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## School Resource Officer Committee

### Fall 2020 Report

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**Committee Members:** Maleeta Kitchen, Co-Chair, Teri Dennison, Co-Chair, Steven Burnett, Annora Bailey, Katie McLaughlin, and Lindsey Hunter

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### Purpose

The Howard County Education Association (HCEA) encourages effective community partnerships that support the academic, social emotional, and overall development of students. HCEA was tasked to analyze the current School Resource Officer (SRO) program that is implemented in middle and high schools within the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). HCEA charged a sub-committee to analyze and report findings to their Board of Directors. The report contains both qualitative and quantitative data gleaned from presentations, interviews, and surveys. Objective information will be summarized, recommendations, and limitations are discussed.

### Qualitative and Quantitative Data

#### ***Howard County Education Association Member Feedback***

- See Appendix A: Member SRO Survey Results

#### ***Howard County Education Association Committee Member Generated Research and Points of Consideration***

- Adetola Abdulkadir of the website "Peers Not Perps," advocates the removal of all officers from school due to the harmful psychological and social effects on children of color. "What is the effect on students' social, emotional and cognitive development when they feel targeted?" The physical presence of a police officer is enough to give students and staff anxiety. This is the case for many no matter race, age, or gender. The negative connotations of the uniform make students of color defensive and anxious as cited in a limited survey conducted at Homewood.
- Evidence from a Howard County student survey through the Professional Standards Bureau (Rebecca Dietz "Youth in Conversation") suggests 60% or more of respondents feel uncomfortable with police in the school.

- African Americans make up 20% of the Howard County population according to the US census bureau statistics July 1, 2019. This reinforces the idea that Howard is maintaining the school to prison pipeline for students of color. The question is this: does the SRO program further this school to prison pipeline or does it seek to intervene?

***Howard County Public School System Central Office Staff – BOE Meeting Report  
September 24, 2020 by Kevin Gilbert, Director, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***

- SROs in HCPSS have several intended roles: Bridge the gap between youth and law enforcement,
  - Create positive impressions that transcend the school environment,
  - Deter behaviors that may lead to youth involvement in criminal justice system,
  - Assist in the creation and execution of school emergency plans,
  - Promote overall safety and security on campus,
  - Assist in investigations as needed,
  - Facilitate daily positive interactions and mentoring with students and staff to set positive examples and model methods for handling stressful situations and resolving conflicts;
  - Use their experience and expertise about the law to teach law-related content in the classroom, which includes government classes, health and safety classes, driver safety classes;
  - Investigate and assist in stopping the formation and involvement of “gangs,”
  - Participate in structured, after-school programs that promote community oriented, policing strategies and positive student behavior;
  - Act as a resource with respect to delinquency prevention,
  - Serve as a liaison between the HCPSS and the HCPD, and
  - Coach sports at the high school and/or youth level.(Information retrieved from September 24, 2020, Board Report and SRO Program History document on November 25, 2020.)

***Howard County Police Department (Sgt Mergenthaler, Lt Pat Arnone, and Cpt Mike Yetter)***

- HCPD is dedicated to building positive relationships with youth in Howard County, creating programs to facilitate interactions.

- HCPD looks for officers that have been coaches, teachers, camp counselors, or have other experiences demonstrating they would be a good fit. They have a camp at which they can observe officers' interactions with kids to try to identify good candidates. The career goals of an officer also factor in. Candidates must demonstrate community policing, and an interest in youth.
- SROs are evaluated with the same process and in the same way as all HCPS officers; there's no separate evaluation process for SROs. The HCPD has a quarterly review process, which was changed from an annual review process.
- SROs are accountable to the principal in each school and serve the school based on the principals' needs, not an overall set of objectives and outcomes.
- HCPD does not have a transparent method for evaluation of the SRO program, which involves a multitude of stakeholders.
- HCPD does not have a defined set of desired objectives and outcomes. There are no measured aspects of the SRO responsibilities reported to the community.
- HCPD is dedicated to changing the types of officers that are recruited for the SRO assignment, specifically more diverse officers and younger officers, which show a propensity to working with youth. (Prior to this change, it was often an assignment given to an officer just about to retire as an easy job.)

### ***NAACP Head - Willie Flowers***

- Willie Flowers says he has researched the SRO program, and asserts policing and the SRO program are different, with SROs engaging in human services protocols. However, officers are also able to apply police investigative skills in schools in regard to student conflicts. Willie Flowers feels officers can help keep the peace in a school and provide protection from mass shootings, and leaders in a school should be more decisive about school security, and empower law enforcement to do human-service style interventions.
- Willie Flowers feels the SRO program aligns with NAACP goals in Howard County , and that the HCPD is very open to community police relations. He encouraged them to change the uniform they use in schools. In Elementary Schools, he feels SROs can mentor and guide kids, and just be visible. In middle schools, Willie shared the importance of connecting students with positive programs and recognitions such as free camps to help kids develop.

### ***SRO statewide trainer (Mike Rudinsky)***

- Originally, the SROs were primarily in elementary and middle schools and focused on building relationships (Bear Trax & Dare). Now SROs are predominantly in high schools.

- Initially, SROs were predominantly in elementary and middle schools. Columbine initiated a move to all high schools and some middle schools. Initially this was a move to protect high school students. The current SRO assignments do not serve any elementary schools and half of the middle schools, as was originally set up to build relationships.
- The SRO program training has moved towards a relationship building and resource focused role in the school and less of a protection and arrest role.
- Significant and in depth training is a new training structure, which supports SROs.

### ***Student BOE member***

- The actual MOU with the HCPSS states, "The law enforcement role will dominate the role" of SROs.
- He notes that 2015-2016 was the first year Maryland took data on school arrests. 180 black students, and 53 white students were arrested – 75% of arrests were of black students, but white students are the majority group.
- In 2019-2020, once again, 75% of arrests were black students, even though overall the number of arrests dropped, the bias did not. In fact, in that year, only 4% of arrests were white students, so the bias was exacerbated. The overall drop in arrests was mainly a drop in arrests of white students. Blacks are only 24% of the student population. There is no evidence that black students commit more crime or are more disruptive. Special Education students are also over-represented in arrests.
- The ratio of students to counselors is 356-1. 250-1 is recommended. HCPSS is similarly way over recommended ratios for nurses, psychologists, and school social workers.

## **Summary and Discussion**

Over the last few months, most presenters and survey data provide positive anecdotal testimony about the SRO program in Howard County. It appears the program is meeting the currently established goals. However, the program was developed over 20 years ago as a response to reducing and/or eliminating violence in schools. This historical information in conjunction with the fact not all qualitative and quantitative data was positive suggests the need to discuss additional considerations and limitations to the SRO program.

A limitation of the committee was that it was not possible for the committee to interview students or staff members that were likely to have opposing viewpoints. For example, the Student Member of the Board of the Board

of Education shared data from MSDE suggested discriminatory practices in the arrest rates of our black students. According to MSDE arrest data 2018-19, of the 72 arrests 46 [64%] were African American whereas the demographics of Howard's Strategic Call to Action list a 24% African American school-age population). This type of information is not new, but it is also not statistically significant. Of the 58,000 students enrolled in the county 72 were arrested in 2018-19 (.001%).

The committee focused on interviews, presentations, and some survey data. Presenters discussed information from personal perspectives and the sample sizes of the data collected was small and may not fully represent the viewpoints of all due to limited representation. The SRO program is a specialized resource provided to support the school system and many employees may not be privy to the program and SRO assigned to their school. In addition, respondents were presenting from a perspective of tradition based on past roles and practices and the committee did not address future considerations to align with our current societal and cultural challenges.

The committee also gleaned insights about the roles and history of the program's development. It is important to consider the additional data available on the brown and black pipeline to prison along with societal changes, which have occurred since the SRO program's development. Therefore, HCEA SRO Sub-committee is prepared to make recommendations for the HCEA Board of Directors and Rep Council consideration moving forward.

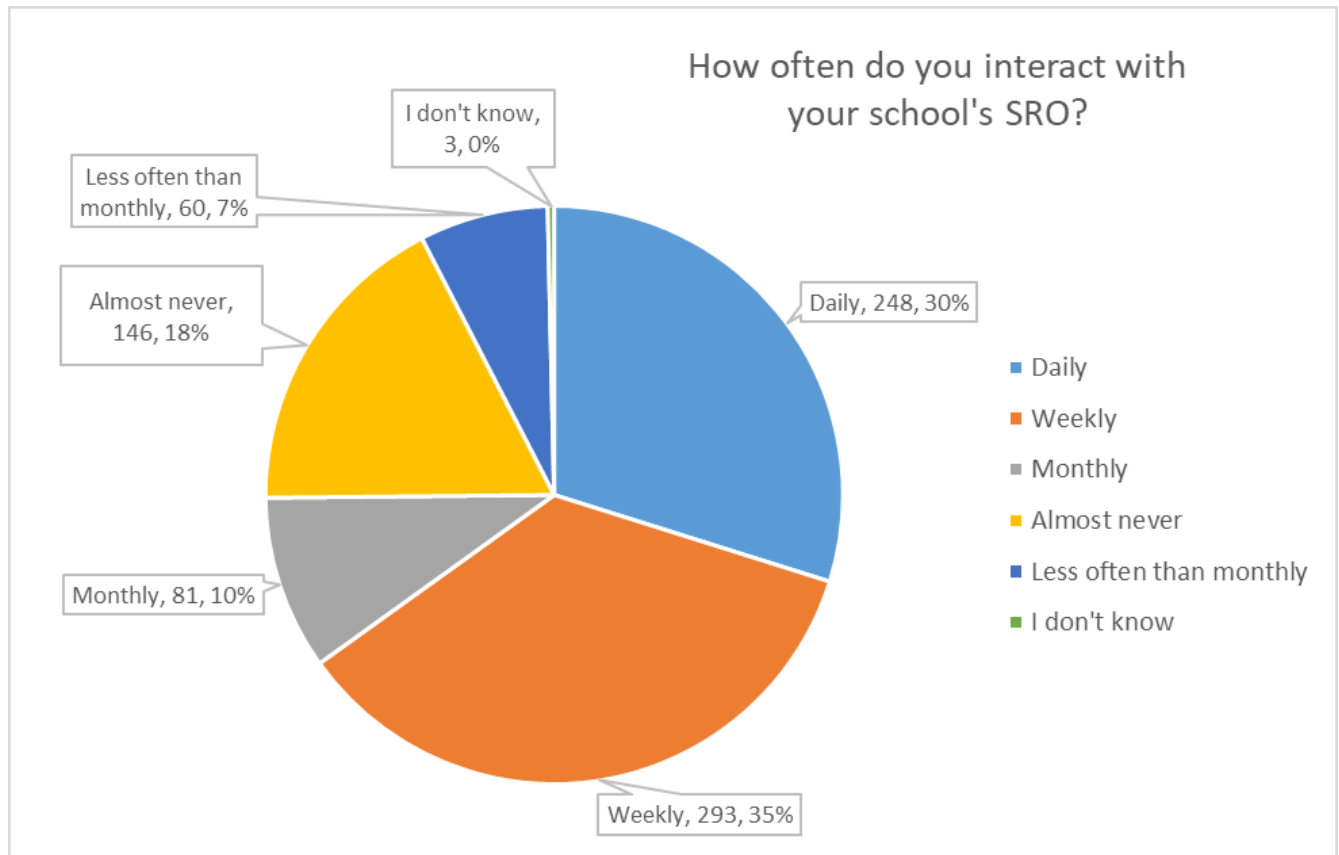
## **Recommendations**

1. Renegotiate the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), that is public before signing, before we return to brick and mortar to ensure:
  - a. Recommend a shift in primary focus from security/discipline to community outreach. Suggestions for implementation may include SRO's working within feeder systems, rotating school, etc.
  - b. Assign SRO's equitably across schools, which do not promote or facilitate the "brown/black pipeline to prison." Currently, SRO's are only at middle schools with high minority populations.

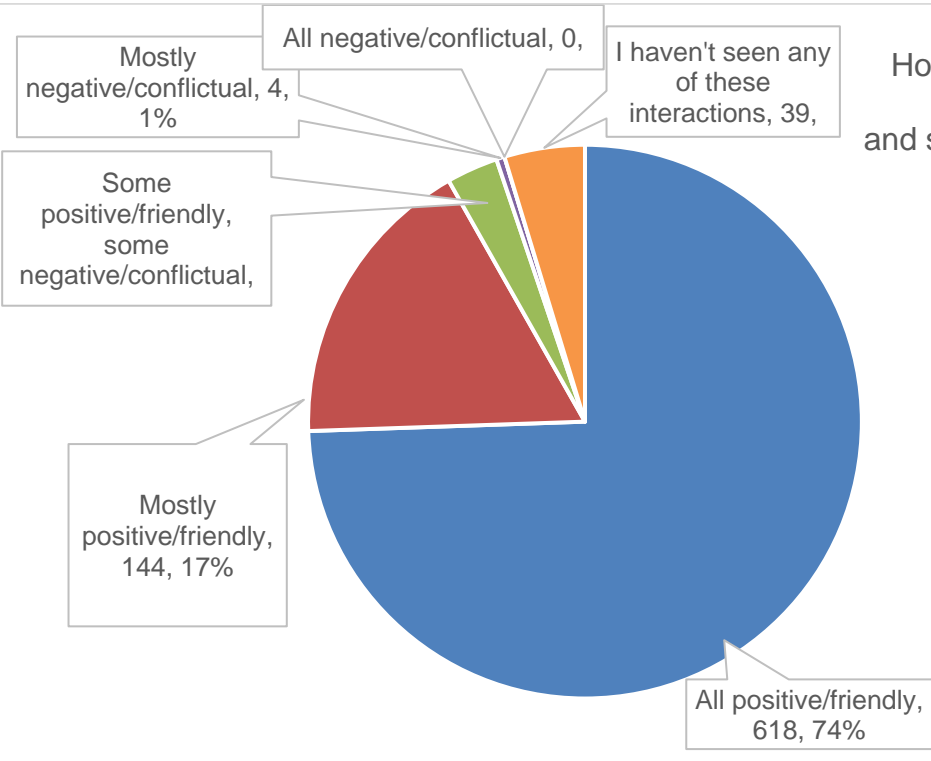
- c. SRO's should integrate and support HCPSS initiatives such as Restorative Practices, Positive Interventions, inclusion in School Improvement goals and planning, etc.
- d. Since it was suggested students may view the presence of police in school's negatively, survey students and families to develop a strategic plan that more fully meets the goals of the SRO program and reduces the brown/black pipeline to prison. Board appointed committee with broad stakeholder representation (including employee groups) to oversee the plan/program is being implemented with fidelity.
- e. Develop strategies and implementation plans to promote and create transparency surrounding the purposes (which does not include discipline), goals, and functions of the SRO program for students, school community, and staff.
- f. Develop transparent grievance procedures that are accessible to students, school community, and staff for complaints against SRO's.
- g. SRO's should be evaluated on metrics aligned with the SRO job description as opposed to the standard Howard County Police evaluation tool.
- h. Create transparency by creating a committee that gathers annual feedback from multiple stakeholders.
- i. Allow schools to participate in the SRO selection process for insurances of SRO fit with school.

## Appendix A: Member SRO Survey Results

There were 1332 total respondents, and 833 respondents from schools with SROs. Questions specific to members in schools with SROs were asked only of those 833 respondents.

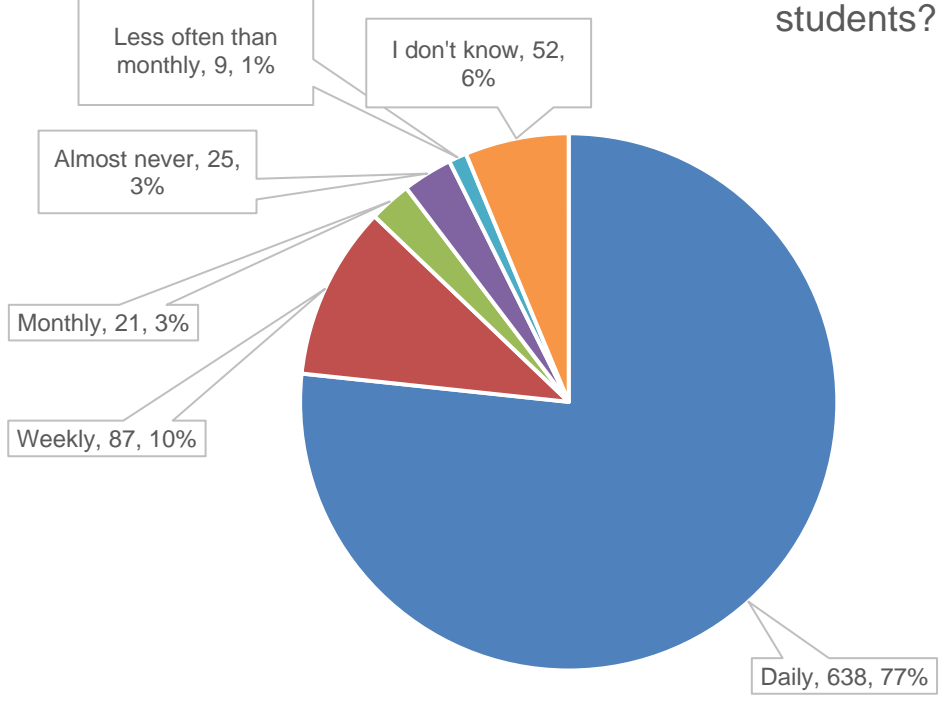


How would you typically characterize interactions between SROs and staff you have seen or experienced?



- All positive/friendly
- Mostly positive/friendly
- Some positive/friendly, some negative/conflictual
- Mostly negative/conflictual
- All negative/conflictual
- I haven't seen any of these interactions

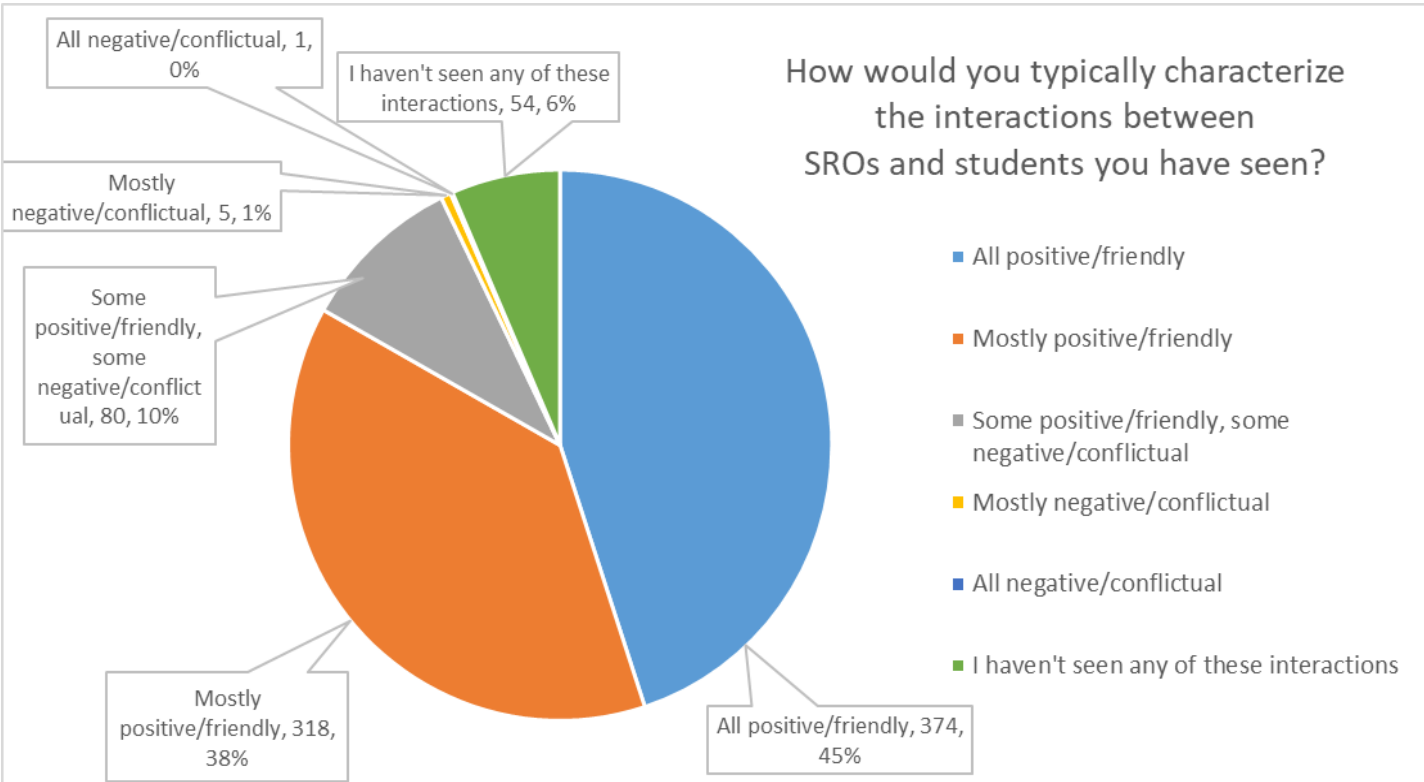
How often you think your school's SRO interacts with one or more students?



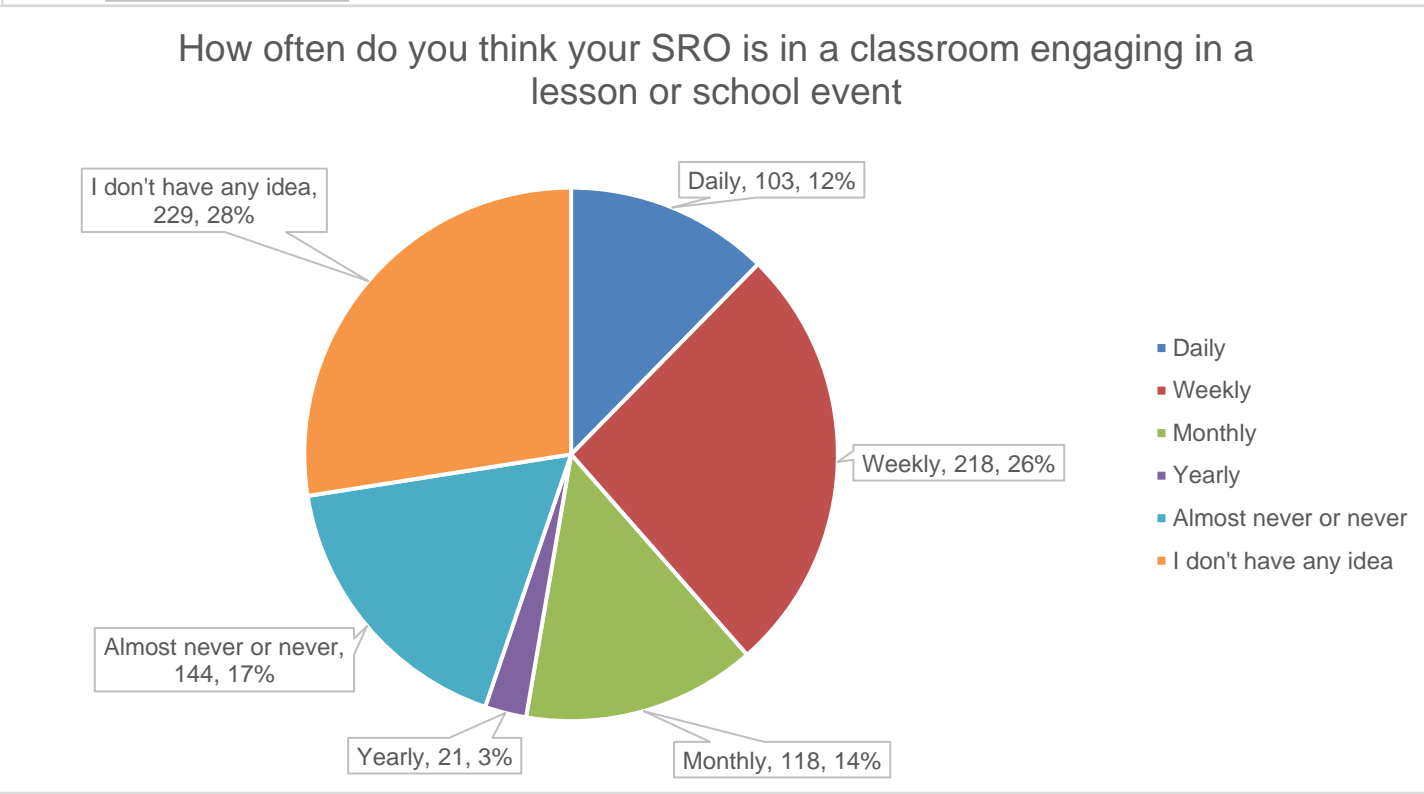
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Almost never
- Less often than monthly
- I don't know



### How would you typically characterize the interactions between SROs and students you have seen?



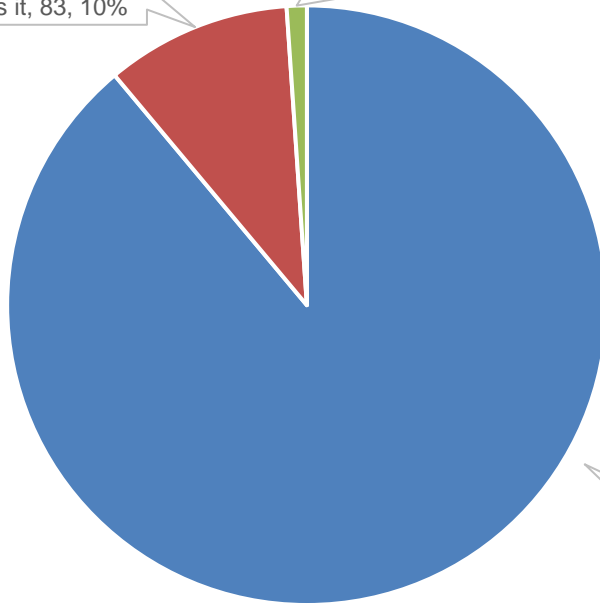
### How often do you think your SRO is in a classroom engaging in a lesson or school event



## Have you had concerns about any SRO at your school?

I've had a problem or concern but did not express it, 83, 10%

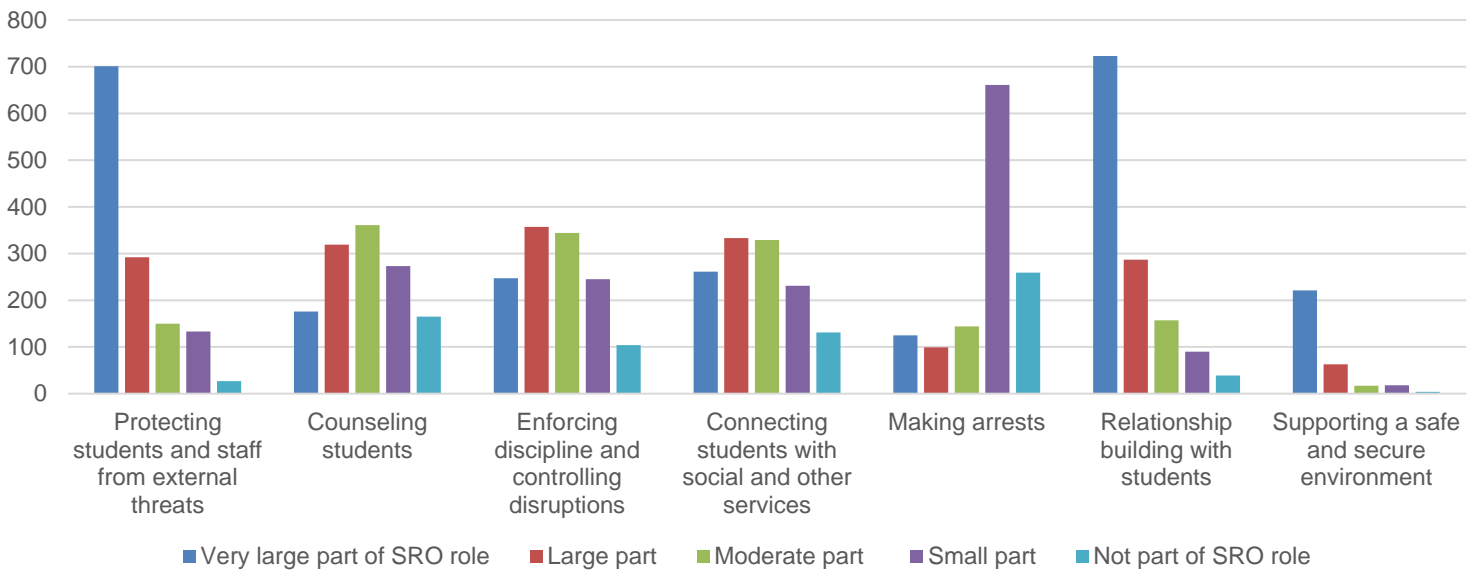
I've had a problem or concern and told someone higher up about it, or told the HCPD about it, 9, 1%



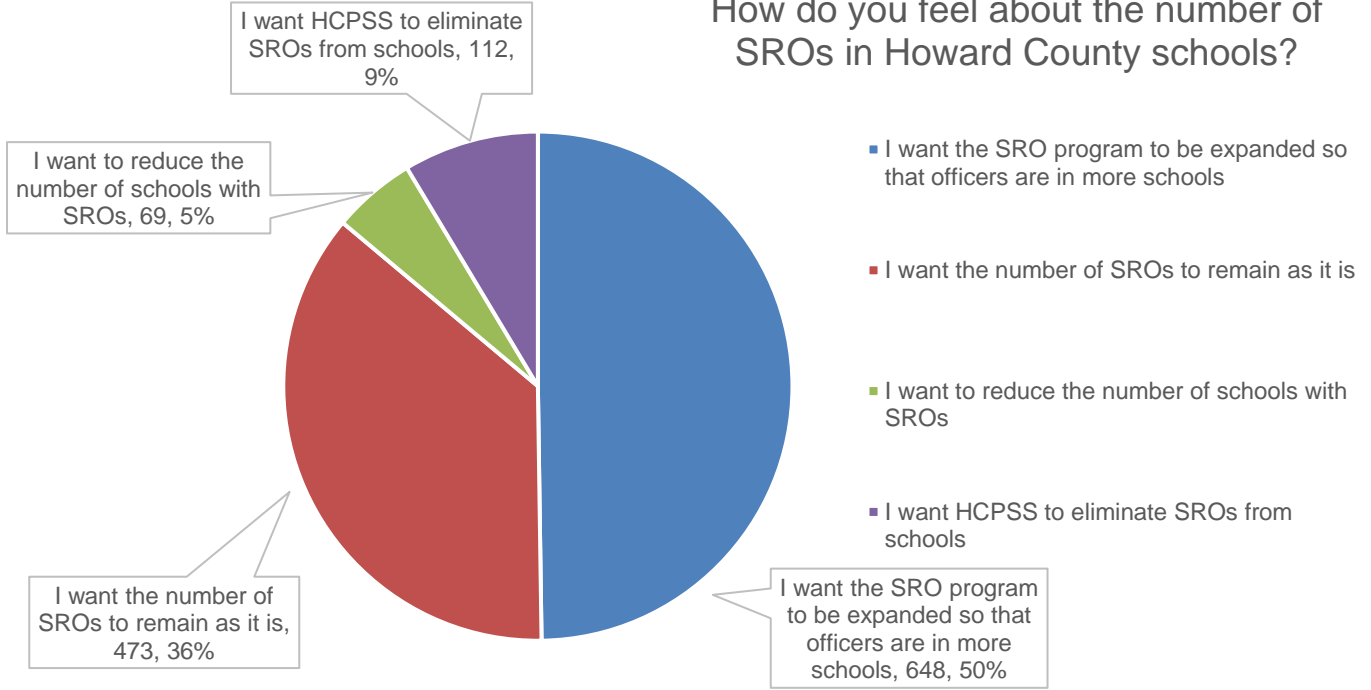
- I've never had a problem or concern
- I've had a problem or concern but did not express it
- I've had a problem or concern and told someone higher up about it, or told the HCPD about it

I've never had a problem or concern , 738, 89%

## How would you characterize the SRO's current role? (Participants did not have to select a choice in each area)



## How do you feel about the number of SROs in Howard County schools?



## How do you feel about the SRO role and program at HCPSS?

