the years, I have formed partnerships with a dozen school resource officers representing five different law enforcement agencies. My interactions with SROs while teaching in the 1990s were casual, and the officers served primarily in a school safety role. As a building-level administrator, my experiences shifted to daily interactions and a level of collaboration that extended far beyond just school safety.

Most of the school resource officer partnerships I have experienced were highly effective. I observed officers demonstrate compassion for students in need or lacking stability in their lives. I helped officers find donors to provide opportunities for disadvantaged students, such as with the Shop With a Cop program, so the students

receive Christmas gifts. I witnessed officers that choose to spend their off-duty time cheering for athletes that they help protect while on duty. My most effective partnerships were with SROs that merged their professional experiences with an educator's perspective while working closely with school staff. The SROs also maintained a focus on student development. They exhibited welcoming behaviors that established trust with the members of the school community.

Not all of my partnerships with school resource officers have been positive. In these cases, the partnerships lacked agreement about the roles of SROs and philosophies of school discipline and accountability. In one of my pairings, my school resource officer partner perceived me as having low regard for consequences that might scare a student into compliance with minor school policy violations. Conversely, I perceived the SRO as unable to recognize the need to foster the development of social and emotional strengths in immature and vulnerable young people. In another partnership, I served with a school resource officer that viewed his role as simply a security presence and rarely made an effort to engage in building relationships with students. In hindsight, I regret not initiating more transparent communications and making more significant efforts to involve the officer in opportunities for positive student interaction. Experiences like these are an important motivation for this study.

As a White male educator, I acknowledge that I have not experienced a lifetime of fear and negative interactions with law enforcement. My racial privilege permits me to view a simple traffic stop as an inconvenience instead of a potentially dangerous encounter. I am more likely to see a school resource officer as a potentially supportive

resource for students rather than a conduit to the school-to-prison-nexus. I carry this critical awareness into this study.

Other principals and their students view the presence of police in schools very differently. This view is particularly true of students and educators of color. The media reports of Black and Brown students subjected to particularly harsh treatment by school resource officers have continued to bring attention and concern about the placement of officers in schools. For example, in September 2019, a 6-year-old Black female student was handcuffed with zip ties, removed from the school, placed in a squad car, and arrested for kicking a staff member (Zaveri, 2020). In December 2019, a sheriff's deputy twice slammed an 11-year-old Black male to the ground and dragged him down the hallway ("North Carolina Deputy," 2020). High-profile, disturbing incidents such as these do not reflect the actions and decision-making of most SROs in America.

Unfortunately, these incidents may contribute to a mistrust of SROs that prevents them from developing relationships consistent with their non-law enforcement roles.

Concerns surrounding police both in schools and communities have become even more amplified following the 2020 death of George Floyd. Many school districts, including those in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Oakland and San Francisco, California; Denver, Colorado; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Des Moines, Iowa; Columbus Ohio; and Rochester, New York have responded to this police violence in society by reducing or eliminating their school resource officer programs (Riser-Kositsky & Sawchuk, 2021). Some may view the removal of SROs from school systems as an appropriate response to violence, but there is

certainly no consensus of these efforts. In Minneapolis, three high school principals of racially diverse schools wrote an open letter to leaders of both the Minneapolis Public Schools and Minneapolis Police Department shortly after the murder of George Floyd. They described the measures taken by both organizations as placing “our students, staff and school communities in grave danger” (Abdullah, Freistleben, & Hampton, 2020). More recently, the fatal stabbing of a student at St. Paul, Minnesota’s Harding High School has renewed the debate on the 2020 district’s decision to remove SROs from schools in the city. In the days following the death of the Harding student, superintendent Joel Gothard struggled to identify a permanent plan for increasing school security, but indicated that the District would be increasing the number of non-police liaisons in addition to increased police presence in five schools (Wurzer & Townsend, 2023).

While it is clear that both significant opposition and support for school resource officers in schools exist, SROs have become so entrenched in schools that it is unlikely that they will suddenly be withdrawn from all schools. However, that does not mean that the underpinnings of how they operate are static. Police reform, school safety, and alternatives to exclusionary discipline are all of critical interest to contemporary educational researchers like me. My research seeks to understand how SROs partner with principals and offer recommendations for improving the effectiveness of these partnerships.

Statement of the Problem

There has been limited research focused on the partnerships that individual school resource officers maintain with the principals in the schools they serve. Existing survey

research demonstrated that principals have strong feelings about SROs and their presence in schools (Barnes, 2009; Covert, 2007; May, Fessel & Means, 2004; Streater, 2008; Stumpf, 2006; Wolfe, Chrusciel, Rojek, Hanson, & Kaminski, 2017). However, some principals' perceptions suggest a disconnect between the officers' actual work and their perceived roles (Barnes, 2009). The findings of these studies have yet to identify a consistent vision for SRO and principal partnerships. Previous studies were unable to determine the conditions and characteristics that the SROs and principals report in effective partnerships. The bulk of the research on SRO and principal partnerships utilized surveys and other quantitative methods in the past two decades. The result is that the individual stories of principals and SROs have yet to be told. A qualitative approach offers an alternate means of collecting the data needed to better understand how the SROs and principals partner, define effective relationships (Lopez, 2019; Dickmann, 1999), build rapport (Stumpf, 2006), and perceive one another's roles (Theriot, 2016; Streater, 2008).

Research Purpose

This phenomenological study aims to explore and better understand the experiences of school resource officers and principals partnering in secondary-level schools. This study will provide an opportunity for six pairs of Minnesota SROs and principals to share detailed descriptions of their work and the partnerships that they maintain with one another.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following primary research question: *How do school resource officers (SROs) and principals describe their partnerships?* In support of the primary research question, this study will also attempt to answer the following secondary research questions:

- How do principals and SROs describe their vision and preparation for their partnership?
- How do principals and SROs describe the positive outcomes of their partnerships?
- How do principals and SROs describe their ongoing collaboration and communication with one another?
- How do principals and SROs describe the challenges that they face with one another as well as the mitigation of those challenges?

Significance of the Study

School principals and law enforcement personnel both play essential roles in our communities. We are in a critical period where principals and law enforcement personnel need to recognize their impact and grow in their ability to serve. Principals are expected to maintain safe schools and focus on learning. Law enforcement is sworn to serve and protect their communities. These charges need not conflict and stand to benefit from partnership. Partnerships between school resource officers and principals require ongoing research to determine their effectiveness in supporting students and protecting schools. This study will investigate these partnerships to add to the current literature in this important topic area.

This study will also inform the professional development of both school resource officers and principals regarding how to best partner. Principals have typically received little training on the purpose and roles of SROs and how the two partners might best work together, despite the growth of programs across the country (Counts, Randall, Ryan, & Katsiyannis, 2018; Cray & Weiler, 2011; Lopez, 2019; Stumpf, 2006). SROs vary widely in their preparation for partnerships. There are certainly opportunities for professional development through national and state juvenile justice organizations and law enforcement agencies, but there are no consistent standards requiring participation in specific training.

Delimitations

After the identification of research questions a large study utilizing quantitative methodologies was considered but not selected. Such a study might have provided a larger body of data and the possibility for more generalizable findings. Instead, a qualitative study using in-depth interviews focused on a smaller population was selected based upon both feasibility and a desire to engage more deeply with the experiences of the individual participants.

- Time- The interviews were conducted within a short window between March 1, 2022 and June 15, 2022.
- Sites- Six Minnesota public high schools representing rural, suburban, and urban settings.
- Sample- Six pairs of current school resource officers and principals who are currently partnering, or partnered within the past twelve months.

Definition of Terms

- *School resource officer (SRO)*- A sworn officer employed by a municipality, county, or state law enforcement agency whose primary assignment is in a school setting during periods of the year when students are in attendance.
- *School-based law enforcement officer (SBLE)*- A sworn officer that functions in most of the same roles as a school resource officer. The significant distinction is that SBLEs are employed by a school district instead of a city, county, or state law enforcement agency (McKenna, Martinez-Prather, & Bowman, 2016). For this study, a specific notation will be provided in references and citations related to SBLEs.
- *Principal*- A licensed school administrator with position titles including principal; associate, assistant, or vice-principal; dean; or other building-level administrator with oversight responsibilities. A distinction will be made when a specific title, such as *assistant principal* appears in the literature or findings. For the purposes of this study, the term *principal* does not include district-level personnel, regardless of the licenses that they maintain.
- *District*- An autonomous public school district charged with educating students. For the purposes of this study, private, independent, collaborative, and charter schools were not considered part of a district.
- *Law enforcement agency*- A municipal, county, tribal, or state-level police or sheriff's department employing sworn officers to provide law enforcement and public safety services for a particular geographic jurisdiction.

Study Organization

This study contains five chapters. Chapter Two includes a review of literature related to school resource officers, principals, and their partnerships. Chapter Three provides details of the study's conceptual framework, research design, and methodology. The data analysis and research results will be discussed in Chapter Four. The last chapter will summarize the study, present conclusions, and offer recommendations. A list of references and a log of tables and of appendices will be found at the end of the document.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

History of School Resource Officers

Formal collaborative partnerships between schools and law enforcement that have placed officers in schools have emerged as a phenomenon over the past seven decades. The first programs with significant scope began to appear between 1951 and the late 1960s. Police have always interacted in schools on an as-needed basis, but the assignment of an officer into a school or group of schools is believed to have originated in Liverpool, England, in 1951. Initial organizers intended to develop better relationships between police and students (Bond, 2001) and reduce delinquency at an early age (Mulder & Williams, 1975). The assignment of police to schools was followed in the United States in 1958 with the introduction of officers into Flint, Michigan schools (Bond, 2001; Mulder & Williams, 1975). According to Mulder and Williams, the Flint model expanded the purpose beyond reducing delinquency and sought to have an officer present on-site to manage police matters on campus and improve communications between the schools and police. The success of Flint's programs led to other school districts establishing school resource officer programs. Programs in Tucson, Arizona (1962) and Minneapolis,

Minnesota (1967) built on the principles of the Flint model (Mulder & Williams; Swayze & Buskovic, 2014).

After the initial introduction of school resource officer programs, the model of assigning police to schools slowed over the next few decades. During this period, however, the concept of community policing began to expand. *Community policing*, or *community-oriented policing*, is an approach to law enforcement that uses strategies that bring together law enforcement personnel and the communities they serve (Barnes, 2016). The approach centers around both community partnership and problem-solving to address the evolving nature of communities and the strategies used by law enforcement (Atkinson, 2002). Community policing shifted officers and law enforcement agencies from a response model to one where they engage with businesses, neighborhood associations, faith groups, and other formal and informal collections of interested community members in problem-solving and collaboration. Areas of particular emphasis include decentralized services, police, and citizens working collectively to address neighborhood problems and examining “factors that contribute to crime and disorder” (Atkinson, p. 6).

The concept of community policing has since been expanded to include the assignment of school resource officers in schools to partner in support of safety and learning (Atkinson, 2002; Barnes, 2016; Benigni, 2004; Rosiak, 2009). Each day schools across the country are required to address various behaviors that move beyond school policy and into the realm of law enforcement. These, according to Rosiak (2009), include violent crimes, property damage, chemical use, truancy, and other behaviors that threaten

a safe school environment. By partnering with an SRO, school leaders can exercise the problem-solving element of community policing. According to Atkinson and Kipper (2004), the partners' work allows for a better understanding of discipline challenges and helps strategize efforts to reduce them.

The 1990s saw an increase in school resource officer partnerships after two decades of limited growth. This growth emerged from the implementation of community policing practices (Barnes, 2016) and the rise of school-related shootings. In the years between Columbine (1999) and Sandy Hook (2012) school shootings, students in the United States were plagued by 40 active shooter events (K-12 School Shooting Database, 2021; Melgar, 2019). This collection of incidents included a 2003 shooting at Rocori High School and a 2005 shooting at Red Lake High School, both in Minnesota, where this study took place. The severity and frequency of these incidents resulted in dramatic SRO program increases. Kentucky serves as a telling example, with the number of districts utilizing SROs increasing from 4 to 67 between 1997 and 2000 (Bond, 2001). The threat of school shootings continues to be a reality of American life and a driver of school safety efforts.

Before Columbine, but following a decade of many other school shootings, the Clinton administration signed the *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994*, regularly referred to as the 1994 Crime Bill. This legislation was written in a climate where Congress and President Clinton placed great attention on order and safety efforts. The 1994 Crime Bill included provisions targeting aspects of law enforcement with close connections to schools, including the addition of 100,000 officers to the

streets, three-strike rules for repeat offenders, and increased anti-gang enforcement efforts. School districts also took action with the emergence of zero-tolerance policies for many behaviors, but particularly weapon possession, violence, and drug-related violations.

The growth in school resource officer programs became viable in many law enforcement jurisdictions as outside funding mechanisms emerged. Efforts in Minnesota to support SRO programs received a boost in 1991 with the Legislature's approval of a bill allowing schools to use property tax levies to support the staffing of police officers in schools (Swazey, & Buskovich, 2014). In 1994, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) established the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) to support community policing efforts across the country through programming and grants. Grants allowed local law enforcement agencies to hire SROs during the period of its COPS in Schools (CIS) program, which was funded through 2005. According to Kennedy (2001), millions in grant dollars, including individual three-year grants of up to \$125,000, provided for the introduction and expansion of SRO programs. These start-up grants were temporary, and local law enforcement agencies assumed program costs after the grants' terms (James & McGallion, 2013). Eventually, most law enforcement agencies included the SRO program as a portion of their budget. Others have looked to school districts to support the staffing costs for SROs. Increasingly, schools and law enforcement agencies are sharing the expenses, according to Atkinson and Kipper (2004). The financial arrangements supporting SRO programs are typically included in inter-agency agreements or memoranda of understanding (MOUs).

Despite significant growth of school resource officer programs over the past few decades, many districts still choose other options for maintaining physical safety in schools. Cray and Weiler (2011), citing NCES data, said that as an alternative to SRO programs, some districts opt to have sworn officers regularly visit campuses, while others elect to hire security guards for their buildings (p. 167). Hiring district-employed school-based law enforcement officers (SBLE) offers an additional option that some larger districts have implemented (McKenna et al., 2016). No Minnesota districts employed SBLEs at the time of this study.

Prevalence and Profile of School Resource Officers

The prevalence and profile of school resource officers in the United States have proven challenging to determine. One factor contributing to this confusion is the variety of agency types and the lack of any centralized tracking system at the federal level. Most districts with SRO programs partner with local law enforcement agencies, including municipal police, tribal police, and county sheriffs. Several large districts across the nation maintain their own school-based law enforcement officers in a unique district-sized jurisdiction.

Prevalence of School Resource Officers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), school resource officers serve in 53% of all public schools and 76% of public high schools in the United States (Dilberti, Jackson, Correa & Padgett, 2019, p. 19). The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) estimates the number of SROs in the country as somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000. This range aligns with Mallet (2016), who placed the number of SROs at approximately 17,000.

School districts in Minnesota employ approximately 315 officers (Swayze & Buskovich, 2014). It is important to note that many of the SROs in Minnesota and represented in the NASRO counts may serve more than one school building. The Minnesota numbers have likely shifted since early 2014 when Minnesota last conducted a statewide survey, particularly with the decisions by the Minneapolis, St. Paul, Hopkins, and Winona school districts to discontinue their SRO programs in the summer of 2020.

Profile of Minnesota school resource officers. A demographic profile of Minnesota school resource officers can be established based on Swayze and Buskovich's (2014) data and their partnership with the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs. According to Swayze and Buskovich, Minnesota SROs are primarily employees of municipal police departments (82%) and county sheriffs' offices (17%), with a small number of SROs employed by tribal police departments. These numbers are consistent with nationwide data, according to Barnes (2016). The geographic distribution of Minnesota's SROs is closely divided between the Twin Cities metropolitan area (48%) and non-metro areas (52%). The demographic characteristics of individual Minnesota SROs indicate a significant difference between officers and the general population. According to Swayze and Buskovich, a typical SRO is a White (92%) male (80%) between the ages of 30 and 50 (79%).

Roles and Relationships of School Resource Officers and Principals

School resource officer roles. The roles that school resource officers assume in their assignments vary widely. These roles typically develop with input from police and school administrators, police chiefs, and the discretion of individual officers (McKenna et

al., 2016). The assignment can suffer from a lack of clarity as a result of such varied input. Instead of benefitting from interagency collaboration, SRO programs and individual officers may find it difficult to determine to whom they are accountable. SROs operate under two distinct cultures, policies, and supervisors due to direction from school principals and law enforcement leaders (Bond, 2001; Fisher & Hennesey, 2015; Lopez, 2019; Robinson, 2006; Rosiak, 2009). Thirty-five percent of SROs experience differing expectations from police and school leaders, according to Swayze and Buskovich (2014, p. 59).

Open and regular communications between principals and school resource officers and formal interagency agreements can aid in clarifying the roles and lines of authority (Atkinson, 2002; Barnes, 2016; Bond, 2001; Coon & Travis, 2012; Counts et al., 2018; Kim & Geronimo, 2010). Despite the need for SROs to operate in two separate organizations, it is uncommon for principals to have contact with police leadership. One study found that 47.1% of principals reported never meeting the SRO's supervisor (May et al., 2004, p. 85).

The only role that school resource officers universally serve is as a law enforcement officer (Atkinson, 2002; Umphrey, 2009). Beyond this, with the potential of so many individuals influencing the roles of any particular SRO, it is impossible to create a comprehensive list of each of the roles in which officers serve. Researchers have regularly referenced the three primary roles found in the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) triad model (Benigni, 2004; Coon & Travis, 2012; Cray & Weiler, 2011; Kennedy, 2001; Stumpf, 2006). According to NASRO, the triad model

recommends that SROs perform in three primary functions, a) law enforcement, b) mentorship, and c) law education (Canady et al., 2012). The amount of time in each of these roles can vary widely, even with the acceptance of the triad model. Finn, Shively, McDevitt, Lassiter, and Rich (2005) suggested that a triad continuum exists with some officers focusing mainly on law enforcement responsibilities while others devote more attention to teaching or mentoring.

Researchers have also identified roles beyond those recommended in the triad model, including role model (Canady et al., 2012; Robinson, 2006), problem-solver, and community liaison (Atkinson, 2002; Robinson, 2006). Surrogate parent and social worker roles were also identified in examining school-based law enforcement officers (SBLEs) (McKenna et al., 2016). Some school resource officers also participate in afterschool activities and serve on school and district committees (Cray & Weiler, 2011).

Principal roles. Principals have the primary responsibility for the operation of their schools. According to Lopez (2019), the legal doctrine of *in loco parentis* places the care and safety of students in the hands of the principal. Principals retain responsibility for student conduct and building safety even when a school resource officer is assigned to a school (Atkinson, 2002; Bond, 2001). This responsibility is in addition to their instructional, budgetary, and other educational management obligations. According to Bond (2001), the only times that an SRO's authority may trump that of the building administrator is in circumstances where a statute or law violation occurs or there exists an imminent danger. The presence of an SRO in a school may be viewed by some principals as a resource to manage some of the non-instructional matters in the building (Robinson,

2006). On the other hand, a source of tension in some administrator and SRO relationships is principals' fear of losing control of aspects of the school environment, according to Coon and Travis (2012).

Organizational Collaboration

The development of a school resource officer program in a school requires thoughtful and sustained planning and development. Atkinson (2002) suggested that efforts to strengthen partnerships occur at multiple levels, with interagency collaboration between school districts and law enforcement agencies and most operational collaboration occurring within individual schools (p. 16). A significant challenge in supporting collaboration is the uniqueness of every pairing. Each principal and school resource officer comes to their partnerships with their own experiences, perspectives, organizational expectations, and understanding of roles that they will assume in their assignments.

Interagency collaboration. School districts and law enforcement agencies desire to provide a safe environment (Lopez, 2019; Stumpf, 2006). They differ, however, in several key ways. Each organization maintains very different cultures (Coon & Travis, 2012; Dickman & Cooner, 2007; Jackson, 2002; Rosiak, 2009). Schools are primarily focused on the education of students, whereas law enforcement is primarily concerned with public safety (Rosiak, 2009). According to Lopez (2019, p. 52), the two types of organizations have unique “abilities, problems, procedures, . . . limitations.” These unique cultures and other differences influence the partnerships within which they occur.

Dickman and Cooner (2007) examined the development of relationships between law enforcement agencies and school districts and identified prerequisite actions for both parties to help facilitate the development and implementation of their interagency collaboration. The researchers recommended that both districts and law enforcement agencies define and communicate the cultures of their organizations to one another. They also suggested creating a school resource officer liaison team to a) assist in the communication of the cultural differences and b) be aware of criteria that indicate a successful partnership. Likewise, Dickman and Cooner recommended that law enforcement agencies provide opportunities for developing quality SROs and creating structures to support SRO to prevent isolation.

Several researchers have examined the support that school resource officer programs have received from law enforcement agencies and the school districts they support. Most of this research has focused on either providing financial support or developing interagency agreements to administer SRO programs (Finn, Townsend et al., 2005; Kim & Geronimo, 2010).

Principal and school resource officer collaboration. Like the efforts at the interagency level, the operational collaboration between school resource officers and administrators is central to establishing and maintaining effective partnerships. The support and cooperation of principals significantly impact SROs' ability to perform their jobs (Wolfe et al., 2017).

In his research, Lopez (2019) found that many of the challenges that exist between school districts and law enforcement agencies “stem primarily from a lack of

opportunities for communication” (p. 51) and an inability to team. Cray and Weiler (2011) suggested that ongoing discussions between principals and school resource officers on day-to-day practices need to continue to allow transparency and an effective program to develop. Robinson (2006) said that misunderstanding roles leads to administrators being hesitant to assign SROs duties unrelated to campus security. To counter this, Robinson recommended that SROs and principals both engage in training that helps them better understand the issues facing their partner, “create a common understanding of roles and expectations,” and clarify principals’ needs and opportunities for SROs to meet them (pp. 30-31).

Beyond clear communications and understanding of roles, benefits come from continuity between a school resource officer and principal (Dickman & Cooner, 2007; Lopez, 2019, Robinson, 2006). With years of working together, SROs and principals have opportunities to develop trust and rapport. Many law enforcement agencies limit the years officers are permitted to serve, regardless of their success. These findings suggest that law enforcement agencies might want to carefully consider the number of years officers can serve in schools and avoid limiting their tenure when effective partnerships are established. Law enforcement agencies that allow SROs that are happy and successful in their positions avoid having a transition period that requires a new officer to “learn the job and win the confidence of school administrators, faculty, students, and parents” are recommended by Finn, Shively, et al., 2005, p. 39).

Memoranda of understanding. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) or inter-agency agreement typically outlines the formal partnership between school districts

and law enforcement agencies. Despite the prevalence and importance of MOUs (Barnes; Kim & Geronimo, 2010), only fifteen states require them in school resource officer partnerships, according to Counts et al. (2018). Specific agreements and elements within MOUs are most frequently determined locally (Barnes, 2016; Bond, 2001; Counts et al., 2018). Elements commonly found in MOUs between school districts and law enforcement agencies include

- program purposes or goals (Atkinson, 2002; Kim & Geronimo, 2010);
- program funding (Bond, 2001; Kurtz, Lloyd, Harwin & Osher, 2018);
- program evaluation (Atkinson)
- program review and termination conditions (Atkinson; Lopez, 2019);
- roles of SROs and administrators (Atkinson; Barnes, 2016; Bond; Coon, & Travis, 2012);
- lines of authority (Atkinson; Bond; Kim & Geronimo);
- SRO appointment or selection procedures and criteria (Atkinson; Lopez);
- training requirements (Atkinson; Kim & Geronimo; Lopez);
- communications between SROs and principals (Atkinson; Kim & Geronimo);
- student rights (Atkinson; Kim & Geronimo);
- SRO involvement in discipline violations (Counts et al., 2018; Kim & Geronimo; Kurtz et al., 2018);
- SRO intervention in law enforcement matters (Atkinson; Bond; Kim & Geronimo; Kurtz et al., 2018);
- protocols for data access and information sharing (Atkinson); and

- work schedules (Atkinson; Lopez).

Selection of School Resource Officers

Not all officers are well-suited for the role of school resource officer, given the uniqueness of the position and the skills required to be effective, according to Coon and Travis (2012). Like most officers operating on the street, Bond (2001) wrote that SROs need “outstanding judgment and good people skills” to be effective (p. 55). Similarly, SROs are more likely to receive administrative support if they are viewed as fair and treat the school community members with dignity and respect (Wolfe et al., 2017). Desirable SRO candidate characteristics include listening, de-escalation, and problem-solving skills; discretion; ties to the community; willingness to work overtime (Finn, Shively et al., 2005); adaptability, a strong interest in youth (Coon & Travis, 2012); and approachability (Kennedy, 2001).

Rosiak (2009) reported that principals need to play a role in selecting the school resource officers serving in their schools. Principals that are engaged in SRO selection know their schools’ needs and cultures. An officer’s value as a resource to the school community is likely to be greater if the candidates and the needs and culture are a good match (Coon & Travis, 2012). The inclusion of principals in candidate selection resulted in greater acceptance of the SRO program and was appreciated by principals who were part of the process (Finn, Shively et al., 2005).

School Resource Officer and Principal Training

A lack of adequate training to prepare principals and school resource officers, both individually and in tandem, represents a significant barrier to success in their work

together. Stumpf (2006) said that this training gap often results in a misunderstanding of the roles of SROs. Training that includes joint SRO and administrative participation may provide greater clarity and more synchronous working relationships. Lopez (2019) and Stumpf (2006) highlighted the need for tandem training between principals and SROs to develop rapport and answer questions. Coordinated training could improve appropriate SRO use and make schools safer for all students (Counts et al., 2018).

Training for school resource officers. A lack of critical school resource officer training is common before an SRO's service in the schools. Even though most SROs eventually receive appropriate training, many enter the position without knowledge in areas unique to working in a school setting, often due to the infrequency of offerings by outside professional development organizations (Finn, Shively et al., 2005). Not all SROs participate in NASRO training before beginning their positions. According to Thureau and Wald (2009/10), the ones that did participate received some training in special education law and rapport building, but the week-long sessions largely focused on juvenile and education law, permissible use of force, interrogation, and interviewing skills (p. 998).

Researchers have identified significant areas requiring additional training for school resource officers, including child trauma and child development (Kurtz et al., 2018; Michelman, 2019), "relationship building, structural racism, diversity, racial equity, . . . de escalation" (Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018, pp. 146-147), caring, "empathy and perspective-taking" (Bottiani, McDaniel, Henderson, Castillo, & Bradshaw, 2020, p. 1027). SROs may be inadequately prepared for the many roles while working in schools without appropriate training in these topic areas.

Regarding discipline infractions, Cray and Weiler (2011) suggested that school resource officers are better suited for students' atypical behaviors than the typical misbehaviors that youth display at school. Bridging this disconnect requires schools to provide the same training to SROs that they do with the educators. Thureau and Wald (2009) reported that when Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies and Trauma Sensitive School training was provided to teachers in Massachusetts schools, SROs were not involved. However, when SROs were provided trauma-based professional development, they were reflective and responded well to the training (Forber-Pratt et al., 2021).

Yet, disagreement on the need for additional role-specific training exists. Most principals report being satisfied with the level of training that school resource officers possessed despite the lack of role-specific training identified by researchers (May et al., 2004). Likewise, a substantial majority of SROs felt prepared, as 81% of SROs reported being sufficiently trained (Kurtz et al., 2018, p. 4).

Most states do not provide guidance on the training that school resource officers receive before or during their assignment to a school. Few regulations identify the type of training needed for SROs (Counts et al., 2018). They further reported that only six states provide specific criteria about the training necessary for effectiveness (p. 425). Minnesota is not one of these states, and Swayze and Buskovich (2014) indicated a lack of any state oversight of the "certification, monitoring or evaluation of SRO or school-law enforcement partnerships" (p. 2).

Training for principals. Many principals lack the prerequisite knowledge needed for an effective partnership with school resource officers. Cray and Weiler (2011) found that only half of the principals that they researched received training “related to the implementation of the school resource officer program” (p. 168). This lack of implementation training presents a challenge, according to Robinson (2006), because principals control the implementation and utilization of SRO programs. Principals also fall short in their emergency response training, knowledge of criminal and procedural law regarding arrests, and the limitations that exist for SROs in managing students (Lopez, 2019).

If principals cannot fully understand the implementation and maintenance of a successful school resource officer program, there are other potential difficulties. It will be difficult for principals to provide the orientation that Atkinson and Kipper (2004) and Swayze and Buskovich (2014) recommend for teachers and other staff related to SRO programs. Principals may also be disadvantaged in participating in a meaningful evaluation process if limited in their knowledge.

Program Evaluation

School districts and law enforcement agencies stand to benefit from increased school resource officer program evaluation. Evaluation plays a critical role in identifying SRO program effectiveness (Atkinson & Kipper, 2004; Lopez, 2019). According to Atkinson and Kipper, the evaluation also guides operations and decision-making by program leaders. Atkinson (2002) suggested that a system of evaluation should include measures of “personnel performance, activities implementation, and results” (p. 35). To

this list, Kim and Geronimo (2010) added that formal agreements such as memoranda of understanding need to include public reporting on SRO activities and a complaint resolution system to increase transparency and accountability.

School resource officer program effectiveness cannot be objectively determined without an evaluative measure. Some districts and agencies have created their own internal assessments. Others have followed well-developed protocols from private consulting firms, state agencies, or the Department of Justice. Many SRO programs, however, lack an evaluative process in their formal agreements despite researchers' concerns (Atkinson, 2002; Atkinson & Kipper, 2004; Swayze & Buskowitz, 2014). The absence of a state-wide evaluative measure remains the case in Minnesota nine years after Swayze and Buskovich (2014) recommended a state-wide agency to help define success measures and gather data.

Evidence of Program Effectiveness

School and law enforcement accounts on Twitter and other social media sites frequently honor the work of school resource officers. This type of anecdotal evidence demonstrates the quality of service provided by individual officers and departments. Empirical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of SROs on a large scale proved more difficult for researchers to identify. In assessing SROs' law enforcement roles, researchers have focused on changes in the incident and reporting rates of criminal and non-criminal activities (Brady, Balmer, & Phenix, (2007; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Theriot, 2009). Less attention has been given to assessing their effectiveness in other roles, such as serving as law educators and mentors.

Several researchers have found that including a school resource officer may not produce the intended outcomes of increasing school safety and decreasing disciplinary incidents on campuses. Brady et al. (2007) explored the impact of New York City's Impact School Initiative. They found that a year and a half after introducing SROs to campus, there was a slight decrease in the number of major crimes but an increase in noncriminal incidents (pp. 472-473). According to a longitudinal examination of several years of data from the School Survey on Crime and Safety, the number of non-serious incidents of violence reported to police increased (Na & Gottfredson, 2013, p. 642). Fisher and Hennessy (2015) reported a 21% increase in school-based discipline following the introduction of SROs (p. 228). Even when data indicated some effectiveness, James and McGallion (2013) questioned whether decreased victimization rates resulted from overall declines in crimes committed against juveniles or the result of SROs being present in schools (p. 17).

Even in situations where violence occurred, there is not a clear indication of effectiveness. The on-duty officer's negligence at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School demonstrates a limitation of the effort to prevent shootings by having a school resource officer on site. The disastrous response of the Uvalde Consolidated School District Police Department of Robb Elementary also suggests that the existence of emergency protocols does not ensure that they will be followed by law enforcement. Those officers likely represent an exception to the response that SROs typically provide in a crisis. Still, an examination of all school shootings over the past forty years suggests

an increase in the number of deaths and injuries when shootings occur in schools with officers (Peterson, Densley, and Erickson, 2021, P. 3).

Perception data from various members of school communities have served as the primary source of evidence of school resource officer effectiveness in their multiple roles. According to Myrstol (2011), there is wide approval for the inclusion of police in schools, but there is less known about “the factors that shape these attitudes” (p. 21). Generally, SROs are viewed favorably by district and school-level administrators and law enforcement leaders (Benigni, 2004; Coon & Travis, 2012), principals (May et al., 2004), and to a lesser extent, students of various demographic groups (Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018; Theriot, 2016). There is, however, a possibility that recent events, such as the death of George Floyd, campaigns to defund police, and media coverage may alter these perceptions, but that research will require some time to be able to measure effectively.

School resource officer perceptions. The research into perceptions of school resource officers regarding their work and SRO programs has resulted in inconsistent findings. SROs have generally reported their presence on campuses as creating a safer learning environment (Barnes, 2016). Beyond that, however, SRO perceptions of effectiveness vary. In a study of 399 SROs and SBLEs, important perceptions held by officers in schools were identified (Kurtz et al., 2018). The researchers reported that morale among SROs is very high, with 86% reporting *good*, *very good*, or *excellent* morale; however, the older and male officers were more likely to report higher morale levels than their younger and female counterparts (pp. 20-21). On the issue of protecting schools from violence, there was strong agreement about SRO effectiveness. An armed

officer deters the threat of school shootings according to 88% of SROs, and 95% felt that the presence of an officer helps to minimize the harm that would occur in the event of a shooting (p. 26). But not all survey questions provided such strong consensus. Only 56% of SROs reported clear direction on which school matters they could intervene (p. 13). When asked about the challenges that SROs face, officers reported limited resources, student violence, unclear policies, and lack of cooperation from school personnel.

In a study of North Carolina school resource officers and principals, Barnes (2009) found many conflicting responses in her examination of SROs' perceptions of their work. Many police officers viewed the inclusion of officers in schools as positive. In addition to crime deterrence, SROs identified rapid response times, reduced conflicts between school staff and parents, and higher case resolution rates contributing to safe schools. SROs also, according to Barnes, valued increased interactions with students and the opportunity to establish a connection with an additional adult with whom they can confide. Not all SROs in the study were as positive about their work. Like Kurcan (2018), Barnes (2009) reported frustration among some SROs, particularly regarding principals and other staff members' lack of understanding of the SRO role. Other issues Barnes identified included school staff members wanting SROs to intervene in school discipline policy matters and principals conflicting with SROs on authority matters.

Principal perceptions. Several studies indicate that principals tend to see value in the work of school resource officers and view the officers as well-prepared to serve in their schools (May et al., 2004; Stumpf, 2006, Wolfe et al., 2017). The inclusion of a law enforcement officer on campus may help principals manage their concerns about gun

violence. Principals that had concerns about school violence expressed to them by community members and parents were more likely to support the presence of SROs (Wolfe et al., 2017). According to Rogers (2019), this is significant because a nationwide survey of principals identified the threat of gun violence as their greatest challenge.

Principals had very favorable views of officers in Kentucky school resource officer programs based on surveys conducted by May et al. (2004). Principals in their study reported that the presence of an SRO reduced negative behaviors, helped the school safety plan, was an effective strategy, and contributed to a positive school climate.

Stumpf's (2006) survey of North Carolina principals also found overall solid support for school resource officers. According to the survey's findings, continuity in the partnership played a role in principals' perception of their positive relationships. Stumpf found that principals rated the individual SROs that they worked with more favorably than they rated SRO programs. However, the discrepancies in principal ratings between their partner SROs and SRO programs diminished (p. 91). Key perceptions of principals were the belief in SROs' willingness to cooperate (93%), contribution to maintaining building order (nearly 90%) and understanding the principal's roles in school safety (p. 96).

Principals' support, trust, and perceptions of the effectiveness of school resource officers were explored by Wolfe et al. (2017). The researchers used Tyler's (1990) Procedural Justice Theory to examine several factors influencing principals' views of SROs in South Carolina. Tyler's theory suggested that individuals perceiving the police as fairly exercising their authority are likely to view police authority as legitimate and

respond positively to police directives. Since principals serve as building leaders, it was argued that their feelings about school resource officers would impact the success of SRO programs (Wolfe et al., 2017). Their study found strong connections between perceptions of legitimacy and support for school resource officers, particularly when the SROs are viewed as fair decision-makers and demonstrate dignity and respect with students. Principals were also found to view SROs as contributing to a safe school when they showed procedural fairness with school community members. Most important for the present study, it was suggested that procedural fairness in the work of school resource officers was central to SRO and principal partnerships.

Student Perceptions. Studies of school resource officer perceptions among students demonstrate more significant variation than those of principals and SROs. In a survey of Minnesota students, Pentek and Eisenberg (2018) reported that an SRO in the school contributed to some feelings of safety, but at a rate that is less than reported by administrators. Brown (2005) found that students perceived SBLEs as effective in maintaining safe schools but were less interested in increasing the number of officers in schools beyond current numbers. Students' generally positive perceptions of SROs may be lessened when they are involved in or observe discipline incidents (Kim & Geronimo, 2010; Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018).

Student perceptions of school resource officers have also been shown to be influenced by racial and gender differences. Pentek and Eisenberg (2018) found that positive perceptions of SROs in Minnesota varied by racial groups, with White and Asian students responding more favorably than Black, multiple race, American Indian, and

Hispanic students (p. 145-146). Brown (2005) reported that male students were less likely than their female classmates to positively rate the effectiveness of the SBLE officers in their Brownsville, Texas schools.

Challenges Arising from the Work of SROs and School Administrators

Interest in police officers and the challenges arising from their work has generated much attention in recent years. School Resource Officer programs have been included in many of the debates surrounding law enforcement reform. Critics of school resource officer programs have expressed various concerns, including students' constitutional rights, racism, mistreatment of children, and the potential criminalization of students in schools. In some places, these concerns have led to increased efforts to counter or eliminate SRO programs (Ahranjani, 2021; Turner & Beneke 2020).

The concept of a school-to-prison nexus originates in the regular disciplinary actions taken by schools that result in the introduction of students into the criminal justice system (Barnes, 2009; Bleakley & Bleakley, 2017; Theriot & Cuellar, 2014). The criminalization of schools is viewed by many as at least partially the product of increased police presence on campuses. Other contributors, as mentioned earlier, include the use of zero-tolerance discipline philosophies, exclusionary consequences, and eroding conceptions of student rights. This nexus denies students their educational rights by removing them, either temporarily or permanently, from their previous educational environment. It also exposes them to the possibility of arrest and incarceration.

School resource officer involvement in enforcing school policies. Often the challenges identified by opponents of school resource officer programs are connected to

the misuse of officers in enforcing school policies. SROs engaged in law enforcement roles may contribute to the criminalization of many behaviors that historically have been managed by school officials when clear role distinctions between officers and principals are either not made or followed. (Counts et al., 2018; Lynch et al., 2016; Price, 2009, p. 549). According to NASRO, officers should not play a significant role in the enforcement of school discipline policies (Canady et al., 2012). Still, some schools that lack clarity about an SRO's role place officers in positions that support school discipline codes (Counts et al., 2018). Student conduct violations involving swearing, teasing, rough-housing, and other frequently seen disruptions can be quickly moved into the category of disorderly conduct in the presence of an SRO (Fisher & Hennessey, 2015). Kim and Geronimo (2010) also reported many court referrals for disruptive behaviors and disorderly conduct (p. 29). Another study found that arrests for conduct violations outnumbered those for criminal activity (Counts et al., 2018).

Disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged schools. The economic realities of individual schools may impact the work of school resource officers, according to several findings by Lynch et al. (2016). Their research found differences in SRO functions between economically disadvantaged and advantaged schools where law enforcement-related functions are more common at the former and education-related functions at the latter. In advantaged schools, SROs were more likely to serve as mentors and provide safety training to students and staff. In contrast, students in disadvantaged schools are less likely to access mentorship due to the SRO's attention to law enforcement functions. Lynch et al. suggested that these disparities in the work of SROs

also help to establish the groundwork for a school to prison pipeline and inequities in punitive actions for students in less affluent schools (p. 529).

Student rights. In recent decades courts have provided a great deal of leeway to school officials to help secure buildings and protect students. This, according to Beger (2002), has resulted in a loss of rights that students maintain at school. Price (2009) also expressed concern that respect for students' disciplinary and criminal due process rights students will be reduced.

The most significant decision related to students' Fourth Amendment rights in school is the 1995 case of *New Jersey v T.L.O.* In this case, the Court ruled that the Fourth Amendment's search and seizure language applied to school searches that were reasonable in scope and intrusiveness (Beger, 2002). The Court established a standard that amounted to *reasonable suspicion* for searches conducted by school officials (Ahranjani, 2021; Beger, 2002). Reasonable suspicion is a lower standard than the *probable cause* requirement for searches conducted by law enforcement officers. A school resource officer must have probable cause for gathering evidence of a crime's occurrence to perform a search of a student or their possessions unless there is a significant threat (Kim & Geronimo, 2010). Although officers operating in schools retain the higher standard, information and physical evidence discovered by school officials operating under reasonable suspicion may increasingly subject students to criminal referrals (Theriot & Cuellar, 2014).

School resource officers must maintain the Fifth Amendment rights of students in school investigations. Barnes (2009) expressed several concerns about the interactions

between students and SROs. The first involves concerns over SRO's questioning of students. Officers must follow the same legal requirements in schools that apply to interrogations in other environments. Principals and other school officials may question students without such stringent requirements. In these cases, school officials must carefully follow procedures because the information gathered under these lesser requirements may eventually be shared with law enforcement. The second highlights the potential use of students as sources of information as if they were informers. As SROs build rapport with students, they may earn the trust of students who reveal information that might place them in an investigation or under suspicion.

Information Sharing. School officials regularly share information about students with one another in an effort to align services. This practice poses potential issues in the presence of school resource officers. Good (2004) suggested that educators need to be very careful about sharing student information. Sharing information with law enforcement may violate data privacy standards and Fourth Amendment rights. School officials may lack clarity on when and with whom student information is shared, according to Rosiak (2009). Memoranda of understanding should include standard operating procedures for sharing information between school officials and SROs to avoid inappropriate and unlawful exchanges (Atkinson, 2002).

Exclusionary discipline. A final practice that challenges the work of school resource officers and principals in the removal of students from school, even if only for a short period of time. Exclusionary discipline practices continue to be used by schools despite alternative options for supporting safe schools and positive student conduct.

Exclusionary discipline practices include “the use of suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary action resulting in removal from the typical educational environment” (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010, p. 1). Fisher and Hennessey (2015) questioned exclusionary discipline and found little evidence to suggest that it serves as a deterrent to future behaviors. Bracy (2011) offered that it may be counterproductive for schools to use discipline methods that harshly punish because students may be less likely to conform if they feel that school discipline is unfair. Other researchers found disproportionate administration of exclusionary discipline practices to students of color and students with disabilities (Beger, 2002; Counts et al., 2018; Kim & Geronimo, 2010; Na & Gottfredson, 2013).

Efforts to apply less punitive and non-exclusionary consequences better serve students because excluded students are at risk of disengaging from learning and missing out on a positive school environment. Non-exclusionary methods put students in a position where they are less likely to miss additional school and engage in other negative behaviors (Kim & Geronimo, 2010; Lynch et al., 2016). The greater use of student support systems and prevention models to provide multiple tiers of services for students may offer the potential for a more significant impact on behaviors (Eklund, Meyer, & Bosworth, 2018; Kim & Geronimo, 2010).

Summary

This literature review has provided an overview of many of the topics previously examined by researchers interested in the work of school resource officers and principals. The collective research over the past two decades has enabled a greater understanding of

several important aspects of the work of school resource officers and principals.

Increasingly the idea of SROs serving in roles that extend beyond law enforcement, such as the triad model, has been recognized by both researchers and practitioners as a positive development. The recognition of a need for greater clarity and collaboration between school districts and law enforcement agencies has also been a positive outcome of the research. The potential impact of law enforcement in a school-to-prison nexus has been widely examined and will likely remain a key area of focus in the coming years. The partnerships between principals and SROs, however, remain an area of study that deserves greater attention. Chapter Three will detail how this study will help lessen the gap in knowledge of that aspect of the general topic area.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Purpose Statement

I developed this phenomenological study to examine the unique partnerships of SROs and principals serving in Minnesota high schools. The research focused on partnership vision and the experiences that SROs and principals describe in their partnerships through a series of interviews. Making sense of these experiences and identifying the elements that exist in successful partnerships offers the possibility of better understanding and opportunities to support these two groups of professionals.

Research Questions

The methods in this study included the development of research questions designed to better understand the phenomena of partnership. The research question is central to the entire design of a phenomenological study. Moustakas (1994) indicated that the research question “must be stated in clear and concrete terms” and the key terms must be “defined, discussed, and clarified” so the intent and purpose are clear (p. 104). This study sought to answer: *How do school resource officers (SROs) and principals describe their partnerships?* In support of the primary research question, this study will also attempt to answer the following secondary research questions:

- How do principals and SROs describe their vision and preparation for their partnership?
- How do principals and SROs describe the positive outcomes of their partnerships?
- How do principals and SROs describe their ongoing collaboration and communication with one another?
- How do principals and SROs describe the mitigation of challenges that they face with one another?

Study Framework

Creswell, J. W. and Creswell, J. D. (2018) recommended that researchers establish a framework that includes three key elements: a philosophical worldview, a research design, and research methods. In this study, these three elements and a statement of purpose helped organize the research and identify the researcher's perspective.

Constructivist worldview. This study was approached from a constructivist worldview. Constructivism emerged as a theory in the middle of the twentieth century. Constructivist theory suggested that learners are active participants in constructing the knowledge that becomes their understanding of the world. Von Glasersfeld (2005) described knowledge "as a mapping of actions and conceptual operations that had proven viable in the knowing subject's experience" (p. 4). Knowledge creation occurs when an individual interacts with their environment and is exposed to sensory information that disrupts the existing mental models that they possess. This disruption and its subsequent reflection force a reorganization of the individual's understanding of their world.

According to Fosnot and Perry (2005), constructivism “construes learning as an interpretive, recursive, nonlinear building process by active learners interacting with their surround” (p. 34). In *social constructivism*, individuals’ creation of meaning and knowledge, a key component of constructivism, is advanced to include others. Multiple realities are constructed through the lived experiences and social interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). Constructivism aligns well with qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach because, according to Creswell, J. W. and Creswell, J. D. (2018), it uses the experiences of distinct individual participants, the multiple meanings they create, and the interactions that they have with one another as the basis for understanding the research topic.

Qualitative design. The research design for the study utilized qualitative research strategies. Qualitative research offers a variety of models that are well-suited to explorations of individuals and their experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described the work of qualitative researchers as “making sense of, or interpreting, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Qualitative research models, including phenomenology, maintain several common characteristics. According to Moustakas (1994), qualitative models typically:

- focus on “the wholeness of the experience”;
- seek meanings and essences of experience over measurements and explanations;
- gather first-hand accounts of experiences;

- view data from experiences as “imperative in understanding human behavior and evidence for scientific investigations”; and
- arise from the “interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher” (p. 21).

Although other researchers (Covert, 2007; Googins, 1994; Shuler Ivey, 2012; Stumpf, 2006) have studied aspects of the school resource officer and principal partnership from a quantitative paradigm, a qualitative research model was selected for this study because it aligns well with listening to the sense-making and lived experiences of individuals engaged in these partnerships. This perspective, identified by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) as the *qualitative stance*, indicated that “the processes and phenomena of the world should be described before theorized, understood before explained, and seen as concrete qualities before abstract quantities” (p. 15). In this study, I employed qualitative methods to follow the guidance of Brinkmann and Kvale and describe, understand, and identify concrete qualities by allowing individuals with direct experience in the phenomenon to share their experiences.

Phenomenological approach. According to Moustakas (1994), “phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge” (p. 26).

Phenomena, such as fear of failure, the love a parent has for a child, a group’s response to an authoritative leader, or the partnership between professionals, are among the numerous topics of interest that might be explored by researchers engaging in phenomenology.

Cresswell and Poth (2018) detailed that the phenomenological approach within the qualitative research paradigm combines the meaning that multiple individuals describe in

their common lived experiences with a particular phenomenon. After identifying the phenomenon and designing the study, researchers seek to describe the phenomenon's essence as seen in the experiences of the individual participants (Moustakas, 1994). According to Groenewald (2004), this description by the researcher seeks accuracy, refrains from presumptions, and remains true to facts. In this study, the phenomena is the partnership between school resource officers and school administrators.

Research Design

The research design and the development of the interview guide drew heavily from the recommendations of several research theorists. The work of Creswell and Poth (2018) and Maxwell (2009) guided the qualitative design that framed this study. Bednall (2006), Groenewald (2004), and Moustakas (1994) were used to develop the phenomenological approach to answering the research questions. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) were helpful in data collection, interviewing strategies, and transcription. Finally, Saldaña's (2016) work was key to the organization and execution of the coding processes.

Researcher Role. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers using methods aligned with constructivism "recognize that their background shapes their interpretation, and they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own . . . experiences" (p. 24). As a school administrator with several decades of experience working directly with school resource officers, I bring a wide range of my own experiences and beliefs to this study. I must consider my own demographic profile as a White, male educator and researcher. Researchers in the phenomenological realm recognize their positioning but, instead of simply

acknowledging it as constructivists do, also engage in a process that requires a clearing of presuppositions and prior knowledge. While coding and identifying themes, the terms *epoche* (Bednall, 2006; Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Moutsakas, 1994) and *bracketing* (Aagard, 2017; Benall, 2006; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Cresswell & Poth, 2018) reflect efforts by the researcher to welcome emergent information and limit the incursion of their own experiences, prior knowledge, and presuppositions.

Scope. This study examined the experiences of six pairs of school resource officers and principals who partnered or were currently partnered within the past twelve months in Minnesota public high schools. The nature of this phenomenological study was the acquisition of information about the lived experiences of the participants. Thus, the scope of the study is not intended for generalization due to both the small sample size and the limited setting.

Participants. The study employed criterion sampling because “it is essential that all participants have experiences in the phenomenon” according to Cresswell and Poth (2018, p. 157). Criterion sampling involves the “selection of participants who meet predetermined criteria of importance” (Moser and Korstjens, 2018). Participants in this study were selected based on criteria intended to generate responses that would allow for the description of meaningful experiences related to the phenomena of partnership. Pairs of participants (school resource officers and principals) were only considered if they: (a) served together for a minimum of one school year; (b) were either currently serving or had served together in the past twelve months, and (c) were still serving the law enforcement agency or school district that employed them at the time of their partnership.

Potential participants were recruited for the study using both email broadcast and targeted means. The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) sent information to their members asking for volunteers willing to engage in a study of school resource officers and the principals with whom they partner. Potential participants were also identified by contacting candidates recommended by the researcher's current and former SRO and principal colleagues. These targeted contacts were used to provide a better representation of school types and participants. After identifying a mutual willingness to participate in the study, volunteers were separately asked several questions via a telephone call verifying that they met the study's participant criteria.

The decision by two participants to discontinue their involvement impacted the effort to provide a representative group of participants. During the course of the study, one White female school resource officer dropped from the list of participants because she felt uneasy participating. This SRO's decision meant that her female principal partner could not be included in the research. A principal that identified as a Black female withdrew from the study when her SRO partner shared that his department did not approve of his participation.

A numerical pseudonym identifier was assigned to each of the twelve participants in the study. In Chapters IV and V, the six participating school resource officers are identified as S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, S-5, and S-6. Likewise, the principals are identified as P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, and P-6. The number assigned to each participant is random and neither reflects the order of their interview nor any alignment in number with their partner.

School resource officers.

Table A

School Resource Officer Participant Profile

Characteristic	School Resource Officers (n=6)
Gender identified	
Female	0
Male	6
Race identified	
White	5
Asian	1
Reside in school district	
Yes	2
No	4
Schools served in current role	
One	2
Two	3
Three or more	1
Agency type	
Municipal police	3
County Sheriff	3

Table B

School Resource Officer Professional Experience Profile

Years of Service	Mean	Range
Years of law enforcement service	12	5-21
Years with current agency	11.3	5-21
Years of SRO service	3.3	1-7

Principals.

Table C

Principal Participant Profile

Characteristic	Principals (n=6)
Gender identified	
Female	2
Male	4
Race identified	
White	6
School grade configuration	
6-12	1
9-12	5
Current role	
Principal	3
Assistant, associate, or vice principal	3

Table D

Principal Professional Experience Profile

Years of Service	Mean	Range
Years of administrative service	13	9-17
Years of service with current district	9.5	2-17
Years partnership with an SRO	10.3	2-15

Informed consent. In a research study, it is essential to secure informed consent from participants. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) said that informed consent includes providing participants with details of the study's purpose, major design features, and potential risks and benefits for participants (p. 93). The informed consent document (Appendix A) addresses each of these elements. The volunteer participants received a copy of the informed consent document before the collection of any data. Participants were allowed to ask questions about the information in the document before signing the document and voluntarily agreeing to participate.

Disclosure of purpose and design features. Participants were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, the primary means of data collection, and a pre-interview questionnaire. The participants knew that the principal or school resource officer that they partner with was also being interviewed. There was no researcher

deception regarding the true purpose of the study or its design features involved in the recruitment process.

Potential risks and benefits to participants. The potential risks to participants and the groups they represent must be considered and minimized in any research study. In a phenomenological study, the risk potential is heightened by the participants' sharing their experiences and insights. In conducting a study, the researcher must weigh the potential risks against the potential benefits that might occur due to their involvement (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

A pseudonym was assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity and protect their identity. All school resource officers, regardless of the type of agency, were identified as an officer. All administrators, regardless of position, were identified as a principal unless their status as an associate, assistant or vice principal was relevant to the information presented. The participants' school or jurisdiction was also provided a fictitious name to prevent connecting collected data to a specific location.

Data reported in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study was carefully scrutinized to avoid including statements or information that could be identified as coming from a specific participant. Examples of information excluded from reporting include specific names of school districts, law enforcement jurisdictions, and individuals. Details of a number of specific incidents were also excluded in some cases. While these may not be obvious to the intended audience, a study participant might have been able to deduce the individual sharing the information had full details been provided.

Participants may benefit from the study as a result of their opportunity to reflect on their work and partnership. Participants were provided with a copy of the study after its completion so that they may learn from the findings and potentially use the information for professional development.

Setting. The selection of Minnesota public high schools as the setting occurred due to the availability of access by the researcher and the greater representation of school resource officers at the high school level. Swayze and Buskovich (2014) reported that SROs serve in 61% of Minnesota public high schools, the highest among the schooling levels, and a number that the authors claimed to be consistent with national averages. The six schools selected for the study share characteristics with many of the schools utilizing a school resource officer in Minnesota. An attempt was made to diversify the sites based upon student enrollment numbers and geographic locations. The study included one urban, three suburban, and two rural districts. Neither Minneapolis Public Schools nor St. Paul Public Schools, which represent the two largest urban districts in the state, were included because both districts discontinued their school resource officer programs prior to the 2020-2021 school year.

Statistics in the site profiles found below reflect data found on each school's current Minnesota Department of Education's Minnesota Report Card. The rounding of statistics was employed to limit the identification of the participating schools, school resource officers, and principals. Percentages were rounded to the nearest five percent. A five-year mean was used for the reporting of graduation rates due to unique circumstances arising from the pandemic for the graduating classes of 2020 and 2021.

School enrollments for the five smaller schools were rounded to the nearest fifty students. Windsong High School is reported as simply having more than 2,000 students since rounding to the nearest fifty students might increase the likelihood of its identification.

Site A. Great Meadow Secondary School, located in a rural area, maintains an enrollment of approximately 300 students. The student population is 80% White with an identified Hispanic student population of 15%. Great Meadow's students graduate at a rate of 85% and 30% qualify for free/reduced lunch. The school resource officer is a county sheriff's deputy.

Site B. Windsong High School, located in a suburban area, enrolls more than 2,000 students. The student population is 70% White and includes significant numbers of students identified as Hispanic, Black, Asian, and two or more races. The students graduate at a rate of 90% and 10% qualify for free/reduced lunch. The school resource officer is a municipal police officer.

Site C. Bergkamp High School, located in an urban area, maintains an enrollment of approximately 1,800 students. The student population is 50% White and includes significant numbers of students identified as Black (20%), Hispanic (15%), Asian (10%), and two or more races. Bergkamp's students graduate at a rate of 95% and 35% qualify for free/reduced lunch. The school resource officer is a municipal police officer.

Site D. Highbury High School, located in a Twin Cities suburban area, enrolls more than 1,850 students. The student population is 40% White and includes significant numbers of students identified as either Black (25%) or Hispanic (20%). The students

graduate at a rate of 90% and 30% qualify for free/reduced lunch. The school resource officer is a municipal police officer.

Site E. Green Valley, located in a rural area, enrolls approximately 500 students. The community has a mixed population with many residents in typical rural professions and a large number of residents commuting daily into the Twin Cities. The student population is 80% White with about 10% of students identified as Hispanic. Green Valley students graduate at a rate of 95% and 15% qualify for free/reduced lunch. The school resource officer is a county sheriff's deputy.

Site F. Prairieville High School, located in a mixed suburban and rural area, enrolls approximately 900 students. The student population is 80% White with an identified Hispanic student population of 10%. Prairieville's students graduate at a rate of 95% and 15% qualify for free/reduced lunch. The school resource officer is a county sheriff's deputy.

Data Collection Procedures

Interview guide. An interview guide provided a structure for the interview process in this study. This guide included an outline of the interview format, an introductory script, and a list of questions to be asked of the participants. The pilot interview aided the development of the final interview guide.

This study included several data collection strategies. Two pilot interviews, one each with a principal and school resource officer, were conducted separately during the development of the interview guide. A pre-interview questionnaire, completed by the participants, provided background information that was analyzed along with the

interview data. Twelve semi-structured individual interviews of the primary participants were conducted. Finally, field notes were recorded to assist with the recollection of critical elements occurring in the interviews.

Pilot interviews. Two pilot interviews were conducted to identify potential issues with the final questionnaire and interview guide. The pilot interviews were conducted in March, 2022. The interview guide that was developed for the pilot interviews served as the framework for the semi-structured final interviews. The pilot interviews were administered to one pair of participants using the same selection process and criteria used for the final interview.

The first pilot interview was conducted with a pre-interview questionnaire and interview guide (see Appendix C) that included questions tailored to the school resource officer roles. The second pilot interview was conducted with a pre-interview questionnaire and interview guide tailored to the principal role (see Appendix D). Each of the pilot interview guides included a script that thanked the participant, reviewed the purpose of the interview, provided an overview of the interview procedures, and restated key elements in the informed consent letter. Participants were not provided a preview of the interview questions.

The pilot interviews for the school resource officer and principal were transcribed and the responses in both cases suggested that the pilot questions were appropriate and produced meaningful insights. The interviews also generated meaningful unsolicited responses from the participants without the interview guide questions needing to be posed. As a result, the interview guide used in the pilot study was not altered prior to the

final interviews. The data collected during the pilot interviews were not included in the final data set that was coded and analyzed for inclusion in the study.

Pre-interview questionnaire. A pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix E for school resource officers or Appendix F for principals) completed by the participants before their interview served the purpose of gathering background information. The participants answered items about their professional backgrounds, professional development histories related to police and school partnerships, memberships in professional organizations, years of service, and school profiles. Collecting these items in the pre-interview questionnaire allowed increased time to collect in-depth data during the interview and provided the researcher context for pre-interview preparations.

The pre-interview questionnaire collected information using a Google Form via a link sent to the participants' identified email accounts. The participants were required to electronically initial a statement in the form that provided a reminder of their previously submitted informed consent document before seeing or answering any items.

Final interviews. A series of individual semi-structured final interviews of the twelve participants served as the primary data collection method for this study. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), a semistructured life world interview "is defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 6). The interviews used to collect data about the research questions will be identified as the *final interviews* to distinguish them from the *pilot interviews*.

In developing this study, there was consideration of conducting the interviews with principal and school resource officer pairs together. Conducting the interviews together may have offered the possibility of observational data regarding their interactions, both spoken and non-verbal. It may also have helped the participants prompt one another with shared experiences or topics to discuss. The decision to interview the participants separately was based on the desire to provide ample time for each participant to share their own unique experiences and the belief that individual interviews might invite more candid responses.

The final interviews were conducted between April 18, 2022 and June 13, 2022. The interviews were spaced in a manner that allowed for interviews with the pairs of participants to occur within a short window of time. This effort was intended to limit the possibility of a significant event or issue arising between the times that the pairs of participants were interviewed that might impact the participant's responses. The May 24, 2022 shooting in Uvalde, Texas might have proven to be one of these events. In order to maintain a consistency between the interviews, the addition of questions related to Uvalde was not added to the interview guide for the final four interviews that took place. None of the four participants interviewed after Uvalde mentioned the incident in their responses.

The locations for the interviews were determined following the selection of the participants. Each participant was allowed to select a time and place that they believed appropriate for their interview. It was suggested that their choice of location should be comfortable and convenient for the participant and offer the possibility of at least ninety

minutes of uninterrupted time. An opportunity to interview via an online meeting was provided to participants due to the COVID -19 pandemic occurring during the study.

All of the participants elected to conduct their meetings via an online meeting application that included both video and audio functions. Only the audio was recorded using separate recording devices. Ten of the participants joined the online meetings from their work offices. One principal and one school resource officer participated from their home. A copy of the interview guide and two recorders were used in each interview. A copy of the previously signed informed consent letter was available for reference in the event that the participant had any questions about the purpose of the study or their rights as a participant.

Each final interview featured a short welcome followed by scripted introductions and conclusions. The introductions and conclusions included a review of the informed consent document, a note about the nature of phenomenological research, suggestions for speaking in a manner that would produce a quality recording, and words of gratitude for their participation. The introductions and conclusions portions of the interviews were not included in the timing of the interviews because these portions varied greatly in length depending on the number of preliminary questions from the participants.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews and the open-ended questions allowed participants the opportunity to share their experiences of partnership in their own words and without forced constraints. Naturally, some participants provided rich experiences and anecdotes while others were less willing to share as extensively. All of

the participants provided both unsolicited responses and responses to specific questions from the interview guide.

Table E

School Resource Officer Interview Length

Participant	Interview Length (minutes:seconds)
S-1	24:42
S-2	38:12
S-3	32:37
S-4	42:56
S-5	21:18
S-6	36:19

Table F

Principal Interview Length

Participant	Interview Length (minutes:seconds)
P-1	24:12
P-2	25:02
P-3	34:28
P-4	26:46
P-5	42:56
P-6	28:16

Field notes. Field notes were recorded within twelve hours of each interview. According to Groenewald (2004), quality field notes are comprehensive and avoid “judgemental evaluation” while describing critical elements from the interview (p. 48). The field notes template followed Phillippi and Lauderale’s (2017) recommendation and included spaces for documenting the setting, participants, interview, and the researcher’s critical reflection.

The field notes proved to be helpful when engaging in the coding process. Since all of the participants chose to conduct their interviews via an online meeting application few notes were taken about the interview spaces. Much more meaningful were the field notes that identified key ideas and themes from each participant’s interview. During the coding process the ideas and themes in the field notes provided an effective validation when organizing the data found in the transcript.

Field notes also proved helpful in the use of the interview guide. After each interview the effectiveness of the script and questions was noted. Despite the use of pilot interviews, the first interviews that were conducted included questions that were re-ordered in later interviews. These minor adjustments resulted in greater clarity, improved flow, and richer responses.

Treatment of the data. Data collected from the pre-interview questionnaire was maintained in a Google Sheet table. Each participant responded to the pre-interview questionnaire using a pseudonym to shield their identity. Questions in the pre-interview questionnaire were designed to avoid the inclusion of names, specific locations, specific employers, or any other information that might endanger the confidentiality of the

participant and their data. If a participant responded with data that might potentially reveal their identity, the specific information was changed into a series of capital X letters.

The interviews were recorded using two audio recorders with digital memory. The audio files were downloaded onto two memory cards containing only information related to the research study. The second memory card served as a backup of the data in the event of damage to the primary card. After the transfer of the data, the recordings were deleted from the audio recorders. Field notes and interview transcripts were converted to a text format and saved to the same memory cards as the audio recordings. All field notes, transcript files, and audio recordings used the participants' pseudonyms in the naming protocols.

Data Explication Procedures

In phenomenology, the concept of explication of data, rather than data analysis, is preferred by some practitioners (Groenewald, 2004). Explication involves an in-depth examination that permits the explicit emergence of information from a previously implicit form. Data analysis, on the other hand, draws conclusions from established forms such as numeric data sets. The explication process began with a transcription of the final interviews' audio recordings. After verifying the accuracy of the transcripts, a coding process was used to organize the data and identify themes emerging from the interviews. The themes and the composite summary of findings were created and can be found in Chapters 4 and 5.

Transcription. The transcription process demonstrated several challenges. First, as Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) cautioned, “a transcript is a translation from one narrative mode—oral discourse—into another narrative—written discourse” (p. 204). The translation from one mode to another made it impossible to guarantee an accurate representation because, in this process, the researcher assumed a role in constructing the knowledge. Both verbatim and literary transcription formats were considered. The verbatim option was determined to be the better format by considering “what is a useful transcription for my research purposes?” (Brinkmann & Kvale, p. 213). The researcher felt that a verbatim transcription would retain more of the participants’ intent in cited passages, even if it included disfluencies.

For greater accuracy, a set of transcription procedures were carefully followed. Each of the recordings was saved as an audio file. These files were then used to create a transcript using a speech-to-text application. After completing the transcription, the researcher twice played back the audio while reading through the transcript document. The researcher corrected the written document when discrepancies were identified between the audio file and the transcript. This step allowed the written transcript to most accurately reflect the words, spoken emphases, and punctuation that supported the participants’ words.

Verification of data. A summary of findings of each participant’s responses was shared with the participant after completing the transcription process. Participants were provided an opportunity to review the summary and confirm, provide clarity, or challenge any items included in the findings. This verification effort supported quality data

collection. It also acknowledged the importance of understanding the participants' individual experiences and sense-making related to the phenomena. Two participants, one school resource officer and one principal, responded to the summaries that they received. In both cases, the amended portions of their summary related to minor points and were not included in the findings presented in Chapter Four.

Coding of the transcript. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested that “theoretical conceptions of what is investigated should provide the basis for making decisions of how—the method to be used for analyzing content” (p. 217). Saldaña (2016) offered latitude to coders and recommended a system that is cyclical, emergent, and focuses on using methods most appropriate for an individual study. More important than a specific set of protocols or coding methods, Saldaña advocated for a model that would allow data to be assigned codes that would later be synthesized into categories, progress to themes, and finally emerge as assertions or theory (p. 14).

For this study, the coding of the transcript was completed with the primary consideration of answering the study's research question. Four separate cycle-one coding strategies were applied to the data: attribute, descriptive, structural, and In Vivo.

Attribute coding was used with data from the pre-interview questionnaire and the final interviews. Attribute coding is the “notation . . . of basic descriptive information such as: the fieldwork setting . . . participant characteristics or demographics . . . data format . . . time frame . . . and other variables of interest” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 83). In this study, the primary function of attribute coding was to recognize the participant population and the demographic characteristics that they represent. For example, the data gathered

through the pre-interview questionnaire produced a profile of the twelve participants. Participants answered a number of questions about their identified gender, race, employers, seniority, and training. This proved critical in identifying potential limitations of the study based upon a group of participants that did not necessarily reflect a greater population of Minnesota school resource officers and principals.

In Vivo coding permitted the individual voices of the final interview participants to be retained through the transcription and coding process. This coding strategy is useful in phenomenological studies because it utilizes the actual language of the participants in the organization of data. Quoting Charmaz (2014, p. 135), Soldana (2016) indicated that since *In Vivo* coding uses the verbatim language of the members of the group experiencing the same phenomena, it “can provide a crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant” (p, 107). The transcription of the audio recordings sought to capture the voice of each of the participants. Several playbacks of the recordings were done to ensure the accuracy of words, punctuation, emphases, and other mannerisms, including disfluencies and other sentence interruptions. The descriptions provided by the participants in Chapter Four’s *Results* section were documented using *In Vivo* coding to ensure that the participants’ words were most accurately represented.

Descriptive coding allowed for the creation of an extensive list of topic codes from the final interviews, an element necessary for developing concepts and themes. According to Saldaña (2016), researchers utilize descriptive coding to summarize qualitative data using keywords or phrases. For this study, the transcripts were read multiple times after transcription and descriptive coding was conducted and the results

recorded in field notes, transcript margins, and a spreadsheet of identified topics.

Structural coding provided tracking of the frequency of broader themes across the transcripts of the participants. Structural coding can be helpful in multiple participant studies as it “codes and initially categorizes the data corpus to examine comparable segments’ commonalities, differences, and relationships” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 98). The notes from the descriptive coding exercises provided a substantial amount of topic data from the interviews. For example, the lack of role clarity, the need for increased professional development, and the SRO’s role in building relationships with students were all topics that emerged due to frequency of mention by the participants.. These topics were merged into like-groups and became broad themes for presentation in Chapter Four’s *Results* section of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review. A research proposal for this study was presented to the Hamline University Institutional Review Board on December 12, 2021. The Institutional Review Board approved the proposal on January 28, 2022 without any alterations being required.

Conflicts of interest. There are no known conflicts of interest in engaging in this research by the researcher, Hamline University, the participants, or their employers. No financial incentives or grant funds have been provided for this research. The researcher has incurred all expenses.

Reciprocity. The participants in this research received a final copy of the study. Notes to the participants were attached to the study and offered suggestions on using the

findings in their professional development. The participants received a small honorarium consisting of a \$15 gift card from a national coffee chain.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The interview responses shared by the school resource officers and principals provided a significant quantity of data for consideration of the study's research questions. While there are some common themes that will be discussed, it is important to remember that the nature of this type of study is to collect data on the experiences of individuals in relation to a phenomenon. Thus, it is more important to consider the way participants express their individual experiences rather than seeking definitive commonalities among a greater population.

This chapter will examine the results of the interviews conducted with the six school resource officers and six principals. With twelve interviews, each lasting an extended period of time, there is simply no way to present all of the insights and experiences shared by the participants. Instead, their comments relative to the research questions will be detailed. The chapter begins with a number of participants' definition of *partnership* and their vision of partnership with the school resource officer or principal with whom they are paired. Then, the experiences of the participants in regard to preparation for partnership, including selection and training, will be presented. The third major group of findings will share the participants' views on the positive outcomes they

have noted as a result of their partnership. Finally, the participants' insights on their ongoing communication and collaboration, as well as their experiences in mitigating conflict, will be detailed.

Defining Partnership

The participants all began their individual interviews by responding to the question about how they personally define the term *partnership*. This helped to establish partnership as the primary focus of the study. The participant's own definition was accepted as the central focus of each interview. The creation of a working definition of the term *partnership* was considered in the development of the study. However, the phenomenological methodology sought individual definitions from the participants. Presenting a working definition of partnership would likely have influenced the responses so it was rejected.

Their responses demonstrated a number of common elements around the concept of partnership. The participants' definitions frequently included the words *collaboration*, *effective communication*, *common ideas*, and *common objectives* as critical elements. One school resource officer from rural Grand Meadow High School offered that, "partnership to me is working in collaboration between two or more people. They would seem to be on the right or same page, on the right track. Have an idea of what you want to get done or accomplish" (S-3). Another rural SRO from Green Valley said that, "a partnership would be able to communicate well and work together and at the end of the day, kind of have common ideas; things that they want to do" (S-2). Similarly, a principal

from urban Highbury High School mentioned that, “I think, collectively we all work together towards a common goal” (P-6).

Other responses went further in defining partnership. One school resource officer’s definition included elements of resiliency and mutual improvement, saying, “I think my definition of partnership would be working with others through good stuff, through bad stuff, through all different types of work while communicating and effectively improving each other through the work that we do” (S-1).

Two principals suggested that outcomes were a key element in their definition. The first emphasized both outcomes and agreement by defining partnership as, “collaboration between at least two parties and where they can look at ideas, events, situations; and work to make the best possible outcomes to conclusion; where there is more often agreement than disagreement” (P-1). The second principal highlighted outcomes and flexibility saying, “it's people working together for the same cause and the same outcome, but going about it and having the latitude and flexibility to do things kind of their own way within the partnership” (P-2).

Several principals commented on the presence of role and positional authority in their consideration of partnership. A female assistant principal mentioned that she recently reconsidered her definition of partnership after speaking with the school’s female dean of students:

[Me] and my dean just had a conversation about that term [partnership] because I consider us partners, but she did not, because I'm her superior. I never really looked at it that way, because in my mind, I feel like if you work together, and

you are on the same team, you are partners, and it doesn't necessarily mean there's a hierarchy of who's in charge or who's the boss. (P-3)

Two other principals added the element of a common goal. The first, a principal from Windsong, a suburban high school, dismissed the importance of roles. Instead, she placed emphasis on working together and goals, saying:

I think I define partners as people who are collectively working in the same team towards the same goal. And so, I think you're partners if you work together and the two of you, you're working toward the same goals, no matter what your roles are. (P-2)

The second administrator, a male assistant principal working in an urban school, also placed emphasis on working together toward a goal regardless of roles:

I would think, like, our administrative assistants in the office are partners with me. I feel like I'm partners with the lead principal and partners with the dean. The SRO also partners with our activities director and partners with our counselors. Like, I'm partners with our teachers and to me, I think, collectively we all work together towards a common goal of education and providing educational experience for students. So I think partners are anybody kind of working together on the same team . . . toward the same goal, (P-6)

Visions of Partnership

While defining partnership, the school resource officers and principals responded with descriptions that focused on collaboration, communication, common ideas, and common objectives. Responses to questions about their vision for partnership generated a

wider range of responses. This was anticipated because a definition seeks to identify a generalizable meaning of a term, whereas a vision presents a more personal outlook on a topic. Still, within the collection of responses of vision there were a number of elements that were mentioned by two or more participants (see Table X).

Table G

Elements Mentioned in School Resource Officers' and Principals' Vision of Partnership

Element	Mentions of the Element
Open dialogue or communication	5
Respect for expertise	5
Role clarity	4
Collaboration	3
Flexibility	3
Open to ideas and inclusion	3
Improvement of culture	3
Purpose clarity	2
Safety	2
Student focus	2
Task completion	2

Only two participants, one school resource officer and one principal, limited their vision to a single element. One White suburban SRO, who frequently spoke of school climate in his interview, responded, “to improve culture is, like, that’s number one [vision] for partnership, especially between an SRO and a principal” (S-1). The White male principal with the most focused description of vision spoke of clarity of purpose, by

intentionally, “laying out what are the things that are expected, and when I say expected, I mean from both sides” (P-1).

Some of the participants described a vision of partnership with a large number of elements. One veteran, suburban principal mentioned his years of working with a wide range of partners in his educational career. He easily recited a long list of elements that he included in his vision:

An ideal partnership from the school side would be a similar philosophy in terms of looking for various things to advance the culture and climate of a school. And so first and foremost, that has to do with creating solid student relationships; being visible; letting students know that they're heard and appreciated; and following through; being consistent; and in terms of working with colleagues, it's a listening ear. It's a willingness to share thoughts, ideas, expertise, as I mentioned before. And then also, it's collaborating on some of the tough decisions that need to be made, maybe some, some delineation of duty in terms of offenses that we sometimes have to deal with. And it's that open dialogue that you can have. (P-5)

Other principals also presented their vision with either greater detail or more component elements. A female assistant principal with more than a decade in school administration focused on service, collaboration, communication, and mutual respect, saying, “ I feel we both had . . . the common view that our jobs were service to others. And so we just . . . worked together. I think that’s a good partnership because we had really good communication. We had mutual respect” (P-3). Suburban Bergkamp High School’s male principal’s vision included safety, relationships, the provision of resources and

community building. He shared that:

It's being able to know that you're able to keep your school communities safe. That it is relationship-based. That students and staff see a resource that they can go to for the victim. Go to for information without actually, maybe, deciding to have to pull the lever to pursue legal processes. And having . . . the opportunity to connect school to the larger community and especially, like, public and social services, in a partnership, probably from the SRO or the police angle of it. I think schools provide a huge opportunity for those relationships, that community building. (P-4)

A white suburban sheriff's deputy with only a year of service as a school resource officer presented a vision with some similar elements including communication, inclusion, and clarity of roles:

I think the most important part is communication. Another part is inclusion and the ability to understand the different roles that take place within a school setting and a law enforcement setting. Inclusion for me, again, is being able to sit at the same table with the administration and, while it may not have anything to do with a law enforcement setting, further understand topics such as their policies or student involvement, (S-6)

Communication and clarity of role was also at the center of a veteran school resource officer's vision. The White sheriff's deputy shared that:

It [vision] goes back to that communication piece. Being able to talk to each other openly about ideas. Some people just can't talk well together. They don't work

well together, and you know, I always feared when I took this job that I'd be made an apprentice. It's just some people, I think, want the same types of things.

Problem is, coming into a school like this, I don't know exactly what the school wants, and what they want for their SRO. So it's good to have that communication and be able to talk to the person, you know, I would prefer if you [principal] came to me and said, "Hey, what do you think about this?" We then go and I do the same to him. Instead of like, "this is the line, this is what we do and this is what we don't do." I think that works better if everyone can communicate. (S-2)

One Asian American school resource officer serving at Highbury's urban campus provided two comments that were not mentioned by the other subjects. In his interview he frequently discussed *trust* and its importance in partnership. His vision weighed heavily on the idea, "that you can trust this person and depend on this person to accomplish—to do things that you know the other person will like" (S-4). The Highbury SRO, who was new to the SRO assignment, was also the only participant to discuss discomfort as part of learning, saying, "yeah, like every new position—it's a little uncomfortable at first. You know, and I always had this little area in my head where I want to be uncomfortable sometimes to gain more experiences" (S-4).

The participants' description of their vision of partnership resulted in a wide variety of responses. The frequent mentions of open dialogue, respect for professional expertise, and clear roles stand out among the range of responses. The mention of safety and improved school culture in a number of responses will be examined among a number of other positive outcomes later in this chapter.

Preparation for Partnership

Selection and assignment of school resource officers. In the interviews a number of the participants discussed their experiences with the process of assigning an officer to a school building. Several school resource officers indicated that they viewed the school resource officer position as a desirable assignment. When describing the assignment an officer that enjoys the position said that, “it's not a punishment” (S-2). Other SROs agreed and indicated that interest in a vacancy exists among others in the department whenever the term limits for a colleague’s service is reached. A white municipal police officer serving at suburban Windsong High School indicated that the assignment is desirable, saying:

It's a pretty coveted spot. Anytime . . . our four year rotation ends, there's always enough people that want it that the school district [has to] interview. So I think for the most part, the majority of the SROs, and the SROs that I've worked with in the surrounding districts, they want to be there and I think they want to be in it for the right reasons. They don't want to be there just so they can work a Monday through Friday schedule and have holidays off. (S-5)

A county sheriff that is assigned to Green Valley, a small suburban district completed a competitive process for the assignment. He shared that his selection required a number of attempts:

There's always somebody that wants to do this job. I did seek it out. I've been around and have done a lot of different things. And this is why, for me, this is fun. So this was definitely something I put in for. [There is] not necessarily a time

limit for it. Although, with that being said, there isn't anything sacred saying that [he would] be here for X amount of time either. So sure. Every year is like well, my administration says I'm going back next year. So that's good. (S-2)

The principals reported a variety of experiences when describing their roles in the recruitment, selection, and assignment of the school resource officers in their schools.

One principal reported that there was no opportunity for input from the school on the school resource officer assigned to the school, saying that, “this year, we had a new person assigned to us. And my understanding is there was no communication with the schools. They were just kind of all like ‘this is who was going to be assigned.’” (P-3)

Similarly, a rural principal said that the county sought a deputy that would be interested in the role but did not solicit input from the school:

It is up to the discretion of the SRO’s employer to assign someone to this duty.

And over conversation over time with the SRO, I am under the impression that the administration of the SRO’s employer first and foremost asked, you know, who would be most interested in a position like this so they're not just randomly assigning. They're taking someone who has an initial interest and assigning them in that position. (P-5)

Other principals reported having more input in the process of hiring the school resource officer, including the opportunity to participate in interviews. A principal from urban Highbury High School, whose school boundaries include several jurisdictions, shared that his relationship with law enforcement leaders was strong despite limited candidate options:

I have sat in a number of interviews with SROs, but here's the kicker: They only give us a couple to choose from, [The police will share that] they've had three apply and I might go tell the chief, "I really liked this guy."

With that being said, we've got a good enough relationship with . . . our main departments that they know what we're looking for. Those guys call me regularly. You know, they're gonna say, "[Dan], this guy's a good fit. This guy's not a good fit."

So I think that's a relationship piece and a trust factor that we have with our SRO higher-ups. . . . We replaced a number of them [SROs] this year and I sat it on every interview. (P-6)

A male suburban principal with a strong sense of the roles a school resource officer can fill described having served on a recent SRO interview team. Earlier he helped the municipal police leadership identify the characteristics of a preferred candidate and vision for an SROs role within the school:

I was a part of the process of working with the captain and the sergeant who oversees the SRO program, and talking about kind of the qualities that we were looking for and things that were important for us. And kind of shaping that vision a little bit so that they could go out and see what interests there would be amongst their officers and rank and file there. And then, when they got to the point of having three people that they thought were good contenders for two positions—then we talked a little bit about each one of those candidates and kind of what would be, who would be potentially the best fit. The final decision went to

them, but felt very collaborative in that process. (P-4)

As a group, the principals appreciated the opportunity to contribute as much as possible to the selection of the school resource officers coming into their buildings. The opportunity to assist the law enforcement officials in the selection of an SRO was consistent with high levels of partner satisfaction among the participants in this study.

Training for school resource officers. The role of school resource officer is multi-faceted and none of the SROs in the study came into their positions without significant experience working in a school setting. For some, their experience in schools was exclusively limited to their own time as students. It is, therefore, not surprising that the SROs described the transition to their new positions in schools as challenging. In their interviews, officers identified several common themes. Most participated in some preservice training, but experienced having to learn on the job. Being in schools required SROs to operate in a new environment, different from their usual work settings. The SRO participants all made some mention of having to adjust to contemporary school culture and “how education works.” The officers also shared that they had received very little training in how to most effectively partner with their principal.

While school resource officers received little training on how to effectively partner with a principal, they did receive training in areas that would support their work in the schools. All six had received training in topics such as emergency response protocols, mental health issues, and de-escalation. Five of the six SROs completed a training course conducted by either the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) or other non-governmental organizations. Three of the six SROs completed

training by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Department of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, or other law enforcement agency. The law enforcement agency training opportunities mentioned by the SROs almost exclusively focused on emergency preparations.

NASRO's most popular professional development offering, and the one that the five participants completed, is its *Basic School Resource Officer Course*. The course provides 40 hours of instruction to participants and a certification upon completion. The *Outline and Agenda* document indicates that the course will “enhance participants’ knowledge of the functions of the school resource officer and increase their understanding of how school resource officers can effectively fulfill their role in the school setting” (National Association of School Resource Officers, 2022). The current version of the course includes a variety of modules related to various aspects of SROs’ work in schools:

- Foundations of School-Based Law Enforcement
- The SRO as Informal Counselor/Mentor
- The SRO as Public Safety Educator
- School Law
- Ethics and the SRO
- Adolescent Brain Development
- Supporting Students with Disabilities
- Building a Positive Digital Culture
- Trauma-Informed Practices

- Human Trafficking
- Behavioral Health (Mental Health Suicide and Substance Abuse)
- Behavioral Threat Assessment
- Developing and Supporting Successful Relationships with Diverse Students
- Verbal De-Escalation
- School Emergency Operations Planning: Navigating a School Crisis
- Armed Assailant Response
- NASRO Membership Benefits and Website Resources

An assessment of the efficacy of the NASRO Basic School Resource Officer Course is not part of this study but three SROs indicated that it helped their transition into their new role and provided guidance on a number of aspects that they had not considered prior to the training. One of the officers that had found it helpful shared that the curriculum was extensive and found the volume of information to be overwhelming for a one-week training. School administrators are also welcome to participate in the training, but none of the principals in this study had completed the poorly advertised course.

Three of the school resource officers that completed the NASRO training prior to the start of their service spoke of the triad model, which describes the SRO role as a combination of law enforcement, informal counseling and mentorship, and law-related teaching. Having a background with the triad model allowed those SROs to frame their role much more clearly than the officer that did not complete the training. One officer's description of a typical day highlighted his understanding of the law enforcement,

teaching and mentorship elements of the triad model, “in addition to limited law enforcement responsibilities, I will be in a class later in the afternoon teaching. And the mentorship piece and counselor, those are the biggest three things” (S-1). A new SRO also shared that his experiences extend beyond just a law enforcement role, saying “I like being in classrooms even though I am not their actual teacher” and “I have students approach me that feel more comfortable talking to me than their deans or therapists” (S-4). Later, the officer clarified that he respects the roles that all of the other professionals play in a school setting and did not want to give the impression that he was replacing deans or therapists. Instead, he saw himself as a person that students could talk to and then he could connect the students to resources if he were unable to assist them.

A different school resource officer that had completed only one year at his school reported entering the role without any significant training or preparation for working in K-12 schools. Regarding his lack of preparation for the role, “everything has come from my knowledge since being at the school. Not having anyone to talk to [prior to starting], I didn’t really know what it was supposed to look like, or what it could look like” (S-2). The officer’s predecessor in the role had served at the mixed rural and suburban school for more than a decade. The female assistant principal that served with both the SRO and his predecessor recognized some of the challenges with such limited preparation and onboarding and owned some of the responsibility:

Maybe some of that's on us. Maybe there wasn't clear enough training for the person to come into that position. Maybe we didn't set that person up for success.

That's obviously a lack of communication between the county and the schools. It

doesn't feel like there's a good process in place when we onboard a new SRO that they have all the training that they need to come in, because it's very different than being a police officer on the beat. (P-3)

The officer and the assistant principal both acknowledged the SRO's successful growth in the role over the course of the first year, but also recognized that the growth might have been even greater with additional training.

Several principals reported having little knowledge of the preparation that their school resource officer partners completed prior to their service in schools. The partnering law enforcement agency typically pays for most or all of an SRO's professional development. According to the participants, school district or principal involvement in SRO training was minimal or non-existent. The male principal at the study's smallest school was blunt in his lack of knowledge, saying, "What topics has the SRO been trained in? I honestly don't know specifics" (P-5). Another rural principal knew that his partner had completed training but lacked knowledge of the content, saying, "I know he went down to somewhere in Texas. Maybe San Antonio? He had SRO-specific training as part of our grants that were available to start the program. Probably some NASRO training" (P-1). A couple of SROs described their only pre-service interactions with the principal as informal conversations, including discussions to get to know one another or talk about office space arrangements.

Table H

Self-reported Professional Development Experience by Topic Area

Topic Area	Principals (n=6)	School Resource Officers (n=6)
Active shooter response, including A.L.I.C.E	6	6
Alcohol, drugs, or chemical dependency	2	4
Behavior management	5	4
Bully and harassment	5	2
Child development	4	2
Communication strategies	5	3
Disability awareness	3	2
Education law	6	2
Emergency planning	4	4
Ethics	4	2
Gangs	1	1
Gender equity	3	1
Juvenile justice codes	0	2
Mental health	5	5
Mentorship	2	1
Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS)	5	0
School-based law enforcement	1	1
Racial equity	5	3
Restorative justice	4	1

Professional Development Experience by Topic Area (contd)

Topic Area	Principals (n=6)	School Resource Officers (n=6)
School policies and procedures	6	2
School resource officer roles	1	6
Sex trafficking	1	4
Social justice	4	2
Social media	2	2
Special education	5	1
Student rights	1	1
Truancy	5	1
Victim advocacy	1	1
Violence prevention	1	1

Training for principals. The principals in this study lacked any significant level of professional development to support their partnership with their school resource officers. Even the principals that did have a strong sense of how to partner with the SRO in an effective manner had developed that knowledge through previous experience of working with other SROs. The principals reported very little preparation prior to the arrival of SROs in their buildings. According to the principals' pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix X), the only training that all principals had completed relative to their partnership with an SRO was related to emergency procedures. It should be noted that any principal, regardless of the presence of an SRO or not, would likely have received similar emergency response training.

Only one of the six participating principals, a veteran male assistant principal from urban Highbury High School, received training in principles of school-based law enforcement and school resource officer roles. That assistant principal benefited from the training but, compared to his colleague, also had the greatest number of years partnering with SROs. He also served in a district with a long-established SRO program, clear memorandum of understanding, and engaged law enforcement leadership.

According to one school resource officer, training must include all of a school's administrative team in addition to the SRO. Despite employing a well-trained assistant principal and putting clear systems in place, Highbury High School ineffectively utilized their school resource officer due to a lack of alignment among the administrative team. The school's SRO shared that, "I am pretty sure that they [the head principal] had never had training on what we are supposed to do, or how to be used, because they think I'm a security guard" (S-4). The SRO felt underutilized after being assigned to tasks such as traffic control, main entry security, and lunch supervision. In addition to identifying the principal and assistant principal needing to align their goals for the SRO, the officer suggested a need for mutual professional development that would permit the SRO and principals' partnership to grow:

The [head] principal here did not have an SRO [at their previous school]. Because they didn't know what to do with me or put me anywhere. I think that that [mutual professional development] would definitely help if there is a class where the principal, associate principal, and SRO can go together, kind of help grow." (S-4)

A desire for mutual professional development was mentioned in several

interviews despite only limited experience with that type of training. Neither the SROs nor any of the principals recalled any prior mutual professional development in an educational environment, except in the area of emergency response protocols. One rural principal noted that, “I have not had any specific PD [professional development] related to working with an officer. . . . other than active shooter training” (P-1). Only a single principal had received mutual professional development, but that had occurred decades earlier and prior to working in education:

I'm lucky enough to have worked security for a number of years. So I understand some of the protocol that happens in dealing with people and I worked [for a professional sports league] for seven or eight years. So I had a little bit of training with those guys [police]. (P-6)

Several principals were blunt in their response to questions about their lack of training and professional development prior to working with a school resource officer. “None. None that I can think of” reported a veteran assistant principal (P-2). Another assistant principal with a long history in school administration shared that, “I have worked with SROs for years but I don’t recall ever training together other than some kind of emergency response stuff. I don’t know where the officers are coming from as far as educational philosophy” (P-3).

Despite their acknowledgement of initial training that would support their partnership, none of the principals in the study reported any significant efforts to engage their school resource officers in professional development that might support their efforts in the schools. None of the SROs reported ever being invited to or attending staff training

sessions. An SRO shared that he was surprised to learn that had had not been invited to participate in a session related to suicide prevention that teachers are required to complete for relicensure. A lack of an invitation is not the only barrier reported. Two principals shared that on non-student days that are dedicated to professional development officers are expected to use the time to complete firearms training or operate on patrol.

Both school resource officers and principals reported limited preparation ahead of their partnership. While most SROs received training helpful for the tasks and conditions they might encounter in their new role, neither the SROs nor the principals had adequate preparation for the partnerships that they were entering. The lack of preparation for partnership perpetuated even after working together. In the interviews there was limited mention of any kind of mutual professional development. This gap was a common frustration by both groups, yet very little had been done in any of the six districts to remedy the matter.

Positive Outcomes of Partnership

All of the participants in the study saw the presence of school resource officers in schools and their partnership with principals as beneficial. The participants consistently identified four major benefits: school safety, access to resources, relationship building, and an opportunity for improved trust between young people and law enforcement.

School safety. Security and the sense of safety on campus regularly appeared among the benefits identified by the participants. The school resource officers in this study all viewed their role as multifaceted but they clearly view the safety of the campus as their first role. Each of the principals commented on the role of SROs in the safety of

the school. One said that the presence of a school resource officer on the school's rural campus, "just maintains feelings of safety for some kids. I think that's important.

Knowing that there is that person" (P-1).

The presence of an officer, however, was not viewed as enough by many officers and principals who stressed that presence includes visibility. Principals want their school resource officer partners interacting with students and staff. Some principals reported making their partnership overt. A female suburban assistant principal said that "when we're [SRO and principal] out together and we're working together, students see us. . . . It can help us as administrators demonstrate that we care about school safety (P-2).

Working together, according to the principal, also includes the students being aware of information sharing "so kids know that we're talking to the police and the kids know that the police are talking to us" (P-2). Visibility proves challenging for school resource officers assigned to multiple buildings. Often when districts or law enforcement agencies have limited resources officers are assigned to multiple school sites. That was the case with four of the officers, representing both large and small schools in rural and suburban districts, in this study. . Three officers served two buildings and one was assigned to three sites within the district.

Access to resources. School resource officers provide the opportunity to share both their expertise and access to resources. School resource officers possess a great deal of expertise that can support classrooms in a number of academic areas. Many also have connections to non-profit and governmental agencies that can provide for the needs of students and their families.

The triad model calls for officers to serve as law-related educators in addition to their law enforcement and mentor roles. Several school resource officers described their experiences going into classrooms to educate youth. Officers mentioned experiences presenting in psychology and contemporary issues courses. Health teachers also regularly ask officers to come into classes studying chemical use to discuss the impacts of alcohol and drugs on users. A White deputy assigned to a rural school listed a number of his experiences connecting students to resources:

I've been in the classroom for driver's ed. I've done career development classes in school. . . . I've had them [Red Cross-trained deputies] come in and help teach the CPR class. And we've also had interest from Pheasants Forever to put on a shooting class. And we've also done stuff outside of school. (S-3)

Two officers also indicated that their support for students extends beyond the classroom and that they enjoy teaching students in a different manner by serving as a coach and an athletic official for a number of sports.

Principals frequently interact with local government agencies and the school resource officers often serve as a contact to the city or county. Principals mentioned a number of times when their SRO provided access to governmental services and logistical assistance including requests for additional overnight surveillance, traffic control, maintenance equipment, and fingerprinting. A principal from a small community raved about his partner and said “having more access to law enforcement . . . in a rural part of the county has been immeasurable in terms of benefits” (P-5). He felt that without his partner that he would be unable to pull off many of the community events that the school

hosts during the year. An assistant principal from a larger suburban school shared that the SRO at her school provided access to social services and court personnel that were otherwise difficult to reach “despite so many unanswered messages. I mentioned it to [the SRO] and within two minutes I had the truancy people on the line” (P-2). Several principals also shared that they were able to use their officers to confirm information that they might not otherwise have had easy access to in the aftermath of incidents. In one of those cases, the SRO quickly connected the principal and the family services official so they could share critical information.

Relationship building. The school resource officers and principals identified their partnership as key to the development of positive relationships with many members of their school communities including both students and staff. Each of the SROs and principals mentioned the importance of relationships in the school setting and described ways that SROs contribute to a positive climate. The SROs were interested in the development of relationships in order to serve as a resource to students. Three SROs shared experiences demonstrating their desire to assist students. The first officer, assigned to a suburban school, discussed his engagement efforts as heavily focused on students:

All I do is engage with students all day to try and develop those relationships. So when I do communicate with classes, or have a student come to me to discuss a certain issue, we can discuss it and they can trust the things that I say. (S-1)

A second officer saw his partnership with the principal as a key conduit in building relationships with students in his small rural school:

I think it [partnering with the principal to build relationships] shows that we can

work together and that if we [school resource officers] are in the classroom, they [students] feel comfortable calling me to help with something that is a school issue . . . knowing that I can take the information they give me even though if I can't do anything with it, I can pass it off to either the dean of students or the principal. (S-3)

Partnering with the principal allowed another SRO to be able to provide multiple perspectives to students at his rural school. This teaming approach when speaking with students was referenced by SROs and principals as one of their most frequent examples of working in partnership. The deputy working as an SRO commented that meeting together with the principal and students, “really helped because I can educate on one side—the law . . . and he can educate a little bit more on the school’s policies” (S-2).

Improved trust between young people and law enforcement. Of all of the topics discussed in the interviews of school resource officer and principal partnership, the opportunity for improving the trust between law enforcement and young people was most frequently referenced. Every participant in the study viewed establishing trust as an essential outcome of having an SRO program in school.

Principals and school resource officers alike mentioned the need for their partnership to help build trust and relationships between law enforcement and young people. Principals were viewed as needing to provide an environment where they allow SROs to fulfill all three areas of the triad model. According to a White SRO at suburban Bergkamp High School, the principal must trust that the officer is not coming into the school environment:

. . .to get kids or write tickets, or do any of those things. They [principal] trust that I am here to try and improve the community, and improve the students, and create a good culture around allowing the students to leave here and be productive, and go make big things happen in the world. (S-1)

Participants expressed that partners must also trust that they can share the responsibility for supporting students. The same SRO shared that we collectively, “keep helping kids grow. . . . I trust that if a student doesn't want to talk to me, they feel comfortable talking to an administrator . . . [so] the right things are going to be done” (S-1).

A number of the participants found the humanizing of officers as central to these efforts. Trust with students builds when school resource officers are humanized and relate to the students that they are serving. According to an SRO in an urban school, “we're humans behind this badge. We have family. We're part of the community” (S-4).

Recognizing the current challenge of environmental considerations for police, another White SRO in a suburban school shared that:

My goal was to kind of show kids that I was a normal person. Like I had a family at home. I could talk to them just like they could talk to a teacher in the building, you know, and just hopefully try and destigmatize my role, especially in the current environment of law enforcement. What they see on social media and the media often isn't too fond of us . . . so I'm just trying to destigmatize some of that and maybe build some comfort, a comfort level around law enforcement (S-5).

Several principals also highlighted the importance of SROs demonstrating that they are much more than an authority figure focused on order. A female assistant principal at a

suburban school shared “I’m not interested in partnering with someone that is only here to enforce the law. I don’t want my students to be afraid of the police. My students need a trusting police force” (P-3). Another principal felt that the SRO’s participation in pepfest games and other fun activities showed the students that the officer wants to be a part of the school community instead of being an outsider assigned to enforce order.

Since the events of George Floyd’s May, 2020 murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota the level of attention given to the role of police has increased. The conversations about policing have impacted the participants relative to law enforcement’s relationship with schools. The interview guide for this study included a question specific to the impact of Floyd’s death on the participants’ work in the schools, but most of the school resource officers and principals made reference to the climate surrounding police prior to being asked about the topic.

Although Floyd’s death resulted in a greater examination of school resource officer programming, some of the partners had considered the role of law enforcement in schools even prior to May, 2020. A White male principal with a particularly strong background in social justice and a position in a diverse suburban school shared that:

I didn't need the crisis and the murder of George Floyd to raise my awareness or think about how our communities of culture, and just teens in general, can look and feel about police officers. So despite not needing that to happen, I think it helped all of us to kind of re-examine [beliefs]. (P-4)

Re-examining those beliefs required a willingness to engage in challenging conversations. This same principal, following prior high-profile incidents of perceived

police abuse, had already facilitated healthy dialogue in the building where the whole school community:

. . . talked about those [inequitable policing, race, and power] pieces. We were really intentional about just naming what was happening in our communities and that harm that was taking place when charges were not pressed against the officers and the murder of Breonna Taylor.” (P-4)

The principal shared that the thoughtful and inclusive approach taken likely helped the school avoid some of the finger pointing and accusations that arose at other high schools in the district. Whether it had the impact of establishing or re-establishing trust between the students and law enforcement proved difficult for the principal to measure, but he felt the dialogue between the parties in the school community unquestionably provided opportunity for improvements.

A White suburban school resource officer also indicated that the role of police was an area of conversation among students for some time, but even greater frank and straightforward dialogue had emerged over the past two years. Instead of conversations about things like theft and parking, “the conversations are deeper. And there's lots of times where I go into a class to teach, and, or just discuss things from a law enforcement side where the conversation goes right towards social justice, and those types of conversations” (S-1). The officer indicated that he welcomed these conversations because they have resulted in much more honesty and interest in the good of the whole community. He shared that, “asking those questions of ‘why’ has [resulted in] a big impact. . . . I don't have a lot of the answers . . . but at least a productive conversation can

happen” (S-1). When asked about the impact on trust, he said that it is difficult to assume the feelings of others. However, he has not personally experienced hostility from students that might be leary of a police presence in the school. saying, “I really feel like I have not been attacked or anything like that” (S-1).

As a group the participants were generally aligned in the identification of several positives that they believe to have come from their partnership. Participants regularly mentioned school safety, relationship building, and improved trust between students and law enforcement. The rural principals in particular identified the school resource officers as providing access to resources and serving as a conduit to services. Perhaps the most notable of the findings in these areas is the absence of officers engaging in enforcement of school policies.

Ongoing Communication and Collaboration

In their definitions and visions of partnership the participants frequently mentioned communication. The term communication can represent a wide range of interactions as the participants in the study demonstrated. Most participants reported having nearly daily interactions with their partner. These interactions ranged from impromptu exchanges in the hallway to scheduled meetings to discuss matters such as child welfare, security, and behaviors in the school.

At least one of the partners in each of the six pairs identified that the school resource officers and principal were communicating regularly. It is common for the SROs and principals to hold short conversations in the offices of one of the partners. According to several participants, these office “drop-in” or “check-in” sessions typically include an

exchange of pleasantries, an “update on what I am hearing or seeing out in the school” (S-3), and discussion of “things that are coming up on the calendar that I need to be aware of” (S1). These meetings regularly include other members of the staff, including assistant principals, deans, and counselors. These short impromptu conversations often occur while supervising the lunchroom or walking the hallways. Several SROs from the larger schools mentioned that they similarly meet with all of the building’s administrators multiple times per week.

Despite the regular communication, the participants rarely commented on specific incidents of collaboration. This stands counter to the frequent mention of collaboration as a key element in partnership. A clear theme of parallel work emerged from both the school resource officer and principal interviews. In a number of cases the partners described having common objectives and communication, but then operating without little significant task interaction with their partner. School resource officers are taking a lead from their principal partners and focusing their efforts on what they perceive as their areas of focus. An experienced suburban SRO described the efforts to provide information and establish a plan for the school:

He [principal] does a very good job communicating with me. . . . He communicates with me on the functions of the building and also gets my input on things that can be improved, or why a police department does a certain thing. There's that communication piece there that allows for the school to function as best as possible. . . . I can't be productive in that triad unless I have an idea of what's going on in the building.” (S-1)

Once the principal sets the tone and direction, the SRO and the principal often have similar objectives, such as safety and order, but end up focusing on their own unique set of tasks. This parallel approach to meeting objectives typically means that there are few common tasks. An SRO at suburban Windsong High School described how the partners work in parallel, saying:

We have the same goal of, you know, keeping everybody safe and having it be a positive experience for everybody. . . . And we each kind of have separate goals. I think we kind of each stayed in our own lane, but we were very respectful of each other's lane, in a way, and we kind of collaborate. But I didn't think I'd tell them how to run their school and when push came to shove, you know, if there was something that was serious enough, they didn't really try and tell me how to be a cop (S-5).

The school resource officers were not alone in their recognition of the parallel work. An experienced suburban assistant principal described how she and her partner conducted their work and frequently deferred to one another's expertise. She identified her work as being:

. . . more on the academic school side and the SRO uses his experience, or hers, in terms of legal and police. . . jurisdiction and we mesh the two together to form that kind of team. . . . They [school resource officers] give us the latitude to make calls on anything that deals with the school and we do the same for them in terms of police stuff (P-2).

The study did indicate that the partners commonly engaged with one another

while serving on either standing or ad hoc committees. Three principals shared that they included their school resource officers in school teams or committees. Several school resource officers concurred and reported serving on committees related to building safety, emergency response, climate, and logistics. Two principals and an SRO mentioned officers' participation on student assistance teams with other professionals in the building. Another principal, however, clearly indicated that he did not feel it was appropriate to have the SRO serve on the students assistance team because, "it might be difficult for the officer to break from his law enforcement role while we are talking about a lot of the kids' background information" (S-6). The suburban principal that chose not to include the SRO on the student assistance team commented that he has regular meetings that accomplish many of the same objectives, but allows him to carefully filter the information that is shared.

The statements related to communication and collaboration by the school resource officers and principals initially suggested high levels of engagement in both areas. While digging deeper, the participants were less likely to provide specific evidence of their perceived efforts. Communication between school resource officers and the principals they partner with are frequent and typically casual in nature. Beyond the frequency, however, the participants shared widely varying descriptions of the nature of their interactions. Collaboration between the two partners also appears to be somewhat exaggerated. Assessing their level of true collaboration proves challenging since the partners act toward a common objective, but rarely engage in the same work.

Identifying and Mitigating Challenges in Partnership

Just as there were many positive aspects to the partnership between school resource officers and principals, there were also several challenges that participants described and ways that they mitigate those issues. The most common themes focused on ongoing communication between the principals and SROs and the need to build trust.

Every participant made some reference to the need for frequent conversations between the SROs and principals. One school resource officer shared the importance of working with his building's administrators in order to grow:

We talk all the time about challenges and what we don't like. I think there were some problems at the beginning. I think we have that understanding now. Our team has built trust within each other. . . . We know what our role is and tag team; where one steps in and one steps out. We play off each other so we can get the result that we want (S-4).

A school resource officer that has developed a stronger connection with the principal over several years reported that his partnership with the principal improved significantly when he received advice from a former SRO about asking for clarity when he was unsure about the principal's intent:

The first thing that I try and do is ask 'why?' Because in most disagreements, I would say the reason [for disagreement] is that I don't understand the reasoning behind it. So by asking why, the administration team can explain that this is what we're thinking. And we can still disagree after I hear that, but at least I know where it's coming from, rather than just going no, that's wrong (S-1).

Most of the partners shared that they speak often but that most of the conversations are informal in nature. Both groups shared that the communications are typically short and take place during office drop-ins or in the hallways or cafeteria. Usually the topics include specific student matters, the climate in the school, or supervision of the building. The partners reported infrequently meeting in a formal setting. These meetings usually focus on a specific topic that impact both of their roles such as emergency planning when they do occur.

The formal conversations between the school resource officers and principals sometimes include others. Members of both groups identified a need for law enforcement and district leaders to communicate in supporting the partners. A male suburban principal attributed much of their success to including leadership in a wide exchange of ideas:

We're not afraid to bring in other voices. I've sat in a number of meetings with the police chief and with the captains and with some of the SROs they are associated with, the superintendent, and our director of secondary schools. They've asked me to sit in on a number of those because you have what's on paper and then you have what goes into practice and they've asked us to talk specifically because we have such a good relationship here. So to try to kind of normalize and get a sense of what some best practices have been between our building and our SRO (P-4).

Conversely, the principals and school resource officers that identified the greatest challenges in their initial partnerships also noted the lack of direction and engagement from law enforcement and district leaders.

The enforcement of behavioral management of students by school resource officers, a source of potential challenge according to research, was addressed by several of the participants. The interviews indicated that the SRO participants held little or no responsibility for behaviors as long as the infractions remained at the level of school-level violations. Multiple participants discussed the presence of boundaries that the partners worked to identify and avoid breaking in regard to responding to student behaviors. Rural Grand Meadow's principal referenced a clear distinction between he and his SRO partner commenting that, "I think he [school resource officer] understands where the line is and I haven't seen him cross the line" (P-1). An assistant principal from suburban Windsong High School described how she and her SRO partner focused on a suspension for a serious infraction:

I'll handle everything to do with the school [such as] the suspension, the communication with teachers, your academics while you're out, and our SRO will handle everything to do with the law part. And so I don't think we ever cross those lines. (P-2)

The distinction between behavioral infractions and criminal activity was less clear to many of the staff members in two buildings who viewed the school resource officer as being present to enforce school policies and maintain order. A principal that had a number of staff members complain about the SRO's unwillingness to enforce a policy that prohibited hats in the hallway during school hours needed to spend time in a faculty meeting distinguishing the SRO's enforcement focus.

A number of participants suggested that the mitigation of challenges might be partially the product of school resource officers acquiescing to the will of the school. Members of four separate partnerships indicated that officers may act in a manner that they believe to be necessary to operate in a school environment. Speaking to how school resource officers navigate the unique culture of working in a schools, one White suburban officer commented that:

...most police probably think a school environment is way too liberal and most people in the school environment probably think the police are way too conservative in the way that things are run. We try and look past it . . . I recognize that I'm in *their* school. (S-5)

This acquiescing to the perceived wishes of the principals was noted by others. An Asian American SRO suggested that, “he [the principal] tells me what he thinks and how he wants it. I listen. I basically say . . . ‘let me know what you want’”(S-4). Another officer, serving at mixed rural and suburban Prairieville High School, even suggested that his acquiescence forced him to “learn rather quickly to make this school administration happy even if it goes against . . . [what] my own morals would be, or what I’ve garnered while working in law enforcement to be correct ” (S-6). A suburban principal shared that his SRO partner might not operate the same in and out of school and that “when it comes to school stuff [the] SRO might just acquiesce” (P-4). These comments suggest that some of the discussion about roles and lines that are established between the partners may have elements of concession of responsibilities in addition to effective partnering.

The participants in this study detailed a number of challenges that they have faced, but they also shared ways to work together to minimize their challenges. Efforts to communicate vision and separate the school resource officers from the enforcement of school policies were identified as important to a number of the participants. However, the partnership in some cases may be supported by the school resource officer's willingness to acquiesce to the perceived will of the principals.

Summary

The findings of this study suggest that the partnership between school resource officers and principals is complex. Partners reported a number of common thoughts in their individual definitions of *partnership*. Their visions of what partnership means in their work, however, differed widely both between and within the groups of school resource officers and principals. These differences were rarely discussed between the partners and a great deal of confusion exists regarding the role of SROs in schools.

Training in how to partner appears to be a gap for both groups. Principals, in particular, expressed little experience in preparing themselves for the presence of law enforcement in their schools.

Partners generally viewed their partnership as positive despite the challenges they encountered. They believed that their schools benefit from their work together and from the presence of law enforcement. The reports of meaningful communication and collaboration between the partners may be exaggerated, but the pairs found ways to be effective. A factor to consider in assessing the effectiveness, however, is the potential of

officers acquiescing to the perceived will of their partner. A more positive contributing factor has been the lack of police involvement in the enforcement of school policies.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and better understand the experiences of school resource officers and principals partnering in Minnesota high schools. This final chapter reviews the study's research questions and provides an interpretation of the findings of the study. The chapter also identifies limitations, suggests implications for practice, and recommends opportunities for additional research.

To better understand the experiences of school resources and principals the study sought to address these primary and secondary research questions:

- How do school resource officers (SROs) and principals describe their partnerships?
- How do principals and SROs describe their vision and preparation for their partnership?
- How do principals and SROs describe the positive outcomes of their partnerships?
- How do principals and SROs describe their ongoing collaboration and communication with one another?
- How do principals and SROs describe the challenges that they face with one another as well as the mitigation of those challenges?

The experiences described by the school resource officer and principal participants provided quality insights regarding their partnership. These insights contribute to the largely quantitative findings presented in the work of earlier researchers (Barnes, 2009; Covert, 2007; May, Fessel & Means, 2004; Streater, 2008; Stumpf, 2006; Wolfe, Chrusciel, Rojek, Hanson, & Kaminski, 2017). Together, the prior research and the findings of this study suggest that the partnership between principals and school resource officers is viewed as important by those serving in the roles. The SROs and principals described a number of positive outcomes of their work together. They also identified challenges that require attention if SROs and principals seek to further strengthen their partnership.

Interpretation of Findings

The opportunity for six pairs of school resource officers and principals to describe their partnership led to a number of findings related to the research questions. Of particular note are findings related to inconsistent definitions and visions of partnership, lack of preparation by partners, positive outcomes of partnership, and the ability of SROs and principals to communicate, collaborate, and identify and mitigate challenges.

Definitions and visions of partnership. The school resource officers and principals described a number of characteristics in their definitions of partnership. The participants most frequently identified collaboration, effective communication, common ideas, and common objectives between the SRO and principal pairs. None of these responses were particularly surprising since they might be expected to occur in any type of successful partnership. The ability to persevere through both good and bad times was

also identified by several participants. None of the participants, however, chose to share any details of particularly difficult challenges that they had needed to persevere through in their work together.

The school resource officers and principals' visions of partnership proved to be more expansive than their definitions of the term. Several participants mentioned collaboration and effective communication in both their definition and vision of partnership. Other elements that multiple participants mentioned included role clarity, open dialogue, respect for one another's background and expertise, willingness to openly consider ideas, flexibility, and the improvement of school culture. The lack of a consistent vision of partnership among the participants is important because it closely aligns with other findings in the study including the limited preparation for partnership and unclear roles.

Preparation for partnership. School resource officers reported that their positions in the schools are desirable assignments and vacancies for SRO positions typically attract significant interest within their law enforcement agencies. Agencies vary in how they select the officers assigned to schools. Some agencies involve school officials, while others do not. Principals that engaged in the recruitment and selection process for their school resource officer partners appreciated the opportunity to share their insights. They believed that their input brought an important perspective to the process and felt greater satisfaction in their partnership once they began working with the SRO that they assisted in selecting.

Principals and school resource officers indicated that they lacked critical preparation for their partnership. Both school resource officers and principals said that they knew very little about one another's work or training. The participants also reported little or no mutual professional development prior to their partnership. Five of the six school resource officers joined the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) and engaged in pre-service training with that organization. NASRO's introductory course provided important training for the officers when they were new to the role. It could not, however, prepare the officers for the wide range of experiences that they encountered in their schools.

The principals indicated that they lacked adequate training for their school resource officer partnership. None of the principals reported engaging in any formal training or than in emergency preparations. Most principals lacked clarity on roles appropriate for their school resource officer partners. In some cases, this lack of clarity for principals resulted in either underutilization or misuse of SROs, both of which limit the effectiveness of finite resources.

Positive outcomes of partnership. All six principals and school resource officers believed that the presence of an SRO in a school aids in both the perceived and the actual safety of the students and staff in the buildings that they serve. None of the participants reported SROs engaging in high security efforts that were typical in the years after the Columbine incident, such as monitoring a security desk, surveilling, or operating metal detectors. Instead, the sense of safety was viewed as the product of relationship building, visibility, and engaging in dialogue with students.

Principals reported that their school resource officer partners provided critical access to resources. Officers and deputies connected members of the school community with medical and social services. Officers also arranged for the utilization of municipal or county services and physical resources that are requested by principals. Examples included extra late-night campus patrols, traffic barriers, chemical education kits, and emergency response training. This finding indicates that principals recognize the limits to their own resources and are taking advantage of the resources available through other entities.

All twelve participants in this study viewed their school's SRO program as building greater connections between law enforcement and students, particularly those from communities that have experienced negative interactions in the past. This suggests that a shift in the partnership between SROs and principals is taking place in their schools. On a larger level, however, there is still uncertainty about the role of police officers in schools. During the time of this study, a number of high-profile incidents of violence between law enforcement and people of color either occurred or had recently taken place. The national and local media extensively reported on the officer-involved killings of George Floyd, Duante Wright, and Amir Locke that occurred in Minnesota. The discontinuation of SRO programs in some places was viewed as a necessary response. In other places, such as St. Paul, Minnesota, recent violence has reignited difficult conversations about the need for school safety and the possible return of officers being assigned to schools.

Communication and collaboration between partners. The school resource officers and principals in the study reported that they communicated frequently. Communications between the partners occurred daily in the majority of the partnerships in this study. Yet, the nature of the communication between the partners differed greatly. Most of the participants described their typical communications as casual interactions of a short duration, often while passing in the building or while jointly supervising an area such as the cafeteria. Longer and deeper conversations occurred far less frequently. When these did occur the conversations involved updates or discussions about individual students.

The participants in the study indicated a general satisfaction with their collaboration despite frequent challenges with role clarity at the outset of their partnership. Their reports, however, appeared to be exaggerated when the participants described their work in direct partnership. The partners frequently engaged in parallel work, where each is responsible for unique tasks. The partners rarely consulted on one another's tasks, nor did they directly collaborate on the creation of documents, proposals, assessments, or strategic plans. A clear exception to the distance that the partners typically maintain in their work would be the participation of school resource officers and principals on committees or other task teams. Finding that the SROs and principals are operating in parallel highlights the need for greater collaboration. Instead of developing plans and taking actions that match the objectives and philosophies of both parties, the partners invite disagreement, redundancy, and misalignment in their work.

Identifying and mitigating challenges in partnership. The interviews with the school resource officers and principals indicated that they recognized many of the challenges that they faced and have made efforts to mitigate those challenges. As described earlier, the participants typically began their partnerships with insufficient role clarity. Over time, the SROs and principals assumed responsibilities and tasks that they perceived as being most appropriate. These roles, once established, typically remained consistent over time.

Most of the participants noted the development of greater trust as they continued their partnership. Principals that reported initial hesitancy about the way that their SROs might interact with students came to appreciate the approach that the officers eventually filled. Several SROs shared that trust was developed when their partners demonstrated respect for their experiences and expertise. A few SROs also indicated that trust was either built or lost based upon the proper utilization of their partner by principals.

Principals' concerns about contributing to the school-to-prison nexus played a significant role in the school administrators' separation of their SRO partners from enforcement of school policies. The principals believed that school personnel should maintain responsibility for managing order and dealing with students in non-criminal and even some petty criminal matters. Separating the SROs from participating in the enforcement of their schools' policies in areas such as attendance, dress code, and proper language positively influenced the SRO's student interactions and opportunities for building trust. The SROs and principals felt that increasing opportunities for positive

interactions and reducing the potential of interactions that might escalate was important in a climate where police are seeking to rebuild trust in communities

Most of the participants in the study indicated that they generally agree with the decisions and actions of their partners. There were, however, several SROs that felt like they were either unable or unwilling to challenge their principal partners. Some instances attributed this to their lack of knowledge in educational practices. Other instances occurred due to lacking confidential information. Regardless of the cause, the officers that expressed frustration in this area indicated that they either didn't feel it was their place to seek clarification from their partnering principal or they lacked enough background to even formulate a question. These feelings led to the officers simply acquiescing to their principal's preferences. By acquiescing, the SROs may have avoided disagreement or conflict but they created a situation where the strength of their partnership may have been weakened. This finding is important because most of the SROs identified effective communication as critical to partnership. Without the ability to ask questions or exchange ideas, the partnerships of the acquiescing SROs and their principals cannot be fully realized.

Limitations

There are significant limitations that come with a research study of this type and scale. The methodologies of qualitative research methods place limits on the ability to generalize the experiences of the participants. The scope of the study and the representation of the participants must be considered.

Scope of the study. This study only considered the experiences of six pairs of school resource officers and principals in Minnesota high schools. Examining only six pairs introduced the possibility of falling short of a saturation point in the final interviews. Ideally, a research study utilizing interviews would reach a saturation threshold (Henninck, Kaiser, and Marconi, 2016). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a saturation point occurs when additional research no longer collects new coding categories or data for analysis. With so few participants, the variety of ideas or themes found within one or both of the roles may not have fully emerged. The small number of participants also requires caution in claiming to truly understand the full meaning of the responses collected.

Participant representation. It is difficult to develop a perfectly representative group of participants in terms of race and gender when engaging in a study of this scale. According to a recent survey of principals, 87% of the school administrators in Minnesota identify as White and the gender division between males and females is split nearly evenly (Pekel, Kemper, Parr, Evenson, & Zhao, 2022).

In this study, four principals identified as male and two identified as female. Five of the SROs identified as White and one officer identified as Asian American. The principal participants included two assistant principals that identified as White women and four identified as White males, one serving as an assistant principal and the other three serving as head principals. The twelve participants in the study served in districts in rural, suburban, and urban settings.

Limits of generalization. Qualitative researchers must avoid the temptation of generalizing the data gathered and applying it to a larger population. The experiences of a small sample of individuals relative to a shared phenomenon is inadequate for drawing expansive conclusions. However, the ideas and themes that emerged from the participants in this study provided important information in addressing the research questions, even if the scope and the participant representation of the study requires careful considerations. The participants were asked to share their own lived experiences relative to the phenomenon of partnership. These experiences merit consideration in considering future practices and conducting additional research.

Recommendations

The results of this study provide opportunities for principals, school resource officers, and researchers to inform their work. Principals and SROs might consider the implications for practice listed below. These considerations are based upon the information shared by their practicing colleagues. Researchers may choose to build on the results of this study with different methodologies or by examining themes that emerged but were not fully explored within the scope of this study. Several of these themes are listed below among the suggestions for further study.

Implications for Practice. The following recommendations for school resource officers and principals are based upon the findings of this study..

Foster partnership. School resource officers and principals in this study identified a number of characteristics in describing their visions of partnership. Unfortunately, in many cases these visions differ from that of their partner or lack

alignment with the realities of day to day responsibilities and experiences. School resource officers and principals must approach their work willingly and pursue opportunities to strengthen their partnership with effective communication. Principals need to demonstrate their trust of SROs to positively impact the school. Instead of operating in parallel, the partners' work must be integrated so that there is coordination of initiatives and shared responsibility.

Allow principals to participate in the selection of SROs. Principals in this study spoke of their interest in assisting with the selection of the school resource officers. Only a few of the principals, however, participated in the selection of their current partners. There appears to be significant advantages in including principals in the process. The principals that participated in the selection felt that it contributed to a positive partnership. Principals can offer law enforcement leaders perspectives that reflect the unique nature of serving in an educational setting and their particular buildings and communities. Participation in the selection of an SRO also establishes a responsibility for a principal to build a successful partnership with their preferred candidate. Some law enforcement agencies may have stipulations about selecting candidates for specific assignments in their collective bargaining agreements. In these situations, a consultative role would still allow for principal input.

Provide greater clarity on roles. Many of the challenges faced by the participants in this study can be attributed to uncertainty in their roles. The school resource officers and principals that are paired together in schools require far greater clarity on the work and the roles that each of the partners satisfies. A number of factors were found to

contribute to a lack of role clarity. Fortunately, many of these factors can be addressed with adequate preparation. Leadership at the district and agency-level should develop well-organized memoranda of understanding that clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of each party. Providing principals and SROs with this improved guidance and then supporting the individuals with appropriate training establishes clear roles from the outset. Following the guidance of the NASRO triad model offers SROs greater freedom to initiate impactful contributions that go beyond just traditional law enforcement roles.

Separate school resource officers from school policy enforcement. Each of the principals in this study indicated that they avoid using their school resource officer partners to enforce school policy violations. Instead, they expect the SROs to fulfill other roles in their schools, such as a law educator and mentor. Partners stand to benefit from a clear agreement of an SRO's responsibility in responding to behaviors that do not rise to the level of necessary police intervention. SROs, like the ones included in this study, should not be asked to monitor student attendance, technology use, language, dress codes, and other matters best addressed by school officials. Separating the enforcement of policy and the work of the SRO lessens the potential for escalating student behaviors and contributing to the school to prison nexus by criminalizing matters that would not otherwise fall under the purview of law enforcement.

Engage in mutual professional development. This study found that principals and school resource officers very rarely engage in training and other forms of professional development together. Principals reported engaging in various school law

seminars, but not sessions related to the work of SROs. Similarly, SROs suggested that they either rarely or never participate in professional development activities offered in their schools. When there is mutual professional development, it is more than likely related to emergency preparations. Districts, law enforcement agencies, professional organizations, and other providers of professional development would be well-served in on-going professional development opportunities for principals and SROs to engage in learning. Topics of particular need include the development and maintenance of partnership, role clarification, the triad model, and building positive relationships with various populations of students.

Challenge acquiescence by school resource officers. This study found that some school resource officers engage in behaviors that acquiesce to the perceived or directed wishes of their principal partners. SROs have reported that they simply deferred when faced with situations where their preferred course of action might be counter to that of the principal. None of the participants suggested that the principal was anything other than the final authority on matters within their schools. Yet most of the participants spoke extensively on the importance of the SROs engaging in collaboration and the sharing of ideas. trust that will allow SROs to question them and have their concerns addressed. This will assist in building trust with SROs to lead rather than simply defer.

Empower school resource officers to contribute to the school. Principals must also foster leadership and empowerment to encourage and then support the initiatives and actions of their SRO. This can occur through formal evaluations or strategic planning efforts, or during less formal interactions. The development of a law enforcement club

advised by the SRO, a proposed rerouting of campus patterns, a ride-along program with patrol officers, and an afterschool discussion with police leaders about use of force all originated with officers that served as participants in the study. In these cases the SROs were given the opportunity to follow through on their ideas on how they could initiate new learning opportunities or better the schools in which they served.

Promote ongoing evaluation and feedback. School resource officer programs need regular program evaluations. A formal process should be included in a district and law enforcement agency's memorandum of understanding. Minimally, this evaluation should call for an assessment of the program's effectiveness prior to the renewal of the program. Assessing the effectiveness and engaging in reflective conversations would allow both partners and their supervisors to monitor the adherence to established roles and adjust them as needed. Ideally, the evaluation would include feedback from the district, law enforcement agency, and other stakeholders in the school community.

Suggestions for further study. This study sought to better understand the way that school resource officers and school principals described their partnership. The research questions emerged from gaps in the greater body of research examining school resource officers and their role in schools. Other researchers are encouraged to consider this study's results and examine additional elements of the partnership between these two groups. Several areas for exploration emerged in this study that are deserving of greater attention. Among these are qualitative examinations of the following:

- The impact of participating in common professional development on the success of the SRO and principal partnership.

- The role of district and law enforcement agency leaders in supporting SRO and principal partnerships.
- The increased emphasis that both SROs and principals place on SROs' place in reducing barriers between law enforcement and students.
- The possibility of SROs acquiescing to principals' real or perceived wishes despite their own experiences and expertise.
- An additional area for research consideration might be found in the area of the principal and school resource officer partnership from the perspective of students, teachers, parents, and other members of school communities with SRO programs. Researchers, including Bracy (2011), Goggins (1994), Jackson (2002), Myrstol (2011), and Theriot (2016) have previously examined the perceptions of various stakeholders' views of SRO programs, but have not focused specifically on the principal and SRO partnership.

The findings of this phenomenological study and research related to school resource officer and principal partnership would benefit from additional research using mixed and quantitative methods.

- Mixed methods research connecting school resource officer and principal partnership to measures of academic success, school safety, climate, discipline, crime and other topics might provide a significant contribution.

- Likewise, a broader study on partnership that included greater diversity of participants and geographic reach may provide greater generalizability to findings identified in this study.
- Finally, an update of the statewide survey of SROs by Swayze and Buskovich (2014) would greatly serve researchers examining the role of school resource officers. The nearly ten-year old data, despite its age, remains Minnesota's best source of information on the prevalence and profile of SROs in the state.

Conclusion

Incidents of violence in schools continue despite the growth of school resource officer programs over the past decades. The shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas on May 24, 2022 that killed 19 students and two teachers occurred in the midst of the interviews with the SROs and principals. The study's last four participant interviews occurred in the two weeks after the shooting. The incident received extensive national media coverage, yet none of the four participants whose interviews occurred after the shooting even mentioned the events in Uvalde in their responses. While no questions in these interviews introduced the events in Uvalde, the lack of commentary by the four participants may demonstrate a tragic concession to the presence of violence in schools.

At this time there is no clear path toward eliminating the incidents of violence that led to the addition of many school resource officer programs. Researchers, law enforcement personnel, and educators can, however, try to better understand and improve the partnership that the SROs and their principals engage in each day. These partnerships,

along with their roles, have shifted over time. School resource officers are no longer viewed as simply security staff in schools. Instead, they have been shown to participate in a variety of aspects of school life. This study found that the partnerships between SROs and principals are complex. Yet, both SROs and principals view their partnership as contributing positively to their schools. With findings from studies like this one, SRO and principal partnerships will continue to develop in positive ways that benefit school communities everywhere.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent

<p><i>Hamline University</i> Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form. IRB approval # Approved: Expires one year from above approval date.</p>

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The student researcher will provide you with a copy of this form to keep for your reference, and will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions.

This form provides important information about what you will be asked to do during the study, about the risks and benefits of the study, and about your rights as a research participant.

- If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the research team for more information.

- You should feel free to discuss your potential participation with anyone you choose, such as family or friends, before you decide to participate.
- Do not agree to participate in this study unless the research team has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time.

Title of Research Study: Serving Together: A Phenomenological Study of the School Resource Officer and Principal Partnership.

Student Researcher and email address: Eric Nelson, enelson23@hamline.edu

Faculty Advisor, telephone number, and email address: Dr. Letitia Basford

(Professor), (612) 804-1798, lbasford01@hamline.edu

What is the research topic, the purpose of the research, and the rationale for why this study is being conducted? The partnerships of school resource officers (SROs) and principals has been the focus of insufficient research despite the importance of the service that both partners provide to schools. This study seeks to answer: *How do school resource officers and principals describe their partnerships?* The study will provide pairs of SROs and principals the opportunity to share their experiences of working together in partnership. These experiences will be used to better understand this unique partnership and potentially serve as research to support professional development.

What will you be asked to do if you decide to participate in this research study? This study will be gathering information from school resource officers and principals about their experience in those roles and the partnerships that they maintain with one another.

1) Prior to their interviews, each participant will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire that is used to gather information about the participant. The questionnaire will ask participants to provide demographic information, as well as answer questions about their work background, employer, training, and other items relevant to the study.

2) Each participant will be asked to complete an individual interview lasting approximately 75 minutes. Participants will be asked to identify a time and a place that works best for their interviews. Due to COVID-19 concerns, participants may also elect to complete their interviews remotely using either Google Duo or Zoom. These interviews will serve as the primary source of data for this study. For this semi-structured interview I will have questions prepared. However, I will allow the participants to freely share their experiences if they are providing responses that align with the questions. All of the interviews will be audio recorded. Interviews will not be video recorded in either in-person or remote online administrations. The audio recording will be used to create transcripts and these will receive pseudonyms so that the participants' identities will be protected.

What will be your time commitment to the study if you participate? Participants will complete a short online questionnaire that should be able to be completed in ten minutes or less. The individual interviews will be completed in a single session of approximately 75 minutes. Participants will be provided with a summary of their interview for validation purposes.

Who is funding this study? This study is unfunded. Any costs are the responsibility of Eric Nelson.

What are the possible discomforts and risks of participating in this research study?

The potential risks to participants and the groups they represent must be considered and minimized in any research study. In conducting a study, the researcher must weigh the potential risks against the potential benefits that might occur due to their involvement (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

a) In a phenomenological study, the risk potential is heightened by the participants' sharing their experiences and insights. By participating in this study, there is a chance of discomfort in answering a question. As a participant, you are not required to answer questions that you are not comfortable answering.

b) In any study there is also a small danger of loss of confidentiality. I have taken significant steps to protect both identities and the source of specific questionnaire and interview data.

c) In addition, there may be risks that are currently unknown or unforeseeable.

Please contact me at enelson23@hamline.edu, or my faculty advisor, Dr. Letitia Basford (Professor) at either (612) 804-1798 or lbasford01@hamline.edu to discuss this if you wish.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your data and research records be protected?

a) Each participant will be asked to identify a multiple-digit number that they can easily recognize, but otherwise provides no indication of their identity. This

numerical identifier will be collected in the pre-interview questionnaire and at the interview. It will be used throughout the study to pair data collected in the pre-interview questionnaire with the transcripts of the interviews. A pseudonym will be created and connected to the numerical identifier for each participant. The participants will not know the pseudonym assigned to them. The pseudonym will be used in the reporting and discussion of the findings.

b) The questionnaire will not collect an email address from the participants. The questionnaire also does not ask for the names of the participants, their employers, the schools or jurisdictions that the participants serve, or the other easily identifiable information. Data gathered in the questionnaire will be converted to a spreadsheet that will use the participants' numerical identity to distinguish the data from other participants.

c) The researcher will use a handheld recorder to create an audio file of the interview. The recorder's audio files cannot be accessed through the internet or other file capture technology. Data gathered in the interviews will be transcribed by the researcher. Actual names of individuals, employers, schools or jurisdictions served, and other easily identifiable information will be replaced with fictional ones.

d) Data reported in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study will be carefully scrutinized to avoid including statements or information that could be identified as coming from a specific participant.

e) The school resource officers and principals that work together will not have access to the interview data provided by their partner.

f) The questionnaire spreadsheet and audio files from the digital recorder will be deleted at the conclusion of the study.

How many people will most likely be participating in this study, and how long is the entire study expected to last? The study will include fourteen participants (seven school resource officers and seven principals). One school resource officer and one principal will be participants in a pilot interview. The pilot interview will be used to assess and potentially improve the interview protocols. The other six school resource officers and six principals will participate in the interviews where data is collected for the study. The study is expected to be conducted over the course of six months.

What are the possible benefits to you and/or to others from your participation in this research study? Participants may benefit from the study as a result of their opportunity to reflect on their work and partnership. Participants will be provided with a copy of the findings of the study after its completion so that they may learn from, and potentially use, the information for their own professional development.

If you choose to participate in this study, will it cost you anything? There is no cost to participate.

Will you receive any compensation for participating in this study? Participants agree to participate on a voluntary basis. A gift card valued at \$15 will be sent to each participant at the end of the study as a token of appreciation.

What if you decide that you do not want to take part in this study? What other options are available to you if you decide not to participate or to withdraw? Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate in the study, and your refusal will not influence your current or future relationships with Hamline University. In addition, if significant new findings develop during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to continue participation, we will provide that information to you.

How can you withdraw from this research study, and who should you contact if you have any questions or concerns? You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which you may be entitled. If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you should tell me, or contact me at enelson23@hamline.edu, or my faculty advisor, Dr. Letitia Basford, at (612) 804-1798 or lbasford01@hamline.edu. You should also call or email Dr. Basford with any questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints about the research and your experience as a participant in the study. In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board at Hamline University at IRB@hamline.edu.

Are there any anticipated circumstances under which your participation may be terminated by the researcher(s) without your consent? I do not anticipate a termination of any participant's involvement in the study due to the limited time span of involvement. The study, however, focuses on the participants' roles in schools. If these

roles changed, or if the participants no longer met the profile of the study's intended subjects, I may need to terminate a participant's involvement in the study.

Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this study? Eric Nelson will gain no benefit from your participation in this study beyond the publication and/or presentation of the results obtained from the study, and the invaluable research experience and hands-on learning that he will gain as a part of their educational experience.

Where will this research be made available once the study is completed? This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of an Education Doctorate (Ed.D) degree through Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. This dissertation research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. It may be published or used in other ways, such as in conference presentations or published in research journals. The published materials will not include questionnaire spreadsheets nor interview recordings and transcripts that can be connected to individual participants. These items will be deleted at the conclusion of the study.

Will your information be used in any other research studies or projects? No. Participants' data collected as part of this study will not be used in or distributed for future research studies.

Signatures:

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Signature and printed name _____ Date _____
of person obtaining consent

Title of person obtaining consent _____ Student Researcher _____

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this Form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Printed Name of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Participant _____

Signature of Faculty Advisor _____ Date _____

Appendix B**INVESTIGATOR COPY****(Duplicate signature page for researcher's records)****Signatures:**

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Signature and printed name _____ Date _____
 of person obtaining consent

Title of person obtaining consent _____ Student Researcher _____

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this Form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Printed Name of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Participant _____

Signature of Faculty Advisor _____ Date _____

Appendix C

SRO Pilot Interview Guide

Research Question

How do school resource officers (SROs) and principals describe their partnerships?

Briefing

- Appreciation
- Review purpose
- Interview overview
- Reminder of consent agreements
- Review audio recorder
- Researcher feedback during the interview

Briefing Script

I want to thank you for your willingness to share both your time and your experiences with me. As I mentioned in the informed consent letter, we will be engaging in a qualitative interview. Qualitative research, particularly the methodology that I am using, places great value in the lived experiences of individuals. Making sense of these lived experiences is part of the process of creating knowledge. What you share will be included in my efforts to learn more about the partnerships between school resource officers and principals.

In our interview, which I will try to limit to approximately 75 minutes, you will be asked a series of questions about your lived experiences and how they influence your views. I have a series of questions that I intend to ask you, but you can share your

experiences to whatever extent you choose. Do not be concerned if you feel like you provide long answers or provide added details or topics. The nature of this type of research is to hear your actual experiences as you choose to share. That being said, I may also ask some clarifying questions to have an accurate representation of your ideas. You should not feel obligated to answer questions and you may stop the interview if you choose.

The information you share will only be used for my current research study. After the interview, I will transcribe the audio recording and code the transcript to identify themes. Your name, place of employment, and any other easily identifiable information will not be included in the reporting of this study. The information you share will not be used for any other research study, and I will destroy the records after the study concludes.

I will be recording our interview using two digital recorders. I will be using two recorders so your interview is captured even if one of the recorders malfunctions. You do not need to speak into the recorders or raise your voice. I would encourage you to speak in your normal voice as this will result in a quality recording.

Once we begin the interview, you may notice that I will attempt to limit my non-verbal and verbal feedback. Please understand that I am trying to limit any behaviors on my part that might influence your responses. Please do not read this as disinterest or lacking appreciation of your time.

Do you have any procedural questions or need clarifications before we begin?

Interview Questions

- How do you define the term *partnership*?
- How does your definition of *partnership* change when you consider the term in a professional environment?
- You have previously identified your partnership with the principal as a successful one. What is your vision of a successful partnership between an SRO and a principal? Or, (if lacking a vision) What might be preventing you from having a vision of that type of partnership?
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of an SRO.
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of a principal.
- How do these role perceptions align with the roles you and your current principal partner *actually* play?
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was particularly strong?
- What types of training have you completed together with your partner?
- Share any conditions or characteristics that are necessary for an effective partnership between SROs and principals. Follow-up if there is little elaboration on the response.
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was lacking?
- How have you and the principal managed disagreement?
- Describe some challenges you've encountered in partnering with your principal.
- How has the climate around policing in the post-George Floyd era impacted you as an SRO? [Question only for SROs active prior to May, 2000]

- How does a successful SRO and principal partnership affect the climate in a school?
- If you were advising a new set of SRO and principal partners, what advice would you provide to them?

Appreciation

Thank you for your time and the insights and stories you have shared with me. I will be contacting you in the next two weeks. When I contact you, I will include a summary of some key points that I heard today. I hope you will review these key points and clarify any information that I may have misunderstood. Again, thank you for your participation.

Appendix D

Principal Pilot Interview Guide

Research Question

How do school resource officers (SROs) and principals describe their partnerships?

Briefing

- Appreciation
- Review purpose
- Interview overview
- Reminder of consent agreements
- Review audio recorder
- Researcher feedback during the interview

Briefing Script

I want to thank you for your willingness to share both your time and your experiences with me. As I mentioned in the informed consent letter, we will be engaging in a qualitative interview. Qualitative research, particularly the methodology that I am using, places great value in the lived experiences of individuals. Making sense of these lived experiences is part of the process of creating knowledge. What you share will be included in my efforts to learn more about the partnerships between school resource officers and principals.

In our interview, which I will try to limit to approximately 75 minutes, you will be asked a series of questions about your lived experiences and how they influence your views. I have a series of questions that I intend to ask you, but you can share your

experiences to whatever extent you choose. Do not be concerned if you feel like you provide long answers or provide added details or topics. The nature of this type of research is to hear your actual experiences as you choose to share. That being said, I may also ask some clarifying questions to have an accurate representation of your ideas. You should not feel obligated to answer questions and you may stop the interview if you choose.

The information you share will only be used for my current research study. After the interview, I will transcribe the audio recording and code the transcript to identify themes. Your name, place of employment, and any other easily identifiable information will not be included in the reporting of this study. The information you share will not be used for any other research study, and I will destroy the records after the study concludes.

I will be recording our interview using two digital recorders. I will be using two recorders so your interview is captured even if one of the recorders malfunctions. You do not need to speak into the recorders or raise your voice. I would encourage you to speak in your normal voice as this will result in a quality recording.

Once we begin the interview, you may notice that I will attempt to limit my non-verbal and verbal feedback. Please understand that I am trying to limit any behaviors on my part that might influence your responses. Please do not read this as disinterest or lacking appreciation of your time.

Do you have any procedural questions or need clarifications before we begin?

Interview Questions

- How do you define the term *partnership*?
- How does your definition of *partnership* change when you consider the term in a professional environment?
- Describe your involvement in the selection or assignment of your SRO.
- Describe your history of interactions with law enforcement personnel prior to entering your role.
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of an SRO.
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of a principal.
- How do these role perceptions align with the roles you and your current SRO partner *actually* play?
- You have previously identified your partnership with the principal as a successful one. What is your vision of a successful partnership between an SRO and a principal? Or, (if lacking a vision) what might be preventing you from having a vision of that type of partnership?
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was particularly strong?
- Share any conditions or characteristics that are necessary for an effective partnership between SROs and principals. Follow-up if there is little elaboration on the response.
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was lacking?
- How have you and the SRO managed disagreement?
- Describe some challenges you've encountered in partnering with your SRO.

- How has the climate around policing in the post-George Floyd era impacted you as a principal? [Question only for principals active prior to May, 2020]
- How does a successful SRO and principal partnership affect the climate in a school?
- What types of training have you completed together with your partner?
- If you were advising a new set of SRO and principal partners, what advice would you provide to them?

Appreciation

Thank you for your time and the insights and stories you have shared with me. I will be contacting you in the next two weeks. When I contact you, I will include a summary of some key points that I heard today. I hope you will review these key points and clarify any information that I may have misunderstood. Again, thank you for your participation.

Appendix E

SRO Pre-interview Questionnaire

Purpose

This questionnaire is designed to gather information to assist in better understanding you and your background in your role as a School Resource Officer (SRO). This information will provide data about the group of officers that participate in the study. Neither your name nor any personally identifiable information will be included in the study.

Instructions

1. Respond to each question below. You may skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering.
2. A preliminary question will ask whether you have completed the Informed Consent document. You will not be permitted to advance in the questions if this document has not been completed. The informed consent document indicates your voluntary participation in this research study.
3. When you have completed the questionnaire you will be asked to submit your responses.
4. After submitting your responses, you may close the questionnaire and your information will be reported.

Question One:

Please identify a number that is easy for you to remember. This number will serve as your identification for this study. Please do not select a birth date, social

security number, or any other number that can be connected to you. At your interview you will be asked for this number again so that your questionnaire and interview responses can be aligned.

Response provided in a short answer text box.

Question Two:

Gender (please select the option(s) that best describes your self-identification):

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Another option not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a checklist. A short answer text box is provided for the identification of an option not listed.

Question Three

Race (please select the option(s) that best describes your self-identification):

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx
- Middle Eastern or Northern African
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Another option(s) not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a checklist. A short answer text box is provided for the identification of an option not listed.

Question Four

Do you reside within the jurisdiction that you serve?

- Yes
- No

Responses provided in a multiple choice list.

Question Five

Are you a parent?

- Yes
- No

Responses provided in a multiple choice list.

Question Six

Your current employer's law enforcement designation:

- Municipal police department
- County Sheriff's Office
- Tribal police department
- School district police department
- State Patrol or other state agency
- Federal agency
- Another option(s) not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a multiple choice list. A short answer text box is provided for the identification of an option not listed.

Question Seven

Total years of service in law enforcement?

Responses provided in a short answer text box.

Question Eight

Years of service in law enforcement with your current employer?

Responses provided in a short answer text box.

Question Nine

Years of service as a school resource officer, school liaison, school-based law enforcement officer, or another similar title:

Responses provided in a short answer text box.

Question Ten

Have you completed training specific to your role in the schools offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers, Minnesota Juvenile Officers Association, or other similar non-governmental organizations? Please describe.

- Yes
- No

Responses provided in a multiple choice list and a short answer text box for a description of training.

Question Eleven

Have you completed training specific to your role in the schools offered by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, or any other similar governmental agency?

Please describe.

- Yes
- No

Responses provided in a multiple choice list and a short answer text box for description of training.

Question Twelve

Please select the area(s) in which you have received training specific to work in a school setting:

- Active shooter response, including Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate (ALICE)
- Alcohol, drugs, and chemical dependency
- Behavior management
- Bullying and harassment
- Child development
- Communication strategies
- Counseling
- Disability awareness
- Education law
- Emergency planning

- Ethics
- Gangs
- Gender equity
- Juvenile justice code
- Mental health
- Mentorship
- Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS)
- Principles of school-based law enforcement
- Racial equity
- Restorative justice
- School policies and procedures
- School resource officer roles
- Sex trafficking
- Social justice
- Social media
- Special education
- Student Constitutional rights
- Truancy
- Victim advocacy
- Violence prevention
- Another option(s) not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a checklist. A short answer text box is provided for the identification of an option not listed.

Question Thirteen

How many schools are you serving as an SRO?

- One
- Two
- Three
- Four or more

Responses provided in a multiple choice list.

Question Fourteen

Are you a member or have a similar affiliation with any professional organization(s) related to your role as an SRO? Please describe.

- Yes
- No

Responses provided in a multiple choice list and a short answer text box for description of the organization(s).

Appendix F

Principal Pre-interview Questionnaire

Purpose

This questionnaire is designed to gather information to assist in better understanding you and your background in your role as a school administrator. This information will provide data about the group of administrators that participate in the study. Neither your name nor any personally identifiable information will be included in the study.

Instructions

1. Please respond to each question below. You may skip a question that you are not comfortable answering.
2. A preliminary question will ask whether you have completed the Informed Consent document. You will not be permitted to advance in the questions if this document has not been completed. The informed consent document indicates your voluntary participation in this research study.
3. When you have completed the questionnaire, you will be asked to submit your responses.
4. After submitting your responses, you may close the questionnaire and your information will be reported.

Question One:

Please identify a number that is easy for you to remember. This number will serve as your identification for this study. Please do not select a birth date, social

security number, or any other number that can be connected to you. At your interview you will be asked for this number again so that your questionnaire and interview responses can be aligned.

Response provided in a short answer text box.

Question Two:

Gender (please select the option(s) that best describes your self-identification):

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Another option not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a checklist. A short answer text box is provided for identification of an option not listed.

Question Three

Race (please select the option(s) that best describes your self-identification):

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx
- Middle Eastern or Northern African
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Another option(s) not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a checklist. A short answer text box is provided for identification of an option not listed.

Question Four

Your current school's grade configuration:

- 6-12
- 7-12
- 9-12
- 10-12
- Another option(s) not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a checklist. A short answer text box is provided for the identification of an option not listed.

Question Five

Your current role in the school:

- Principal
- Assistant, associate, or vice-principal
- Dean of students
- Another option(s) not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a multiple choice list. A short answer text box is provided for the identification of an option not listed.

Question Six

Total years of service in educational administration:

Responses provided in a short answer text box.

Question Seven

Years of service in educational administration with your current employer:

Responses provided in a short answer text box.

Question Eight

Years of service as an educational administrator that has worked directly with a school resource officer, school liaison, school-based law enforcement officer, or another similar title:

Responses provided in a short answer text box.

Question Nine

Have you completed training specific to your work in partnership with an SRO offered by the National Association of School Resource Officers, Minnesota Juvenile Officers Association, or other similar non-governmental organizations?

Please describe.

- Yes
- No

Responses provided in a multiple choice list and a short answer text box for description of training.

Question Ten

Have you completed training specific to your work in partnership with an SRO that was offered by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, or any other similar governmental agency? Please describe.

- Yes
- No

Responses provided in a multiple choice list and a short answer text box for the description of training.

Question Eleven

Please select the area(s) in which you have received training specific to work in a school setting:

- Active shooter response, including Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate (ALICE)
- Alcohol, drugs, and chemical dependency
- Behavior management
- Bullying and harassment
- Child development
- Communication strategies
- Counseling
- Disability awareness
- Education law
- Emergency planning
- Ethics
- Gangs
- Gender equity
- Juvenile justice code

- Mental health
- Mentorship
- Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS)
- Principles of school-based law enforcement
- Racial equity
- Restorative justice
- School policies and procedures
- School resource officer roles
- Sex trafficking
- Social justice
- Social media
- Special education
- Student Constitutional rights
- Truancy
- Victim advocacy
- Violence prevention
- Another option(s) not listed here. Please identify _____

Responses provided in a checklist. A short answer text box is provided for identification of an option not listed.

Appendix G

SRO Final Interview Guide

Research Question

How do school resource officers (SROs) and principals describe their partnerships?

Briefing

- Appreciation
- Review purpose
- Interview overview
- Reminder of consent agreements
- Review audio recorder
- Researcher feedback during the interview

Briefing script

I want to thank you for your willingness to share both your time and your experiences with me. As I mentioned in the informed consent letter, we will be engaging in a qualitative interview. Qualitative research, particularly the methodology that I am using, places great value in the lived experiences of individuals. Making sense of these lived experiences is part of the process of creating knowledge. What you share will be included in my efforts to learn more about the partnerships between school resource officers and principals.

In our interview, which I will try to limit to approximately 75 minutes, you will be asked a series of questions about your lived experiences and how they influence your

views. I have a series of questions that I intend to ask you, but you are welcome to share your experiences to whatever extent you choose. Do not be concerned if you feel like you are providing long answers or are providing added details or topics. The nature of this type of research is to hear your original experiences as you choose to share. That being said, I may also ask some clarifying questions so that I have an accurate representation of your ideas. You should not feel obligated to answer questions and you may stop the interview if you choose.

The information you share will only be used for my current research study. After the interview, I will transcribe the audio recording and code the transcript to identify themes. Your name, place of employment, and any other easily identifiable information will not be included in the reporting of this study. The information you share will not be used for any other research study, and I will destroy the records after the study concludes.

I will be recording our interview using two digital recorders. I will be using two recorders so your interview is captured even if one of the recorders malfunctions. You do not need to speak into the recorders or raise your voice. I would encourage you to speak in your normal voice as this will result in a quality recording.

Once we begin the interview, you may notice that I will attempt to limit my non-verbal and verbal feedback. Please understand that I am trying to limit any behaviors on my part that might influence your responses. Please do not read this as disinterest or lacking appreciation of your time.

Do you have any procedural questions or need clarifications before we begin?

Interview Questions

- How do you define the term *partnership*?
- How does your definition of *partnership* change when you consider the term in a professional environment?
- You have previously identified your partnership with the principal as a successful one. Describe your vision of a successful partnership between an SRO and a principal? Or, (if lacking a vision) What might be preventing you from having a vision of that type of partnership?
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of an SRO.
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of a principal.
- How do these role perceptions align with the roles you and your current (SRO/principal) partner *actually* play.
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was particularly strong?
- Share any conditions or characteristics that are necessary for an effective partnership between SROs and principals. Follow-up if there is little elaboration on the response.
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was lacking?
- How have you and the principal managed disagreement?
- Describe some challenges you have encountered in partnering with your principal.
- How has the climate around policing in the post-George Floyd era impacted you as an SRO? [Question only for SROs active prior to May, 2020]

- How does a successful SRO and principal partnership affect the climate in a school?
- What types of training have you completed together with your partner?
- If you were advising a new set of SRO and principal partners, what advice would you provide to them?

Appreciation

Thank you for your time and the insights and stories you have shared with me. I will be contacting you in the next two weeks. When I contact you, I will include a summary of some key points that I heard today. I hope you will review these key points and clarify any information that I may have misunderstood. Again, thank you for your participation.

Appendix H

Principal Final Interview Guide

Research Question

How do school resource officers (SROs) and principals describe their partnerships?

Briefing

- Appreciation
- Review purpose
- Interview overview
- Reminder of consent agreements
- Review audio recorder
- Researcher feedback during the interview

Briefing script

I want to thank you for your willingness to share both your time and your experiences with me. As I mentioned in the informed consent letter, we will be engaging in a qualitative interview. Qualitative research, particularly the methodology that I am using, places great value in the lived experiences of individuals. Making sense of these lived experiences is part of the process of creating knowledge. What you share will be included in my efforts to learn more about the partnerships between school resource officers and principals.

In our interview, which I will try to limit to approximately 75 minutes, you will be asked a series of questions about your lived experiences and how they influence your views. I have a series of questions that I intend to ask you, but you are welcome to share

your experiences to whatever extent you choose. Do not be concerned if you feel like you are providing long answers or are providing added details or topics. The nature of this type of research is to hear your original experiences as you choose to share. That being said, I may also ask some clarifying questions so that I have an accurate representation of your ideas. You should not feel obligated to answer questions and you may stop the interview if you choose.

The information you share will only be used for my current research study. After the interview, I will transcribe the audio recording and code the transcript to identify themes. Your name, place of employment, and any other easily identifiable information will not be included in the reporting of this study. The information you share will not be used for any other research study, and I will destroy the records after the study concludes.

I will be recording our interview using two digital recorders. I will be using two recorders so your interview is captured even if one of the recorders malfunctions. You do not need to speak into the recorders or raise your voice. I would encourage you to speak in your normal voice as this will result in a quality recording.

Once we begin the interview, you may notice that I will attempt to limit my non-verbal and verbal feedback. Please understand that I am trying to limit any behaviors on my part that might influence your responses. Please do not read this as disinterest or lacking appreciation of your time.

Do you have any procedural questions or need clarifications before we begin?

Interview Questions

- How do you define the term *partnership*?
- How does your definition of *partnership* change when you consider the term in a professional environment?
- You have previously identified your partnership with the principal as a successful one. Describe your vision of a successful partnership between an SRO and a principal? Or, (if lacking a vision) What might be preventing you from having a vision of that type of partnership?
- Describe your involvement in the selection or assignment of your SRO.
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of an SRO.
- Describe your perceptions of the roles of a principal.
- How do these role perceptions align with the roles you and your current (SRO/principal) partner *actually* play.
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was particularly strong?
- Share any conditions or characteristics that are necessary for an effective partnership between SROs and principals. Follow-up if there is little elaboration on the response.
- Describe a time or two where you felt your partnership was lacking?
- How have you and the SRO managed disagreement?
- Describe some challenges you have encountered in partnering with your SRO.
- How has the climate around policing in the post-George Floyd era impacted you as a principal? [Question only for principals active prior to May, 2000]

- How does a successful SRO and principal partnership affect the climate in a school?
- What types of training have you completed together with your partner?
- If you were advising a new set of SRO and principal partners, what advice would you provide to them?

Appreciation

Thank you for your time and the insights and stories you have shared with me. I will be contacting you in the next two weeks. When I contact you, I will include a summary of some key points that I heard today. I hope you will review these key points and clarify any information that I may have misunderstood. Again, thank you for your participation.