

Introduction to the special issue on policing and school safety

Keeping schools and students safe has become a national priority and a politically charged debate in the wake of several high profile violent incidents on primary, secondary, and higher education campuses in the USA. Although many schools are relatively safe environments, there is still cause for concern in others. Consider in 2013 there were 1,420,900 nonfatal victimizations recorded among students between the ages of 12 and 18. This included more than 900,000 violent victimizations. Furthermore, in 2013 students experienced a greater chance of victimization on campus than a way from school (37 per 1,000 vs 15 per 1,000) particularly for simple assault (Robers *et al.*, 2015). School safety has now moved beyond the confines of educational administrators and concerned parents and now incorporates technologies such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and access controlled doors.

Given this recent fervor over school safety and best practices, parents and elected officials have called for action. Each response to dealing with school safety has serious policy and practical implications – most notably having law enforcement or armed security personnel on campus. According to a 2015 survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, during the 2013-2014 school year 43 percent of schools in the study had some type of security or law enforcement personnel. Across all grade levels there were more than 80,000 security officers present, with 90 percent of them engaged in security enforcement and patrol (Gray and Lewis, 2015).

Policing in the schools

Although there are many procedures and technical innovations that may be employed to provide a safe school environment, it is the human element of the police on campus that has generated research interests and apprehensions over their interactions with students. Within the public school system in the USA the most visible symbol of policing on campus is the school resource officer (SRO) program. While the presence of SROs appears ubiquitous, and their duties seem straightforward, deploying police in a school environment is a relatively new concept with several complexities. The first official SRO program began in Flint Michigan during the 1950s with the purpose of creating a better relationship between the police and students while helping them become better citizens (Burke, 2001). These duties of security, citizenship building, and relationship creation would become the model for SRO programs across the nation over the decades.

Publishing a journal in a timely and professional manner is a demanding task and requires dedication, assistance, and a myriad of skills from many people. The author would like to thank Editors Dr Lorie Fridell, and Dr Wes Jennings for the opportunity to serve as Guest Editor for this special issue. The author would also like to thank Assistant Editor Christopher Marier for answering the author's numerous questions and keeping the process moving along and on time. Thank you to all the authors who submitted their manuscripts. Finally, thank you to all the reviewers who gave their time, knowledge, and valuable feedback to each of the contributions here and to make this special issue possible.

Although the research focus is often on primary and secondary educational settings, there are equally complex issues of safety and policing on college campuses beginning with the creation of the first campus police department at Yale University in 1894 (Wada *et al.*, 2010). While college campuses have had issues with criminal victimization of students and the need for security over the years, it would be the high profile school shooting events beginning in the 1990s that would shift the role of policing in primary and secondary schools more toward law enforcement and security practices. The SRO program was revisited with hopes of providing increased security on campus, and by the year 2000 the Department of Justice set aside \$68 million to expand the SRO program across the nation. While the initial creation of the SRO program did include traditional policing activities, today SROs find themselves training school personnel in safety procedures and assuming more disciplinary roles. It is clear that police on school grounds has been and will likely remain a fixture in American education. However, research has yet to fully explore the multifaceted intricacies of law enforcement in the school environment such as the implementation of security procedures, student perceptions of legitimacy, and crime reduction.

The research that does exist is scattered across various fields and journals associated with education, security, and criminal justice with varied methodologies examining various actions of the police on campus. The results of the effectiveness of police to reduce crime on campus have been mixed at best. Some studies have revealed the police have no impact on crime and may be a counterproductive force on campus, while others find police practices on school grounds have reduced crime. There are several issues surrounding the evaluation of police and school safety. One of the main concerns is often the lack of data collection by the agencies and officers who are on campus. Furthermore, many departments lack a rigorous evaluation program, which often results in evaluations based on perception rather than objective measures of success.

Placing law enforcement officers in an educational setting also raises numerous questions around the roles they will play. Role possibilities include supporting the educational mission, protecting life and property, and assisting with student discipline. The roles of law enforcer and disciplinarian raises valid concerns over expanding criminal justice actions on school grounds. Traditional law enforcement actions on campus are consequences that have flowed from the “zero tolerance” policies of the 1990s regarding student misconduct. Increasingly police officers on primary and secondary educational campuses are drawn into non-criminal and disciplinary matters at the urging of school faculty and administrators. These actions may result in arresting students, particularly minority students in what has been termed the school to prison pipeline as students are pushed out of education environments and toward the criminal justice system. Furthermore, there remain concerns over the training of officers for this unique task and the rights of students when their school infractions may result in an official law enforcement response on campus.

Given the expenditures of money, time, and resources, this may be one of the few areas in police practices and justice policy that has not been explored in a way to meaningfully assess the best ways to keep schools safe and the role law enforcement will play. These concerns, issues, and research questions provide the impetus for this timely and important special issue. The purpose of the special issue on policing and school safety was to bring together current research and knowledge from experts in the field on this complex topic. The articles and researchers included in this issue reflect a diversity of methodology, theoretical exploration, policy evaluation, and future possibilities for police in schools.

The articles in this special issue

Each article published in this issue stands on its own merit, however as guest editor I have attempted to organize them within one of two thematic areas: practices and policy, and the school police role and future directions. Within each area there is a logical flow of the subject matter and connection to the theme.

Practices and policy

Within this area the articles focus specifically on the practices and outcomes of police departments and officers assigned to schools. The first article by Gonzalez, Jetelina, and Jennings provides an important foundation for this special issue by offering a meta-review of 32 select research articles on the effectiveness of SROs, security personnel, and structural school safety measures. Results reveal that increased safety measures may not produce the desired effects, and may reduce student perceptions of safety. The second article by Crawford, and Burns explores this issue of school safety in a unique manner by examining grade level, minority school status and how armed security personnel, safety procedures, and school context impact reported violence on campus. The findings show that law enforcement presence, armed security, and various school security procedures are frequently not associated with reduced reports of violence, and highlight the different outcomes of these practices, and problems faced by the minority status and context of the schools. The next article by Martinez-Prather, McKenna, and Bowman explores the issue of training of SROs and the relationship to disciplinary outcomes. Findings reveal that 40 percent of SROs in the study have not received specialized training for working in the school environment which in turn impacts their disciplinary actions with students.

The next article by Pelfrey and Keener provides an interesting, and timely mixed methods assessment of campus police officer's perceptions of using Body Worn Cameras. Results show that campus police in the study had several concerns over the utilization of the video information for complaints and assessment. Given recent concerns over officer accountability in many cities across the USA (e.g. Baltimore, and Ferguson), it is logical this would impact university campus police as well. Next, the article by Allen examines student and officers' beliefs about what has been a controversial tactic in some communities in the USA, stop and question policing. Results suggest that most students were supportive of the actions for safety reasons, but a number had concerns about unwarranted stops.

School police role and future directions

The role and function of a SRO may be varied across the nation, and ultimately the school context may have an influence on law enforcement actions and consequences. Lynch, Gainey, and Chappell examine the role and function of SROs within the context of educational and socially disadvantaged schools. Results show that officers in disadvantaged schools are more likely to perform law enforcement functions than those in schools with more resources. Victimization on campus can take different forms today, and can be troubling for students, teachers, and parents. Accordingly, police officers on campus may find their roles and functions being expanded in new ways. Wright examines SROs providing social support to mediate the effects of cyber-bullying. Findings reveal that increased social support from SROs reduced feelings of depression over time that resulted from an earlier incident of cyber-bullying.

The next article continues the exploration of the role a SRO may play and what can be accomplished with unique approaches. Gill, Gottfredson, and Hutzell provide an

interesting qualitative examination of Seattle's school emphasis officer program, which seeks to connect at risk students with services that may align with trauma-informed principles. While the study was not an analysis of effectiveness, it provides information on what may be a future direction for police practices within schools and programs that recognize the total needs of students as well violence prevention. Finally, the last article within this theme and for this special issue is an exploration of the marginalization of the police on campus. Patten, Alward, Thomas, and Wada examine a campus community's knowledge and acceptance of their campus police as "real" police through a liminal theory framework. Results reveal that most respondents were neither aware of the tasks of campus police nor their training requirements. This last article essentially comes full circle revealing the complexities of the police role in a school environment, the lack of knowledge about their functions, and difficulty of conveying their legitimacy to the public they serve.

Each of the contributions in this special issue provides new insight and approaches to understanding the police role in providing security, safety, and service on campus, and advances our knowledge within the area. The numerous findings contained here not only provide a solid base to inform policy and action, but reveal the gaps in the current research literature on police and school safety. Accordingly, it is my hope that this special issue serves not just as a showcase for articles, but as a starting point for a discussion of policy, practice, and new directions for future research that may ultimately be implemented to make our nation's schools and college campuses safer.

Charles Crawford

Department of Sociology, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA

References

- Burke, S. (2001), "The advantages of a school resource officer", *Law and Order*, Vol. 49 No. 9, pp. 73-75.
- Gray, L. and Lewis, L. (2015), "Public school safety and discipline: 2013-14, (NCES 2015-051)", US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC.
- Robers, S., Zhang, A., Morgan, R.E. and Musu-Gillette, L. (2015), "Indicators of school crime and safety: 2014 (NCES 2015-072/NCJ 248036)", National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.
- Wada, J.C., Patten, R. and Candela, K. (2010), "Betwixt and between: the perceived legitimacy of campus police", *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 114-131.