WHAT THE DATA SAY
School Resource Officers
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School Resource Officers

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Task Force on the Reduction of Violence in the Lives of Children & Youth

Based on what evidence?

My Request to this Audience
WHAT THE DATA SAY

Understanding Violence: Frameworks

Interpersonal violence: direct action; person to person. Visible

Structural violence: Systemic = Barriers limiting individuals’ ability to fulfill their potential. Resource and social inequities. Invisible
WHAT THE DATA SAY

References: On Violence


WHAT THE DATA SAY
On School Violence
Mass School Shootings

In the 20th century, 22 mass school shootings in the United States.

In the 21st century (to 2018), 13 mass school shootings in the United States.

The 21st century shootings to date have resulted in 67 deaths cf. 55 for all of the 20th century.

Perpetrators: majority white males (88% in 20th century; 85% in 21st century)

source on next slide
WHAT THE DATA SAY

On Mass School Shootings, source

WHAT THE DATA SAY
On Gun Violence
[Visible Violence]

Access to guns is best predictor of gun deaths.

Armed guards or citizens do not reduce death or injury in mass shoots.

Cases of mass shootings at schools with armed police officers show they have not and are unlikely to prevent a mass shooting or decrease the fatalities associated with such an event.

sources on Slide 11
WHAT THE DATA SAY
On Gun Violence


Conclusions:

Hundreds of millions of dollars spent on security measures.

No evidence these measures diminish firearm violence in schools.

The measures do create a false sense of security.

**Recommendations:** School systems need to engage in:

- Research for evidence-based practices.
- Policy advocacy to address state firearm laws.
- Expanding mental health services and cost-effective interventions for reducing violence (e.g., bullying, peer mediation, conflict resolution, etc.).
WHAT THE DATA SAY
On Gun Violence, sources


WHAT THE DATA SAY
On School Violence

School interpersonal violence presents in many forms, from verbal or emotional harm to targeted or random physical attacks or assaults with or without a weapon, and more.

Since the late 1990s, school violence in general has declined.

These data parallel the overall trend: violent crime in the US has declined in the same period.

.sources on Slide 14
WHAT THE DATA SAY
On School Violence

Media portrayal of violence in schools depicts school-based violence as epidemic, portraying schools as unsafe and dangerous places.

Political rhetoric invokes fear and danger.

sources on next slide
WHAT THE DATA SAY

On School Violence, sources


WHAT THE DATA SAY

Responses to Actual and Perceived School Violence

Parents and School Personnel:
Fear & Panic

Policy Makers:
Heightened Surveillance & Security (including SROs)

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
WHAT THE DATA SAY

SROs: School Resource Officers

What is an SRO?
A law enforcement officer with sworn authority who is employed by a local police department or sheriff’s agency in a policing assignment in a school.

SRO responsibilities, like those of regular police officers, is to make arrests, respond to calls for service, and document incidents that occur within their jurisdiction.

Beyond law enforcement, SROs may serve as educators, emergency managers, and informal counselors: the law enforcer (50%), the “counselor” (25%), the “law-related educator” (13%); 12% “other.”

Sources on Slide 18
WHAT THE DATA SAY
SROs: School Resource Officers

Question: Are SROs usually armed?

Answer: Yes.

A school resource officer is a commissioned, sworn law enforcement officer, not a “security guard.” Except in local jurisdictions that prohibit SROs to carry firearms in schools, SROs are armed. They are issued and carry all the same equipment police officers have on any other law enforcement assignment.

sources on next slide
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On School Resource Officers, sources
Community Oriented Policing Services COPS. US Department of Justice.


WHAT THE DATA SAY
SROs: School Resource Officers

Question: *Do people know* that SROs are armed police officers?

My speculation: Some do know; many people do not know.

My view: Need to use *language* that does not obscure information—that is transparent. This will help stakeholders have the information they need, and will protect police officers on whom are placed unfair burden of misrepresentation.
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SROs and Efficacy

Do SROs increase student safety? In other words, are they effective?
WHAT THE DATA SAY
SROs and Efficacy

No evidence that presence of SROs effects a decrease in crime.

No objective crime reduction outcome

sources on Slides 27-28
WHAT THE DATA SAY
SROs and Perception of Efficacy

Presence of SROs = Adults (administrators and parents) perceive improved safety

Presence of SROs = Students do not perceive improved safety; they do perceive lack of due process in punishment

sources on Slides 27-28
WHAT THE DATA SAY

Documented Consequences of SROs in Schools:

[1] The doubling of the rate of referrals to law enforcement for the most common misbehavior by students in schools—fighting (in legal terms, “simple assault without a weapon”) and disorderly conduct.

Students at schools with a SRO presence are five times more likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct, with over 10,000 prosecutions of young people under the so-called ‘disturbing schools’ laws every academic year.

Sources on Slides 27-28
WHAT THE DATA SAY
Documented Consequences of SROs in Schools:


Accordingly, increases the likelihood that students are arrested at school.

sources on Slides 27-28
WHAT THE DATA SAY
Documented Consequences of SROs in Schools:

[3] Criminalizing traditional school disciplinary issues exacerbates the school-to-prison pipeline, a form of structural violence.

sources on Slides 27-28
Students of color and students with disabilities are disproportionately funneled into the criminal justice system (the school to prison pipeline), a form of structural violence.
WHAT THE DATA SAY

Consequences of SROs in schools, sources


WHAT THE DATA SAY
Consequences of SROs in schools, sources


WHAT THE DATA SAY
Other Issues and Concerns:

**Training of SROs:**
Length? Depth? Type? No national standards; short term (e.g., 40 hours; equivalent to 5 days)

**Costly Practice / Financial Incentive:**
Federal government COPS program awarded more than $750 million to local police departments for SROs (1999-2008).

Note: There are an estimated 14,000-20,000 SROs, which has grown exponentially since the 1990s.
Conclusions

To reduce violence in the lives of children & youth:

School officials should not give in to political pressures to “do something” when that “something” is likely to be ineffective and wasteful of limited school resources.
Intuitive appeal of SROs is not justification for implementing them in the schools.
WHAT THE DATA SAY

Conclusions

To reduce violence in the lives of children & youth:

*Administrators need to avoid rash decisions that result in the implementation of ineffective and potentially counterproductive measures just to do something. Difficult to impossible to turn back from such a policy action.*

sources on Slide 35
WHAT THE DATA SAY

Conclusions

To reduce violence in the lives of children & youth:

There are many school-based programs and practices that have been demonstrated in high-quality research to enhance school safety. Many of these effective practices (including identifying and addressing needs of the most vulnerable or “at risk” students) are also known to be cost-effective. Schools can make more extensive use of these non-SRO programs. Resources need to be directed at these programs.

sources on Slide 35
WHAT THE DATA SAY

Conclusions

To reduce violence in the lives of children & youth:

Taking school safety seriously requires school officials rely on an evidence-based approach to develop policies and procedures that will not only keep our schools safe but also maintain an environment conducive to learning.

*Our students, staff, and faculty merit this investment.*

sources on Slide 35
WHAT THE DATA SAY

Conclusions, sources


WHAT THE DATA SAY

Final Recommendation:
Study Holistic Approaches
Examine What the Data Say

You might start with this April 2019 source: